



## Devon Joint Communications (“Don’t let Devon go to waste”)

### Summary

The Devon Authorities Recycling Partnership is achieving major advances in waste minimisation and recycling rates following the success of a joint communications strategy which has promoted a step-change in public attitudes. The “Don’t let Devon go to waste” campaign – backed by DEFRA – was the most exciting and demanding waste marketing campaign ever attempted in the UK. Partnership working between all of the county’s local authorities has proved critical both to its success and to its continuing impact.

“Partnership can work for any big communications campaign – it makes sense to save money and have a shared budget and not confuse the public. It’s extremely successful and that’s why the “Don’t let Devon go to waste” campaign has such high recognition rates and that’s why we’re managing to achieve such impressive results.”

**Liz Poulter, Senior Waste Management Officer, Devon County Council, (“Don’t let Devon go to waste” Project Manager)**

Improvement through efficiency

## Background

In 1991, Devon won the BT and Friends of the Earth first "Recycling County" Award and a joint Recycling Committee, representing all of the Devon authorities, was set up. This committee was unique at the time, with a budget formed by pooling recycling credits from jointly purchased and operated recycling bring banks. This fund was used for capital expenditure for recycling schemes county-wide, including kerb-side collections where there was match funding from the local authority involved.

The Devon Authorities Recycling Partnership – a subsidiary of the Devon Authorities Waste Reduction and Recycling Committee – was formed to submit a bid for a waste awareness and analysis campaign to the DEFRA "Household Waste Minimisation and Recycling Challenge Fund". This made £140 million available to help authorities reach the 25 per cent national recycling target by 2005-6.

With Devon's strong history of partnership working, the bid was successful and £1.119 million funding was awarded to the county in June 2002. Contracts for waste analysis, door-stepping and a media campaign were awarded in September 2002 and the "Don't let Devon go to waste" campaign ran from October 2002 to March 2003.

Devon Authorities Waste Reduction and Recycling Committee also provided £10,627 for the initial project – bringing the total available to £1,169,627. Additional funding from DEFRA was granted in March 2003 to fund a second TV commercial.

Due to the size and complexity of the project, the Partnership enlisted the County Council's purchasing arm – Devon Purchasing – to advise and assist on all contractual issues. The County Council also agreed to act as bankers and financial advisors. An invite for Expressions of Interest was published in the Official Journal of the European Communities (OJEC), with the contract specification broken down into three parts – Waste Analysis, Door-stepping and Media.

Eight companies expressed an interest, of which seven submitted a bid. After considering track records, an understanding of sustainable waste issues, innovation and local knowledge, a sub-group of the Partnership asked four contractors to give a presentation.

RH Advertising was appointed as media consultants, while MEL Research Ltd was appointed to carry out waste analysis and door-stepping.

A Management Board, comprising key managers and officers representing each local authority, was responsible for delivering the campaign.

The Devon Authorities Recycling Partnership consists of representatives from: Devon County Council, East Devon District Council, Exeter City Council, Mid Devon District Council, North Devon District Council, Plymouth City Council, South Hams District Council, Teignbridge District Council, Torbay Council, Torridge District Council and West Devon Borough Council.

It now funds and promotes a wide range of cross county initiatives, including Devon Community Recycling Network, Devon Community Composting Network, Real Nappy Campaign, Furniture Reuse payments, Devon Authorities Web Site, exhibitions at Devon County Show, and the continuing "Don't let Devon go to waste" campaign.

## Objectives

"Don't let Devon go to waste" included information gathering about public attitudes to recycling and used a huge advertising and public relations campaign to create a county-wide "brand". This enabled it to have a big impact with the public and benefit all of the authorities involved. The aims of the project were:

- To increase tonnage of recycled material across the county, specifically by increasing participation in kerb-side recycling schemes by 10%+, and/or increasing the quality of that material by decreasing contamination, leading to improved MRF efficiency of 10%+
- To find out from the public why they do/don't participate in available recycling schemes and encourage them to do so, with the aim of increasing recycling overall by 5%
- To use the information gathered to assist with the expansion of services and extend the project's benefits beyond the funding period

## Benefits

When the bid was submitted, the county-wide recycling rate in Devon was 20 per cent, with recycling facilities not being fully utilised and the rate of increase of recycling slowing.

Following the campaign, research demonstrated that residents have a positive feel about recycling and want to participate, and that lack of participation is not due to apathy but largely due to practical reasons, such as no kerb-side container, no transport or no storage space.

Kerb-side recycling was the most favoured method of recycling – and saw a dramatic 31 per cent increase over the tonnage figures for the previous year. The growth in residual waste sent to landfill reduced to 0.88% in 02/03, compared to 3.3% in 01/02.

The campaign saw an increase in recycling in every district – ranging from 10-40% - particularly where authorities also introduced additional collection rounds, changed their contractor or introduced other initiatives or trials. But even where no changes were made, the improved performance was significant. Participation rates increased from 35 to 43%.

The “Don’t let Devon go to waste” message has since continued to be used, and recycling rates in Devon were 45.6% in 2006-07 compared with a national average of 30.9%, making it the third highest achieving county in the country. While not all of the increase can be attributed to the campaign, since extra services have also been introduced, the campaign has, nevertheless, had a big impact. The target is to achieve recycling rates of 50% by 2010.

