



5 ways to improve

WASTE AND RECYCLING SERVICES

using digital communications

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INTRODUCTION

Councils in the UK are working hard to streamline their waste and recycling services, reduce inefficiencies, and improve collection and recycling rates. For many, enquiries from residents about bin collections account for a huge proportion of call centre costs and staff time, and so reducing the need for this type of customer contact is a priority for many councils. Having a strong and proactive citizen engagement strategy is crucial to the improvement and efficient delivery of these services. Why?



Because well-informed residents are less likely to need to call or visit the council to ask:

- Which bin do I need to put out?
- When will my bins be emptied?
- Why weren't they emptied?
- What do I need to do now?

If residents know what they need to do and when, they are more likely to present the right bin at the right time and have a positive impact on local recycling rates. To help residents remember when to put their bins out for collection, many councils in the UK are using digital communications solutions such as the [GovDelivery Communications Cloud](#) (by Granicus) to deliver timely and personalised email or SMS reminders.

Waste and recycling teams are already working closely with communications teams to deliver campaigns which inform, educate, and engage citizens in positive recycling behaviours. After all, it is in everyone's interests to improve collection services and boost recycling rates.



An efficient and effective operation has positive implications for:

- The environment
- Resident satisfaction (with the council and living spaces)
- Council finances
- Employee satisfaction
- Council reputation



We know delivering waste and recycling services and the associated customer communications can be a very complex business. In this guide, we share some examples of how councils are using digital communications to improve services and citizen participation in local programmes. We hope you'll be able to adopt some of the good practices; please get in touch if you'd like some help to do this or if you have other examples of good work.

SAVE STAFF TIME AND STREAMLINE PROCESSES

Sending email or SMS reminders to residents about when to put out each bin is an important first step in improving the efficiency and effectiveness of your waste and recycling services.

Your council may be collecting different bins on different days (household waste, recycling, garden waste, food waste and more), and without the right tools and processes in place, managing personalised reminders for multiple collection rounds can be an unwieldy or impossible task - especially for time-poor teams.

So how can you eliminate the need to manually build and schedule all these different reminders? How can you save your team time? Many local authorities are embracing advanced digital marketing technologies to provide residents with the updates they need and streamline internal processes.

There are a number of different approaches for delivering automated targeted bin collection reminders. Some councils like Kirklees use an RSS (a type of web feed) to automatically trigger reminders, Wrexham uses marketing automation to deliver drip campaigns, while others use an Application Programming Interface (API) to sync information in their customer database with their digital communications platform to deliver highly targeted personalised messages.

Example scenario: *Mr Smith at 22 Station Rd contaminated his recycling bin with non-recyclables and left some bulky waste outside his property. Your team couldn't empty the bin this morning. They log this on a CRM which triggers a specific SMS alert advising Mr Smith of the reasons his bin was missed and where to dispose of bulky waste. This avoids a phone call from Mr Smith later that day, saving customer contact costs and staff time.*



DID YOU KNOW?

An API is a piece of code that creates a “bridge” between different systems, for example, a seamless link between your digital communications platform and other databases or software. They can automate management of your mailing lists, deliver SMS/ email alerts based on specific audience behaviours or criteria, and eliminate the risk of human error.

EXAMPLE IN PRACTICE

Saving staff time and streamlining processes

Wrexham County Borough Council

What they needed to do

Every week a communications officer at Wrexham used to schedule hundreds of bin collection email reminders to multiple mailing lists which corresponded to each collection round. They had to build and send the bulletins in two languages (English and Welsh), pushing the monthly total of bulletins into the thousands. This task took one day a week. The council needed to reduce the workload and find a more efficient way to deliver these personalised reminders.

What they did to make improvements

After upgrading to the GovDelivery Advanced Package for Communications Cloud, Wrexham streamlined processes by using the advanced segmentation and marketing automation features. When a resident subscribes to collection reminders, they select their collection day and calendar, and automatically fall into an audience "segment" – a dynamic list of people who meet certain criteria. Predefined "welcome" and drip campaigns (a sequence of automated messages sent to drive a specific action or understanding) are automatically triggered to "onboard" and nurture them as a new digital subscriber, before they receive their first automated personalised bin reminder. These bulletins are fully automated and do not require any maintenance.

1

Resident subscribes at Wrexham.gov.uk

The screenshot shows a mobile view of the 'Refuse and Recycling Calendars' page. The main heading is 'Refuse and Recycling Calendars' with a sub-heading 'Subscribe for reminders'. Below this is a dark blue bar with the text 'Email Updates'. The main content area contains the text: 'Did you know that you can now subscribe to a Bin Collection Day reminder via E-mail? You will receive a weekly reminder of your collection day and the bin colour.' Below this is a form field for '*Email Address' with a 'Submit' button. At the bottom, there is a section titled 'Your calendar guide for collection services' with two links: 'Refuse and recycling collection arrangements for Bank Holidays' and 'Which Day is my Bin Collection Day?'.

