

# Survey Report

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The Region of Durham Waste Department spends large sums of money on advertising in the form of calendars, new paper advertising, radio, events, promotional materials and a website. Despite their effort, it appears that the message may not be getting through. Their goal is to have 70% diversion of household garbage by 2010. This deadline is quickly approaching and the current statistics show that approximately 25 % diversion from the garbage stream to Blue Box Recycling, Compostable Food Waste and Leaf & Yard Composting is currently being achieved. A step forward, but far from their current goal.

The Region essentially wanted to know how they could inform and educate the residents of the eight towns and counties within their jurisdiction. They would like to know which form of media is going to reach the largest number of people the fastest, and have the greatest impact. This will achieve not only a smaller financial drain due to the advertising, but possibly less waste generated by the Region themselves in the form of flyers/calendars and promotional materials.

Although this particular survey is gathering data for the Region of Durham, it is a global issue. All people need to cut back on trash production. We are quickly running out of areas to transfer our garbage. People do not want to live beside landfill sites, but we will need to find locations for more. Most landfill sites in southern Ontario will reach capacity within the next 10-20 years, if we continue to produce waste at the rate we are now. When it comes to the other alternatives, debates arise as to the virtues of incineration and the thought of placing garbage in abandoned mines throws up the red flags regarding chemical leaching into our groundwater system, among many other issues. Despite all of the negative press, Canadians continue to produce approximately 306 kg per capita of garbage per year (Statistics Canada 2007). We have become a disposable society.

At some point, someone has to step up and educate consumers on the green alternatives and the green disposal methods. The Region of Durham Waste

Department is attempting to do this with the Electronic Waste Disposal Events, Household Hazardous Waste Events, and general education of the public. However, their message, as well as many other similar organizations globally, seems to be missed by the public. Traditional media resources may not be the answer to deliver the information to the public. Consumers are bombarded with information, there are estimates that we are exposed to hundreds or even thousands of advertisements daily in North America. Deciphering what is important and what is noise has become an issue. The organizations trying to relay the message regarding green disposal methods need to determine an avenue that is more productive in grabbing the public's attention and keeping it long enough to have the urgency of the situation sink in. They need to build awareness by targeting particular groups with different advertising. For example, the older generations may prefer the more traditional newspaper, whereas the younger generations may prefer the ease of access of the internet site.

Once the Region of Durham Waste Department determines which method of advertising receives the best response, they can showcase their initiatives more effectively. In turn, this will cause the public to be more aware of the urgency regarding the global "trash" issue. The ideal outcome would be for the new advertising to work and Durham residents begin diverting 70% or higher of their waste to recycling programs. If this were the case, Durham could then assist other municipalities in educating their constituents and in turn divert even more waste. We all know *what* the message is, It is time to look at *how* we are going to get the message out.

## Bibliography

*Solid Waste: Managing Our Garbage*. Statistics Canada (September 2007). Retrieved October 14, 2009 from: [http://www41.statcan.ca/2007/1762/ceb1762\\_003-eng.htm](http://www41.statcan.ca/2007/1762/ceb1762_003-eng.htm)

## **Project Overview**

The Region of Durham Works Department wished to gain insight into the most effective way to get their message out to the public in an age of increasing reliance on electronic tools and information systems. The Region sought to have a survey designed, completed and analyzed to determine which method of advertising was embraced by the public, as well as which methods were not well received. They anticipated that the survey results would assist them with a better understanding of public communication and in turn, a more effective use of advertising budgets. Their ultimate goal is to educate the public and achieve 70% waste diversion by 2010.

## **Survey Design**

I chose to use a closed, forced-answer style for the survey. This makes it quick and easy for the respondent, as well as, easier to analyze the results. Each question was short, and in plain language for two reasons; to ensure it did not discriminate against the less literate, and to make it quick to fill out.

Question 1-2: The first questions on the survey were age and sex of the participant. This information was required to determine if different age groups or the sex of the participant has any influence on their information gathering strategies.

Question 3: The survey design was so that a representative sample from each of the eight areas in Durham would be accounted for. By asking the participant where they resided we could ensure that no area was over or under represented. This information will also be useful in determining if there is a difference between rural and city methods of information gathering.

Question 4-7: These questions dealt with each of the current advertising methods; calendar, radio ads, newspaper ads, and website. Each of the questions were two-part. First the participants were asked if they were familiar with each and secondly they were asked how effective they found each one. The choices for the second part of the question were; "Not at All", "Somewhat" and "Very".

