



With our nation's *twitterpation* over social networking sites, one state is taking advantage of the trend and using social marketing to push recycling education.

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R E C Y C L I N G

Stickers. Inserts. Wall hangers. Brochures. Banners. Door hangers. Television, radio, billboard, newspaper and magazine advertisements. School presentations. News media campaigns and Web site development. For decades, municipalities, counties, states, as well as pertinent recycling organizations, have used the above forms of promotion, among others, to raise awareness and educate the public about the benefits of recycling. However, it goes without saying, conducting such forms of education and promotion can cost a community or association a lot of money.

For example, in January 2008, Time Inc., along with partners Verso Paper Holdings and the National Recycling Coalition, spent \$3 million on a ReMix campaign aimed at increasing residential recycling of magazines and catalogs. The campaign included full-page public service advertisements placed in numerous prominent consumer magazines, and also included advertisements on buses and subways, in movie theatres, on cable television, and in other outlets. Of course, not every municipality or organization has \$3 million to spend on a public education campaign. However, the good news is, in this day and age of modern technology, with gadgets and Web-based programs that literally allow individuals to be accessible around the clock, one

almost doesn't need \$3 million to operate a successful recycling-based public education campaign.

The North Carolina Department of Environment and Natural Resources' Division of Pollution Prevention and Environmental Assistance (DPPEA) utilizes three social marketing campaigns to increase public commitment to recycling. First, the Recycle Guys campaign was adopted from South Carolina in 2000, and the DPPEA recommends recycling coordinators use it to educate kids between pre-K through eighth grade. Thanks to a U.S. Environmental Protection Agency grant, the second form of social marketing involves the division's RE3.org Web site, which was created in 2005. The audience for RE3.org is high schoolers, college students and young adults. Lastly, the DPPEA is embarking on a new campaign called "Recycle More NC." It will focus on educating those between 35 and 55 years of age.

The communication strategies for each campaign vary slightly based on the audience. Recycle Guys are used on children's cable television channels and through the school system. RE3.org utilizes some cable television ads, social media, sponsorship of athletic events and radio advertisements. The Recycle More NC campaign will involve some cable television, newspaper, radio and truck advertisements. The annual budget

for all three campaigns is about \$230,000. Funding comes from the DPPEA, local government partners and private sector sponsorships. A breakdown of the budget is as follows:

- TV ads: \$150,000
- Promotional items: \$50,000
- Athletic events: \$15,000
- Radio ads: \$15,000

Data gathering

The DPPEA regularly conducts surveys throughout North Carolina to gauge citizens' brand recognition for the campaigns, how they spend their free time, preferred communication methods, etc. The surveys are conducted and analyzed by student

interns. Table 1 provides an overview of surveys conducted since 2007.

The data provides the division with useful information. Although the Earth Day surveys are slightly skewed, due to the nature of the audience, the division is confident the campaigns are branding with North Carolina residents, especially those who receive the cable television advertisements. When asked where respondents saw the logo, 32 percent say the Internet, 28 percent say television and 16 percent say school. The surveys conducted during the summer of 2008 were mostly done in areas that do not receive cable television advertisements. Also, the North Carolina State Fair attracts people from all across the state, including those areas that do not receive cable television advertisements. This helps explain the dips shown in Chart 1.

One performance measure that an educational campaign has is Web site visits. Chart 2 shows the number of visits per month for Recycle Guys, while Chart 3 displays the number of visits per month for RE3.org. The light gray

columns indicate the airing of cable television advertisements. The division does not consistently see a spike in Web site visits due to the advertisements. October spikes are caused by traffic to a Halloween craft page that consistently comes up in search engines and includes a funny, ghoulish voice when refreshed. There are also consistently higher visit totals each April, which reflects the Earth Day bump.

Again, the light gray columns indicate the airing of cable television advertisements. The August 2007 spike was caused by an incentive program established via a partnership between the DPPEA, Time Warner Cable and MTV. Under the campaign, those who visited the Web site, and

pledged to recycle, were registered to win one of four trips to that year's MTV Video Music Awards. After trending upward from 2005-2007, Web site visits now oscillate on a seasonal cycle.

