

Waste Management

Snohomish County Paper Recycling Campaign

2017 RSA

Paper is one of the most commonly understood recyclable materials, yet continues to be a significant portion of the residential waste stream. In 2017, Waste Management set out to increase its paper diversion by learning more about its customers' paper recycling behaviors and developing an outreach campaign to help educate and motivate them to recycle more paper.

The project was conducted in Snohomish County's unincorporated areas (UTC) and combined research with a multi-faceted outreach campaign. Through a one-time curbside paper recycling data collection process, WM was able to create targeted campaign messaging and gain valuable insights for future campaigns.

Outreach Goal and Campaign Approach

Goal: To educate and encourage King County UTC customers to put more of the paper waste they generate at home in to the recycling cart.

Campaign Approach: Identify the paper types most commonly ending up in Snohomish UTC customer's garbage carts and use the findings to conduct an outreach campaign encouraging residents to recycle more paper at home.

Cart Audit Research

Through a one-time audit of Snohomish UTC customer recycling and garbage carts, the research team discovered that UTC residents are already recycling a good portion of their paper (more than 80 percent of the paper waste they generate). The team sorted collected cart samples into 14 distinct categories of paper waste to determine the types of paper ending up in the garbage most often. These types of paper included items such as calendars, notepads, gift bags, gift cards, and school/child art projects, as well as polycoated paper such as milk cartons and coffee cups.

Engagement Strategy

The research study findings directly informed the messaging of the resulting outreach campaign, which first thanked residents for doing a great job of recycling paper then highlighted the "top offenders"—that is the paper types that are still ending up in the garbage, and have the highest value in the recycling marketplace. The outreach campaign did not focus on the polycoated paper category because those paper materials do not have as strong of markets as the other items such as school papers and calendars.



The six-week campaign launched in late 2017 and combined direct mail, community outreach events, web content and digital advertising. Residents received a unique mailer that looked like a "thank you" card with images inside showing the paper types most often ending up in the garbage and drove

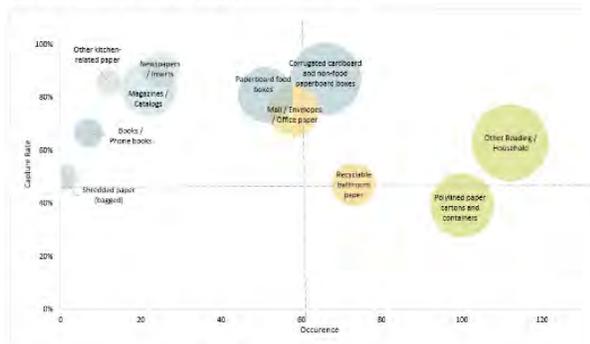
customers to a [campaign web page](#) with more information. A related 30-second video using the same concept was developed for the digital advertising campaign, which was geotargeted to Snohomish County UTC zip codes and also pushed people to the campaign web page.

Outcomes

Research

The study collected garbage and recycling contents from 126 households (252 recycling and garbage cart samples) across the county, helping focus the campaign and providing a wealth of data WM can use in the future education and outreach efforts.

Figure 1: Paper Material Types (By Weight in Garbage, Occurrence, and Capture Rate)



The bubbles representing paper material types are scaled to reflect the average monthly weight estimates of each material type in household garbage.

Direct Mail

A total of 49,409 direct mailers were sent to residents, representing half of all WM customer households in unincorporated areas of Snohomish County.

Outreach Events

Educational booths at three events in early December 2017 helped WM staff make 329 face-to-face contacts to teach community members about paper recycling through an interactive game.



Campaign Web Page Traffic

The paper campaign web page received a total of 10,216 views from November to December. Other Snohomish County landing pages also saw a significant boost, doubling pre-campaign views for most pages.

Digital Advertising

The advertising campaign overall delivered just over 2.4 million impressions, more than 1.4 million video views and 9,134 ad click throughs.

Through this outreach campaign, WM gathered insights that will guide future recycling campaigns:

- Whenever possible, condensing messaging into *shorter videos* (15 seconds or less) may help garner even more views. Ads with a *strong call-to-action* like “watch to learn about tricky items” or a link to something topical like the holidays also drive more engagement.
- For outreach events, *location and season are key considerations*. Community events drive more foot traffic, but are less frequent in the winter months and unpredictable or rainy weather can also affect attendance. For this reason, in-store promotions work better during this time of year and were a good fit for strong visuals like the paper pirate ship and coffee tumbler giveaways, which helped draw attention from shoppers.