Question 8-9: The last question was a basic over-view of which method did they think was most effective. If they circled other, there was space for them to write a suggestion.

## **Survey Process**

In the beginning, the idea was to go to malls and survey people. Most of the larger areas had malls, or community events that would contain large groups of people that would be potential

respondents. My first event was The Run for the Cure, and it was at this event that I realized that an opportune time to get people to complete a survey is when they are waiting for something, for example food, kids, etc. This way they were not in a rush, as they would be while shopping. At that point I decided to change my venues for survey gathering. Sporting events were found to be useful as parents many times were waiting for their children before and after games.

I also found through trial and error that large offices or businesses could be utilized for surveys, as it required less actual legwork. The response rate was not as high as actually making contact with each person; however, the time it actually took was significantly less.

### **Issues**

Many issues arose as the survey process developed. The first being the number of surveys should have been determined appropriately before hand, instead of coming up with an arbitrary number (1000). It would have been better to calculate the total number of surveys that needed to be completed to make up a representative sample (384) and determine how many from each town/county were required. This would have eliminated the repetition and the waste (now have to randomly select some completed surveys to reject).

Although the survey says to skip to the next question if from Whitby or Oshawa, most people did not follow this. Most people from Oshawa/Whitby did not realize that the Region of Durham does not produce their calendar and is not responsible for their pick up (other than blue bin). However after speaking to the Region regarding this we have determined that although the respondents from these areas are not technically covered by the Region, we would include them in evaluating the effectiveness of the advertising. The calendar distributed by the Town of Whitby and the City of Oshawa are similar to the one distributed by the Region.

### **Suggestions**

Designing and completing the surveys has been a learning curve. If I were to do a survey project such as this one at another time, many things would be done differently.

To begin, it is suggested in survey design that the demographic questions should be placed at the end of the survey (Fink 1995). It is my belief that respondents were more eager at the beginning, but then lost interest and just circled the middle answer.

An issue that was not identified until after the surveys were completed was that people who live in multi-family dwellings should not have been included in the survey, as they do not all participate in recycling and composting programs. A question should have been included at the beginning of the survey.

I also believe that the usefulness questions should have been quantified with a scale of 1-5 instead of just the three options; Not at All, Somewhat and Very. Respondents tended to just circle the center answer, therefore it is not completely reliable. A differential scale answer may have provided more insight. This would also eliminate the variances caused by not knowing what each persons definition of the three terms given.

The survey could be made shorter by combining the two-part questions.

Original:

6. Have you seen the Region's ads in the paper? (Metroland This Week/Independants)		
Yes	No	n/a
How useful did you find this information?		
Not at all	Somewhat	Very

Combined:

6. How useful do you find the Region's ads in the newspaper?

1      2      3      4      5      Not Applicable

The survey could also be made easier to follow and read by using graphics such as arrows to direct people to the next question or to skip a question. This would have been useful to direct the respondents that live in Oshawa or Whitby to skip question 4. People generally did not read the small print and completed the second part of the question.

Lastly, a space left at bottom for email or contact info would be useful. Many respondents indicated that they believed the best method for delivery of information would be contact by email. Although at this time the Region is not equipped to do anything with this information, the opportunity should have been taken to build a database. In the future, the Region may be able to utilize these people as part of a social marketing strategy.

## Conclusion

The overall results of the survey may assist the Region of Durham Waste Department in their pursuit to determine which methods of advertising are expected to have the greatest impact on the public. However, in the process of designing and implementing this survey many oversights and unnecessary repetitions were observed. Attached is the new version of the survey, utilizing the knowledge gained through the original process.

**Please circle your answer**

Does your household recycle or compost?	Yes	No	
Which area do you live in?	Pickering	Ajax	Brock
	Scugog	Clarington	Uxbridge
		Whitby/Oshawa	

	Not At All			Very		
How useful do you find the Region's Waste Management Calendar?	1	2	3	4	5	Not Applicable
How useful do you find the Region's Radio ads? CKDO/KX96/94.9	1	2	3	4	5	Not Applicable
How useful do you find the Region's Ads in the Metroland This Week/ Independant Newspaper?	1	2	3	4	5	Not Applicable
How useful do you find the Region's Website Information?	1	2	3	4	5	Not Applicable

Which method of delivery to you think is best to get information to your household?

Newspaper    Calendar    Radio    Website    Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Age:  
 20-29            30-39            40-49            50-59            60+

Sex:  
 Male    Female

***Thank you***