Use of social media

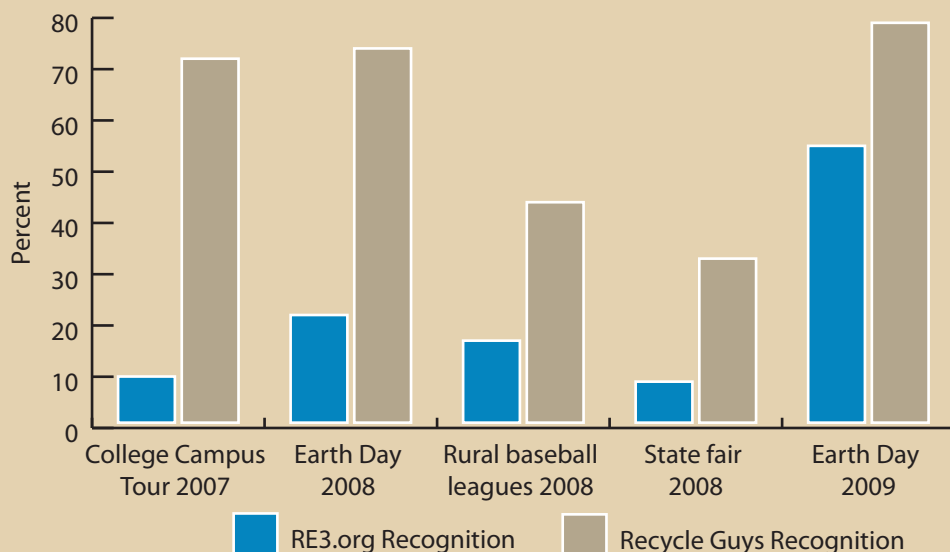
The DPPEA has been using social media for the RE3.org campaign for more than three years. The campaign's blog first began in November 2006, and is used to easily communicate with recycling coordinators and environmental educators throughout the state. The posts provide recommended social marketing techniques, recent marketing and recycling news and

Table 1 | Surveys conducted by the DPPEA since 2007

| Date | Audience | Location | Respondents | Demographics |
|-----------------------|--|--|-------------|--|
| 2007 surveys – spring | Eight colleges and youth groups throughout N.C. | Cary, Charlotte, Hickory, New Bern, Raleigh, Wilson, Wingate | 341 | 58% female; 40% male; 33% between ages 11-18; 49% between ages 19-23 |
| 2008 surveys – spring | Five outreach events all in the Research Triangle area | Cary, Raleigh, Durham | 304 | 53% female; 46% male; 16% under age 18; 46% between ages 18-34 |
| 2008 surveys – summer | Three baseball events | Asheville, Hickory, Kinston | 81 | 63% female; 27% male; 35% between ages 18-34 |
| 2008 surveys – fall | 12-day N.C. State Fair | Raleigh | 1,237 | 64% female; 34% male; 20% between ages 18-34; 31% between ages 35-50 |
| 2009 surveys – spring | Four outreach events all in the Research Triangle area | Cary, Raleigh, Durham | 387 | 70% female; 30% male; 29% under 18; 40% between ages 18-21; 10% between ages 22-25 |

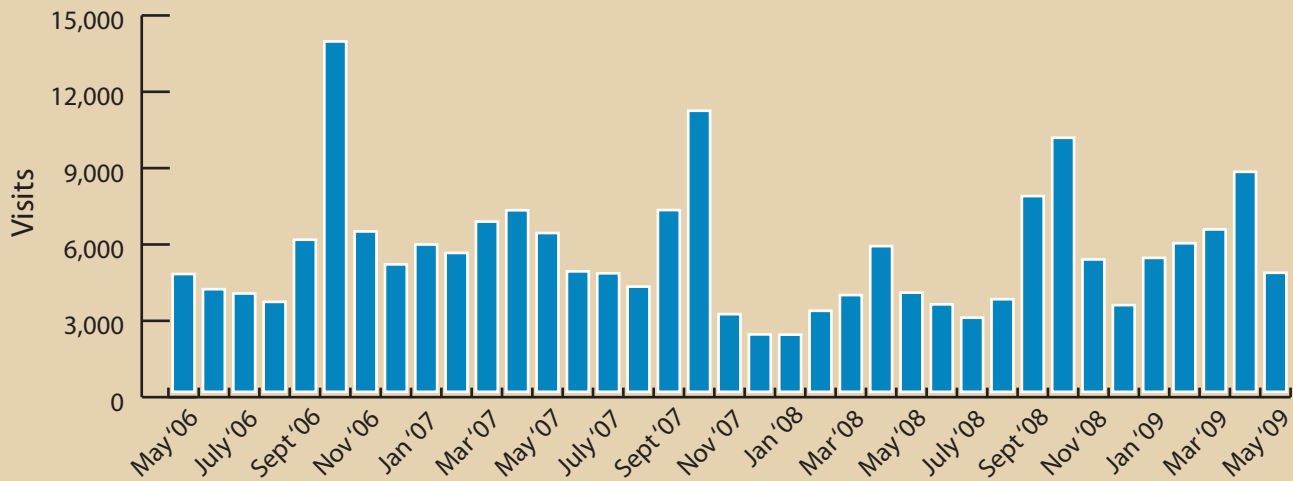
Source: North Carolina Division of Pollution Prevention and Environmental Assistance, 2009

