

CASE STUDY // RUBBERMAID COMMERCIAL PRODUCTS

SERVICE DESIGN WEEK 2018



A NEW SERVICE MODEL TO IMPROVE PEOPLE'S RECYCLING HABITS AT WORK.

Rubbermaid Commercial Products (RCP) asked IN2 to design a new service that would improve the recycling rates in commercial office towers. We got to take on a problem experienced all around the world – recycling– and, by focusing on the daily experiences of office workers, show significant improvement in how much of the offices' waste they recycled.

It touches on some big themes: creating new business and service models, sustainability, and changing people's behavior. This is change-the-world stuff. Getting there also contained a big dose of the not-so-glamorous side of innovation. We had to get dirty to help clean this one up.

Among other things, RCP sells commercial waste receptacles. Of course, they already had plenty of receptacles in their portfolio, so they didn't need another one. Instead, to boost sales, RCP needed to think outside the (garbage) box, and they asked IN2 to discover new opportunities and test new ideas for an interesting hypothesis.

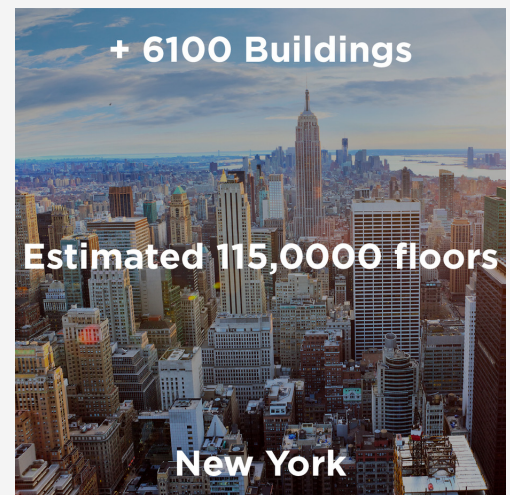
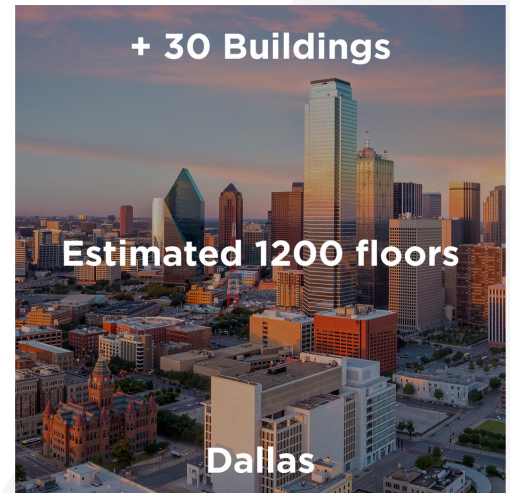
Large office buildings spend a lot of money to have their trash hauled off. However, because the material has reuse value, they pay less money to recycle their waste than to send it a landfill. If we could figure out a way improve recycling rates, everyone would win. It would make life easier for everyday users, RCP's customer would save money, RCP would sell more recycling bins, and all this would create a positive impact on the environment. In other words, it's a win at the Triple Bottom Line (business, customer, environment).

What could we do to get people to throw more stuff in the recycling bin and less in the trash can? And can you make sure what gets in there is stuff they can actually recycle?

THE PROBLEM

First, let's talk about scale. IN2 is based in Dallas, where there are over 30 office buildings over ten stories tall, totaling more than 1,200 stories. It is common for each tenant to have their own recycling program, which means there are thousands of different systems in the tall buildings in Dallas alone. Across the nation and the world, all of this adds up to become a massive issue.

Worse, the vast majority of waste gets sent to the landfill. A low percentage of trash is diverted for recycling. And much of that is contaminated by other trash, which makes it that much harder for the recycler to operate efficiently. In fact, if a shipment contains more than 10% contamination, the whole thing is typically sent to the landfill.



OPPORTUNITY DISCOVERY

This starts to get really interesting when you talk to people that participate in the system. We believe that the best way to find new opportunities is through a deep-diver connection to individual user's stories. Behaviors lead to insights, which roll into new frameworks to analyze the status quo.

For this project, we visited 5 office buildings in Dallas and Austin (where we have another team center) and met with 45 participants. They told us about their habits and showed us how they threw away their trash. This led to some surprising takeaways, and we heard things like this:

- "They don't pay me to throw away my trash"
- "I'm not even sure whether I can recycle that"
- "It's just one bottle"

Let's take these in order. At face value, they seem a little silly. However, when you look deeper, you can empathize. As we studied these work spaces, we saw that trash cans were always at hand, but recycling bins were often far away. During the busy work day, maybe you don't always have time to get up, go down the hall, and around the corner just to throw stuff away. You're trying to succeed at your job, and this can add a lot of distraction.

And grown-ups don't know how recycle? Don't they teach that in elementary school? Actually, they may not, or not well enough. People honestly are not sure what they can recycle and since they feel like they're supposed to already know, they're often embarrassed to ask. Furthermore, each city and municipality accepts different materials, and you may never hear the specifics at your office.