Most respondents – 84% - interviewed towards the end of the initial campaign had seen or heard advertising or promotional messages about recycling in their local area, compared to 51% previously. TV adverts were the most recalled media, followed by local press.

Research showed the public had previously been confused by continually receiving differing messages. Having one brand representing 11 authorities, and also potentially the community and business sectors, has proved extremely powerful.

The campaign remains highly effective, achieving a 79% recognition rate as of January 2008, giving the authorities together a fighting chance of competing against other forms of marketing.

This joint working provides not only greater consistency and recognition in the messages being given to the public, but also financial benefits and economies of scale which enable authorities to have a bigger impact than would be possible individually.

Bearing all of the creative costs of such a campaign alone would take up a major slice of any communications budget. It is more economic to pool resources, and Devon has also been able to secure more competitive rates based on the level of business it can provide.

The media contract in Devon was recently re-advertised through the EU process and, following the tendering process, was again awarded to RH Advertising, who continue to offer value for money.

Joint working is also cost effective in that it enables a sharing of expertise and resources between authorities, for example, press officers, information vehicles, and staff attending major shows. It is also helpful when bidding for external funding, and in Devon was a key factor in attracting the necessary DEFRA funding to launch the campaign in the first place.

### **Critical success factors and lessons learned**

The strong partnership working of the Devon authorities was instrumental to the success of their ground-breaking campaign, which now continues to contribute to the success of recycling and waste management initiatives in the county.

It is necessary to have clear goals so that all involved are striving for the same purpose. Good communications are essential, between authorities and with the contractors involved and the media, plus one-to-one communications with the public. There needs to be a willingness among authorities to be a true partnership, rather than one that simply exists on paper. In Devon there are numerous contractual and financial ties, with joint contracts and a joint pot of funding.

For such an initiative, commitment from all involved is vital, and ministerial and member support makes a tremendous difference, as does the enthusiasm and dedication of officers.

The amount of staff time and additional pressure on workloads, however, does need to be considered. Resources for the nature of this work should not be underestimated. In Devon, provision for a full time project manager for eight months within the funding bid to DEFRA proved vital, particularly due to the number of authorities/parties involved and the short time scale for the preparation of the campaign.

There is a big time commitment in running such a large campaign. During the preparation stages of the bid, the partnership met almost fortnightly. Once the project was underway, the Project Board met at least monthly. Regular board meetings were crucial to ensure the needs and requirements of all the local authorities were met. They were also invaluable as a regular form of communication between the authorities and the Project Manager – and also enabled input from contractors and external organisations such as the Environment Agency and National Waste Awareness Initiative.

Pre and post campaign market research, monitoring and evaluation is also essential to provide baseline information, assess the effectiveness of the campaign and set goals for the future.

Monitoring and its timing needs thorough planning – whether the training of door-steppers or choosing the right season. In Devon the timescale was pre-determined by the terms and conditions of the DEFRA funding, and the harsh and dark conditions of winter made outdoor activities such as door-stepping and roadshows difficult.

Ideally, preparations for a campaign of this magnitude would be made at least a year in advance.

Research revealed that television advertising was shown to be the most effective media, but a marketing mix is essential. All methods have a role to play and must be planned and timed in unison for maximum impact to reach all sectors of the public.

In Devon the mix included: a high profile launch hosted by BBC Tomorrow's World presenter Philippa Forrester; branded uniforms for door-steppers carrying out market research; leaflets, posters and billboards; advertising and editorial on buses, in newspapers and magazines, and on radio and TV; roadshows; switching on Exeter's Christmas lights; work in schools; a website and a helpline.

### Risks

The campaign achieved remarkable results in a short time but the progress must be sustained and increased, together with an increase in recycling infrastructure, if Devon is to meet its statutory targets and those set out in the Municipal Waste Management Strategy for Devon.

Continued education and awareness and the financial commitment required needs to be long term to achieve the desired change in society's behaviour.

Campaigning competes with the marketing efforts of manufacturers and retailers who spend 10-20% of product costs on marketing. Professional marketing of waste minimisation and recycling cannot be done on the cheap if it is to be effective. Therefore, it should not be seen as unreasonable to spend 2% of a multi-million pound waste budget on communications.

Devon currently spends between 1-2% of its overall annual waste management budget – equivalent to approximately £300,000-£400,000 a year - on marketing.

The future direction of the campaign in Devon is still very much focused on waste reduction and re-use. Work has included promoting re-usable carrier bags, with a high profile campaign featuring Rick Mayall. There is also a drive to reduce the purchasing of heavily packaged produce under the heading "same taste, less waste", and to reduce food waste and promote composting with messages such as "spuds into buds".

With partnership working there is a risk that using joint funding for initiatives might focus on certain areas at the expense of others – for example, community initiatives favouring rural rather than urban areas. This could lead to concern over areas receiving a fair share of funding.

There may also be differences between authorities relating to their individual strategic or political outlook. Potential issues can be mitigated by having clear partnership goals, good communications, and by using proper contractual routes.

### Transferability

Partnership working can be beneficial to any major communications campaign where individual authorities want to promote a consistent message to the public and maximise their impact by sharing resources, expertise and funding.

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