Chart 1 | Campaign brand recognition



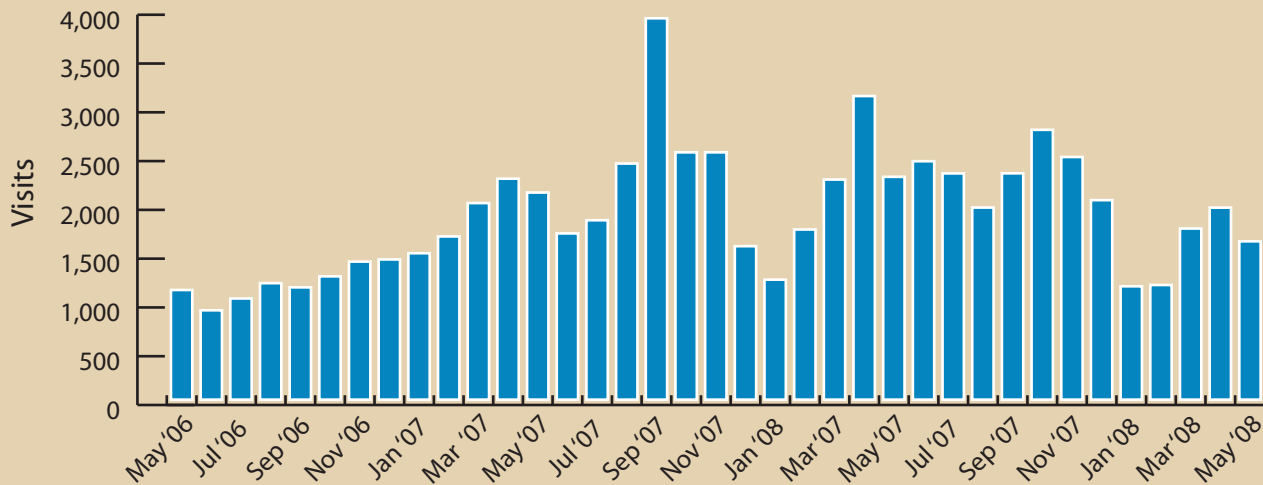
Source: North Carolina Division of Pollution Prevention and Environmental Assistance, 2009

Chart 2 | Recycle Guys Web site visits



Source: North Carolina Division of Pollution Prevention and Environmental Assistance, 2009

Chart 3 | RE3.org Web site visits



Source: North Carolina Division of Pollution Prevention and Environmental Assistance, 2009

data, DPPEA updates, etc.

In 2006, DPPEA also created a YouTube account. The online video-sharing site allowed distribution of new RE3.org commercials in an economical manner. One RE3.org video has had more than 12,000 views. In 2007, DPPEA uploaded the Recycle Guys commercials. One commercial has had more than 31,000 views. Typical peaks occur during April, due mainly to Earth Day publicity. The “Grasscycling” commercial was placed on YouTube’s home page in honor of Earth Day in 2008. Chart 4 shows the top-viewed Recycle Guys videos on YouTube.

In December 2006, the DPPEA cre-

ated both a MySpace page and a Facebook group. At that time, MySpace was the better social networking site because it was available to all, was used by more people and allowed those with an account to use a designated URL. Much has changed since 2006.