The real disconnect comes when people are busy and distracted, unsure if they can recycle the coffee cup they just finished. In the moment, in a split-second decision, what do you do? One cup is no big deal, right?

GETTING DIRTY

At any given moment, millions of people could be making the same decision: trash or recycle? At scale, it's not just one cup at all. That means that, to measure the impact of our potential solutions, we'd have to show the real nature of the problem. That meant getting dirty. We had to sort and measure the real trash. Our team rolled up our sleeves and analyzed the current recycling rate, as well as how many recyclables made it into the trash – and vice versa.

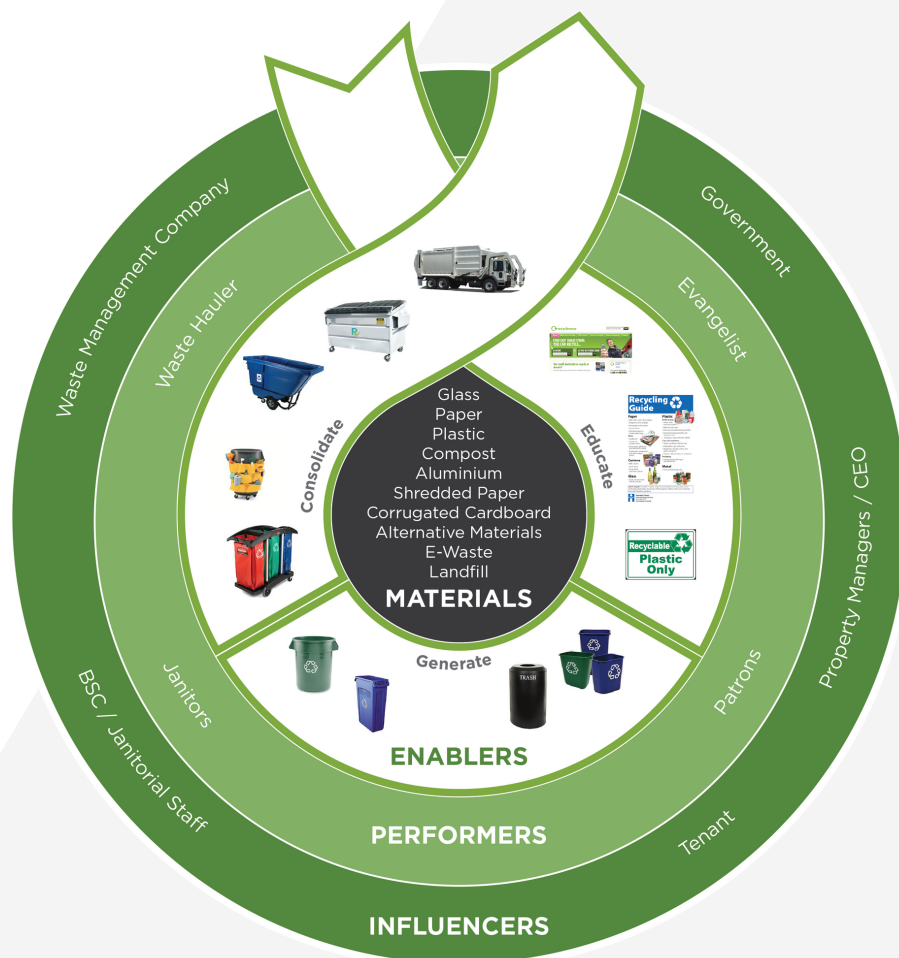
What we found was not great: At one site, only 11% of all waste went to recycling, and others were not much better. Plus, much of the recycling was over-contaminated with trash and likely to be rejected.

CLEANING IT UP

Armed with a clear understanding of the current state, we worked with RCP to convert what we learned into new ideas to make things better. One helpful tool we built was a Journey Map, showing how waste moved through the system. There are a surprising number of participants and influencers involved, each of whom could help improve the recycling rate.

Many of the team’s new ideas targeted accessibility and education. We could create new configurations of waste bins to make recycling more accessible. Clear labeling could show what materials went in which bins. Plus, we designed a kit to help office managers – or a resident in-house ‘Recycling Champion’ – to teach people about the impact of, and the best practices for, better recycling.

Then we went back to test our thinking in a real setting (and, of course, got dirty to measure the impacts).



OUTCOME

The results were astounding. Educating people on what they should do and why it mattered – and then giving them the right tools to do it – led to a huge improvement. In our worst testing site, the rate jumped from 11% of waste recycled to 57%. In another site, contamination fell by 22% while total recycling went up dramatically. Other sites showed significant progress as well.

This project shows the power of the innovation process. When you start with a good question and base solutions on people's stories, you can create impactful change, as long as you're willing to take the necessary steps and get your hands dirty!

ABOUT US

IN2 Innovation is an experience innovation design agency. We help companies create effortless experiences through new physical and digital products and services.

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