Uncovering the Drivers of Consumer Recycling Behavior

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Vision and Campaign Objectives

• A national consumer campaign to reintroduce recycling to the American public and reenergize the recycling ethic

• Increase the understanding of, belief in and participation in recycling among consumers throughout the country

• Get those who are recycling occasionally to recycle more often, more consistently and encourage others to do the same
Where Did We Start? Research.

What do we currently know about recyclers and the motivation to recycle?

How does what participants report about their own behavior conflict with what they actually do?

Where are the gaps in our knowledge of the values that underlie this behavior?
Secondary Research Audit Objectives

- Uncover what is already known about recycling behavior in the U.S.
- Examine factors among consumer behaviors that can be influenced by communications
- Define the target audience and differentiate between the “sometimes” recyclers and the “always” and “never” recyclers
Positive Rational Drivers of Recycling Behavior

- Belief that advantages outweigh the disadvantages
- Recycling is more a matter of right and wrong than of costs and benefits
- Social Pressure
  - Expectations of others is important, however
  - Less important than “internal facilitators” such as personal commitment to recycling
Positive Drivers of Recycling Behavior

• Behavior is consistent with self-image
  • “Always” recyclers aspire to values like a sense of accomplishment, inner harmony and self respect
  • “Sometimes” recyclers do not see themselves as a typical recyclers
• Recycling activities appeal to both community interest (altruism) and self-interest
• “Sometimes” Recyclers
  • want to feel connected to others
  • need to believe that their efforts make a tangible difference
  • desire to support a healthy environment (though they don’t know how)
Barriers to Recycling Behavior

• Lack of knowledge
• Perceived barriers
  • Lack of time, lack of space for storage, pest concerns, messiness, difficulty moving the bin to the curb, inconvenient drop-off sites
Potential Influence of Communications Tactics

- Educational programs that include individual behavioral commitments are more effective than simply informing people about conservation opportunities.
- Positively framed messages manifest a significantly higher level of belief and a more favorable attitude.
- Communication about recycling is more effective when it is vivid, concrete and personal.
Primary Research: What Did We Want to Know?

- What are the factors that contribute to the “sometimes” recycler NOT recycling? (Material type? Location? Social factors? Situational factors?)
- To what degree do we need to educate “sometimes” recyclers?
- Do “sometimes” recyclers have trouble connecting the act of recycling to the ways it benefits society?
- “sometimes” recyclers do not picture themselves as the typical recycler. What is their image of the typical recycler and how can we help them adopt a self-image that is consonant with consistent recycling?
Methodology—Objectives of the Research

To contrast the typical “active” recycler with the less frequent “sometimes” recycler across different U.S. geographic locations.

To examine the key influences of recycling and establish a tangible communications hierarchy that could influence people to recycle more.
Methodology—Why Ethnography?

Three issues should be considered when researching recycling behavior:

• Good behavior is often overstated in traditional research (e.g., flossing, exercise)

• Recycling behavior is most entrenched at home among family members

• Local influences (neighbors, communities) have a significant effect on recycling behavior, shaping both attitudes (through setting community “standards”) and actions (through infrastructure)
Our Target Audience Identified

Who are the “sometimes” Recyclers?

- Stuck between the “trial recycling” and “consistent recycling” stages of the adoption funnel
- Believe that recycling is important, but do not recycle consistently
DDB Life Style Study

“Always” Recyclers (41 million)

• Skew female (57%), slightly older
• Own their house (63%), skew high suburban, low rural
• Very concerned with health and environmental issues and support charitable causes

“Sometimes” Recyclers (106 million)

• Skew male (53%)
• Own their house (53%)
• Concerned with health and environmental issues and support charitable causes, but less than “Always” Recyclers

Data from DDB’s 2006 Life Style Survey question: “I make a strong effort to recycle everything I possibly can.” “Always” Recyclers are defined as those who responded 6 – 1 definitely agree.
Respondents were identified as either “Sometimes” or “Always” recyclers

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<tr>
<th>Recycling Profile</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tr>
<td>The “Sometimes” Recycler</td>
<td>Suzie recycles when she remembers. She believes it is the right thing to do, but it isn’t always a priority and it’s often easier to just toss a can into the garbage than put it in the recycling bin. She has curbside recycling, but hers isn’t always full, so she doesn’t put it out every week. She is most likely to recycle newspapers, glass bottles and soda cans. She is less likely to bother with anything else. She is not sure whether her actions really matter.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The “Always” Recycler</td>
<td>Paul recycles everything he can every week. He also has curbside collection, and he rinses cans and bottles and sorts paper. He prefers to buy products that are sold in recyclable packaging so he can avoid creating garbage. He and his family have a garden, so he tries to compost his fruit and vegetable waste. Paul checks most things before tossing them in the garbage and if it can be recycled, he’ll do it. Paul believes that all of his actions matter.</td>
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Ethnographic Process/Methodology