In 2006, Facebook became available to anyone with an e-mail address. Since then, the number of active Facebook users has surpassed those on MySpace, leading the campaign to use Facebook more. There are different ways for a Facebook user to find RE3.org: Through a group, cause or page. The “page” function looks similar to a personal profile and has the ability to link updates to the campaign’s Twitter account.

However, the Facebook “group” has been used longer than the Facebook “page,” which is reflected in our number of followers in Table 2.

In May 2007, DPPEA created a Flickr account for both campaigns. Flickr is an online photo sharing site that allows people to easily download high-quality resolution pictures and graphics. The division uses its Flickr account to share pictures of events that staff members have attended.

In 2008, Twitter became a part of the RE3.org campaign. Twitter is a micro-blogging site that allows participants to post entries of 140 characters or fewer. The Twitter search function allows users

to see what people are saying about a topic in real time. DPPEA staff typically “tweet” about recycling, specifically in North Carolina and our local communities. In the fall of 2009, many tweets were devoted to spreading information about North Carolina’s new plastic bottle land-fill disposal ban. During this time, dozens of Twitter users “re-tweeted” or composed their own tweet about the plastic bottle disposal ban. DPPEA saw a 12 percent increase in Twitter followers during the fall of 2009. Chart 5 displays the month-by-month membership of social media outlets used.

Most staff resources are spent updating the Facebook Page and Twitter account, which is reflected in the largest percentage increases in user participation. The spike in Twitter followers in June 2009 is unclear; however, there were several “full-time” interns during the summer that spent more hours on the social media sites than would normally be spent during the regular school semester. The spike in Facebook page followers in July 2009 reflects

a promotional “free T-shirt” campaign to attract new users to the page. There was a 50 percent increase in fans due to the promotion.

Table 2 summarizes the different types of social media used by RE3.org, and their impact.

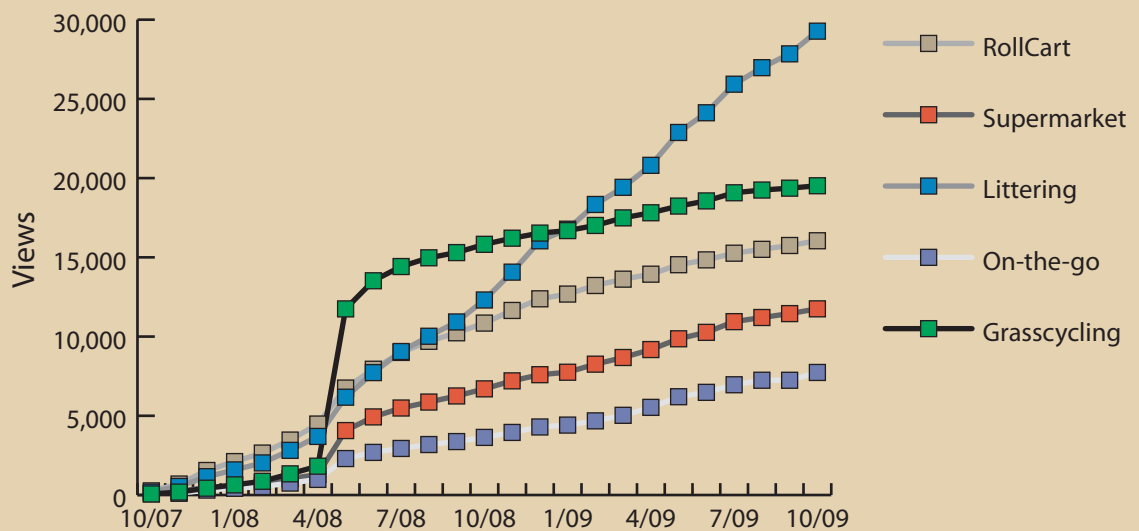
Frequently asked questions

The DPPEA often receives questions on how we find time to update and maintain the social media accounts RE3.org uses. DPPEA sees these social media sites as an important part of its education and out-

reach strategy. The popularity of Facebook, Twitter, etc., with the RE3.org demographic, makes the time spent on social media sites appropriate. We have found that, if you dedicate the time, you will see results. For example, during the 2009 state fair, DPPEA daily updated the RE3.org Facebook page with pictures and status updates about our booth at the fair. After the 10-day event was over, there was an eight percent increase in Facebook page fans.

