

Can You Create Jobs with Recycling?

by Andy Ferguson

I feel badly for anyone who had to miss the IAPD Convention and Plastics Showcase in Miami. Those who attended no doubt walked away with new ideas, strategies and best practices for their corner of the industry. What a great opportunity to network and socialize with our colleagues. Thanks to all the IAPD staff who worked so hard to make it happen.

During the convention, the IAPD Environmental Committee focused on helping companies form new recycling programs and recognized some companies that have successfully implemented programs. By now, we all should understand plastics recycling for what it really is: Recycling in our industry is neither a passing phenomena nor an industry fad, it is here to stay. Recycling is not only here to stay it is also embedded in the future of the industry.

Right now, recycling programs up and down the supply chain are mostly voluntary. However, environmental, social and governmental pressures are sure to increase sooner rather than later. These pressures will not just increase within your organization but also for your customers. Soon the entire industry will be looking for ways to be part of the solution. Successful companies in the industry will be ones that adapt to this changing landscape before it becomes mandatory.

One of the challenges with many new recycling initiatives is momentum. Developing a successful recycling program is a strategic culture shift for many companies. Many times, the people within our organizations are resistant to change. Everyone loves the idea of change but very few will volunteer for the legwork. It can be overwhelming, but don't get caught up in trying to do everything all on the first day or in the first year. Find small victories and build on them. You'll make progress.

Often new ideas are hatched that soon fizzle out and the program is pulled back to the proverbial starting line. One way to combat this inertia is to add dedicated resources to your strategy. No company would ever undertake a new computer system or the development of a new product line by splitting the responsibilities among existing managers. Instead, companies develop project teams or managers who dedicate their time to addressing the strategy to ensure its success. Yet when it comes to recycling, many companies take a "bullpen by committee" approach. It is very hard to enact a strategic initiative by having every man-

ager in the company do just a little bit more. A successful program will not build itself. No one is going to do it for you. Consequently, recycling programs get bogged down because they are too hard for people with already full schedules to implement, control or measure. A recycling program without enough resources is like a plant that is starved of water and light, both will struggle to grow.

Herein is the opportunity to create jobs with your recycling program. The economy and labor markets today are ripe with talented individuals. Individuals with fresh perspectives about the environment and our industry, who would be able to convert a strategic idea into real competitive advantages, are out there. They may even exist within your own organization. However, it will take commitment from the organization to bring them onboard. (If you run into resistance, I recommend you read the excellent article written by Environmental Committee Chair Mark Shriver for the December 2012/January 2013 issue of *The IAPD Magazine* entitled "Sustainability: Your Newest Profit Center." He makes a good case for recycling — and other green practices — as a source of income.)

Real experience comes from dealing with buyers and brokers, negotiating prices and working out logistics. Filtering these responsibilities across several managers and administrators will dilute the experience these tasks generate and delay the growth of a program. On the other hand, funneling information and inquiries from potential business partners into one mailbox will compound the effects of that same experience for the organization. As the experience pool within your organization deepens, the program will expand. As any program grows it will require more direct labor, space and management resources. This is not a problem, this is an opportunity. Effective recycling programs can not only reduce cost, but increase revenue streams and even generate profits. That means as an effective program grows and expands, so also should the cost reductions and profits. Getting started is the real challenge.

Now we can see yet another advantage of your IAPD membership. Many of you have taken advantage of educational resources of the IAPD Environmental Committee. For those who have not, feel free to inquire about the free resources available to you through your membership. Don't be discouraged if your organization has struggled to get a program off the ground; you are not alone.

Recycling Tips

A recycler may take less desirable, possibly even materials they cannot recycle, if it means you will sell the higher demand items to them.

Most plastics are recyclable, but not all plastic is marketable. The right recycler can design a program to meet your needs.

Always qualify your recycler as you would any business partner. Make sure they have the appropriate insurances, licenses, etc.

Look for companies that can recycle around 90 percent or more of your materials.

Look for recyclers that avoid landfilling or incinerating such items as mercury lamps, leaded glass and batteries.

IAPD can help.

Many of you walked away from the convention this year with dreams, ideas and aspirations to make your company better. Now is the time to get moving. Dedicate one person within your company to lead the movement and start having and celebrating small victories. Start making a difference. You don't have to have a perfect program the first day or even the first year. Perfection is not the goal yet. Getting better should be the goal and if your organization is just getting started, there is a lot of "getting better" out there. Go get it.

Remember, focus on the environment is not going away. The environment is important to your customers, society and the government. How long before it becomes important enough to your organization?

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