- “Always” Recyclers
  - 27 in-depth interviews
  - In-home one-on-ones & friendship groups
  - Boston, Denver & Chicago
  - Depravation exercise
  - Journaling prior to visit

- “Sometimes” Recyclers
  - 34 in-depth interviews
Ethnography Key Findings

• “Always” and “Sometimes” Recyclers have key values in common
• However, concern for the environment isn't the primary driver
• It’s the emotional connections (not rational facts) that create the “habit” of recycling
• The key is to align existing values with recycling
Both have a common *value foundation* that is driven by the desire to “do good”—for others and their own self-image.

“Sometimes”

“Always”

**VALUE FOUNDATION**

- Acting responsibly
- Being fair
- Following the Golden Rule
- Doing good

= BEING MY BEST
But “Sometimes” Recyclers often marginalize recycling because it doesn’t give them immediate feedback/gratification.

Rational Questions from “Sometimes” Recyclers

Where do recycled items go?
I want to make a direct impact – does recycling do that?
Is recycling even happening?
If I can’t see it, how am I supposed to believe it?
Is going the extra mile even worth it?
What’s the difference of one bottle or can?
The environment was often the quickest and most convenient response to “Why do you recycle?”

- Mentioned equally by “Sometimes” and “Always” Recyclers
  - so why not equally motivating?
- Seemed to be more of a “feel-good” reinforcement of existing behavior rather than a behavior-inducing driver
- When asked “What if your recycling infrastructure (the bins) were removed?”, Suddenly the environment and the future weren’t so important.

“Yeah, then I just probably wouldn’t recycle. It wouldn’t be worth the hassle.”

“Sometimes” Recycler, Boston
But the environment lacks personal relevance for “Sometimes” Recyclers

“I never personally see landfills anywhere, so there’s nothing staring me in the face, reminding me that I need to recycle.”

“Sometimes” Recycler, Boston

“Saving the world is too big to grasp and it doesn’t even seem realistic through recycling. What’s the impact?”

“Sometimes” Recycler, Chicago
“Always” Recyclers are more motivated because they connect the dots between their recycling effort and emotional drivers:

- Find immediate reward in emotional benefits
- Are more able to ladder their behavior to a positive outcome
- Do not require more tangible benefits/information to engage in recycling
- Recycling has become second nature
- **CONNECTED**

“Sometimes”:
- Lack a motivating connection to recycling
- Are unable to see the effect of their recycling behavior (or lack of)
- Seek more tangible benefits/information (rational)
- Are easily distracted from the path of recycling
- **DISCONNECTED**
“Sometimes” Recyclers bounce between Protocol and Neglect, whereas “Always” Recyclers are steadfast at Ritual Recycling Not Recycling

It’s necessary to bring emotional connection to “sometimes” recyclers in order to break them from the cynical cycle back and forth between Protocol and Neglect.
What the Campaign Needs to Do

“Sometimes” Recyclers (rational)

Belief becomes Ritual

“Always” Recyclers (emotional)
What the Campaign Needs to Do

It is necessary to speak to values and use emotional drivers to move our target out of their heads—and into their hearts.
“I do it, because it needs to get done. And I know that. And others can see that I know that.” (internal)

“I do it because I want people to look up to me, and I lead by example.” (external)

“I do it because it’s one of the few ways I know my actions make a real difference.”

“I do it because it’s going to work.”
Emotional Drivers to Driving Ideas

All we’d learned:

• The value base of “doing my best”
• The pitfalls of “remaining rational”
• The need for emotional connection
• The behavioral drivers themselves

All laddered up to the driving creative idea that: “Optimism is the key to creating recycling connectivity”
What Do We Need the Creative to Do?

To make our target feel

- Optimistic
- Connected
- Accomplished

- In short, to make the act of recycling an act of optimism—of connection to the community—and to create the feeling of accomplishment when the behavior is practiced
A Target Refresher—The “Sometimes” Recycler

• KNOWS that recycling is the “right thing to do,” but probably couldn’t explain why
• is unlikely to recycle if it’s inconvenient
• lacks a motivating emotional connection to recycling
• is disconnected
Unlocking the Feelings of Optimism
Brand Communication Idea:
A Manifesto
Best Planet in the Universe
So How Does this Work?

BRAND EARTH
Imagine the Possibilities?
See the Potential.