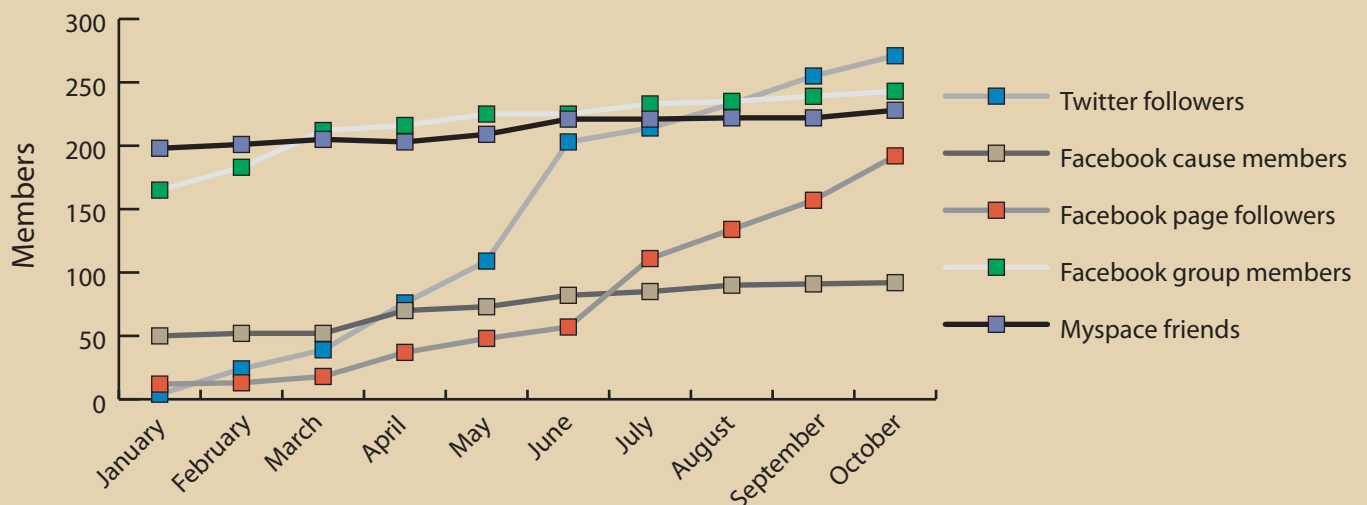
Another common question is about allowing comments on our social media sites. The DPPEA has indeed received some inappropriate comments on our YouTube account. However, YouTube

Chart 4 | Top viewed Recycle Guys videos on YouTube



Source: North Carolina Division of Pollution Prevention and Environmental Assistance, 2009

Chart 5 | 2009 RE3.org social media trends




Source: North Carolina Division of Pollution Prevention and Environmental Assistance, 2009

Table 2 | Social media used by RE3.org

| Type | Impact |
|--|---|
| RE3.org Blog http://re3org.blogspot.com | Between October 2007 and October 2009, the RE3.org blog had a 46 percent increase in visitors. The blog currently averages 24 visitors per day. |
| YouTube www.youtube.com/re3org | Between October 2007 and October 2009, the number of video views increased by 129 percent. Currently, there have been 60,492 views. |
| MySpace www.myspace.com/re3org | The MySpace profile has 224 "friends," and there have been 4,354 views of the RE3.org MySpace blog. |
| Facebook www.facebook.com/re3org | The Facebook Group has 243 members. The Facebook Page has 188 fans. The Facebook Cause has 91 followers. |
| Flickr www.flickr.com/re3org | There have been more than 32,500 picture views on RE3.org's Flickr site. The most viewed picture is the Reduce Reuse Recycle Green Arrows. |
| Twitter www.twitter.com/re3org | The RE3.org Twitter account has 266 followers. |

Source: North Carolina Division of Pollution Prevention and Environmental Assistance, 2009

and Blogger allow you to approve comments before they are posted. YouTube also has a filter mechanism that removes all swear words. The DPPEA does allow negative comments to be posted on our sites (they occur infrequently), but division officials respond to them with factual, pertinent recycling information. The division sees it as a way to start a dialogue and a way to use social media

as a way to change perceptions about recycling. 

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