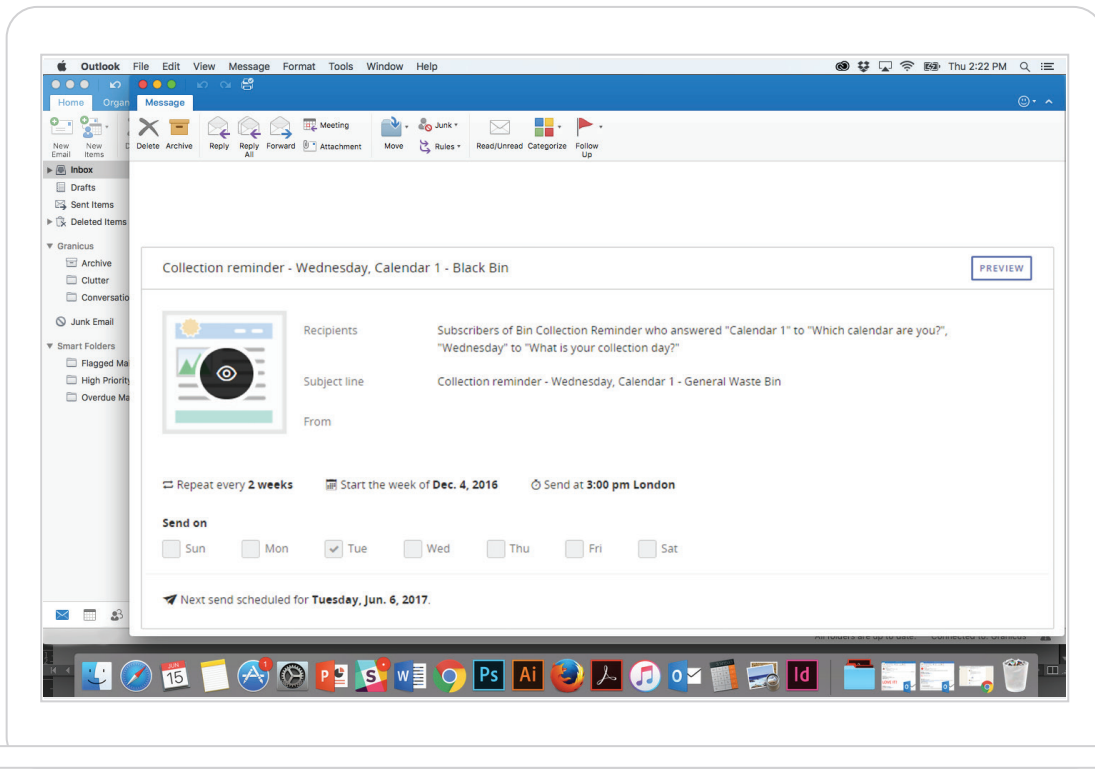
2

Resident selects their calendar and collection day

The screenshot shows a mobile view of the 'Subscriber Preferences' page. The URL in the browser is 'https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/UKWCBC/subscriber/edit'. The page features the Wrexham County Borough Council logo and navigation links for 'Residents', 'Business', 'Visitor', and 'Council'. Below the navigation is a 'Welcome kelly.burke@granicus.com' message. The main content area is titled 'Subscriber Preferences' and has three tabs: 'Subscriptions', 'Preferences', and 'Questions'. The 'Questions' tab is active, showing two dropdown menus: 'Which calendar are you?' and 'What is your collection day?'. Below these are 'SUBMIT' and 'CANCEL' buttons. At the bottom, there is a 'Join the Conversation' section with social media icons and a 'Useful Links' section with links for 'Back to Top', 'Site Map', 'Contact', and 'News'. The footer includes '© 2014 WCBC'.

EXAMPLE IN PRACTICE

- 3 Resident's answers are logged and they will automatically receive reminders for their collection, per the campaign set-up in the GovDelivery Communications Cloud**



Results

Fully automated campaigns save an officer a whole day's work a week

- Automation and segmentation streamline processes and save staff time
- Collection reminders achieve 60% open rate
- 6,500 residents receive automated reminders
- Fewer residents need to call the council with bin-related enquiries
- Automated A/B tests optimise bulletin content and engagement
- Automated "welcome" and "re-engagement" campaigns lead to 53% increase in new subscriptions a week

Learn more about [Wrexham's citizen engagement strategy here](#).

EXAMPLE REMINDERS

Keeping residents informed to reduce customer contact and save staff time

1 Wrexham County Borough Council

Subject line: Collection reminder - Monday, Calendar 2 - Green Bin

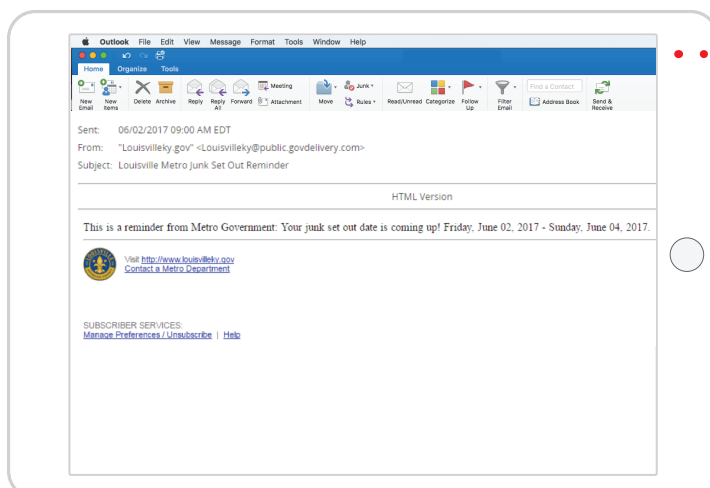


We like...

Wrexham puts all the need-to-know info in the subject line.

2 City of Louisville, Kentucky

Subject line: Louisville Metro Junk Set Out Reminder



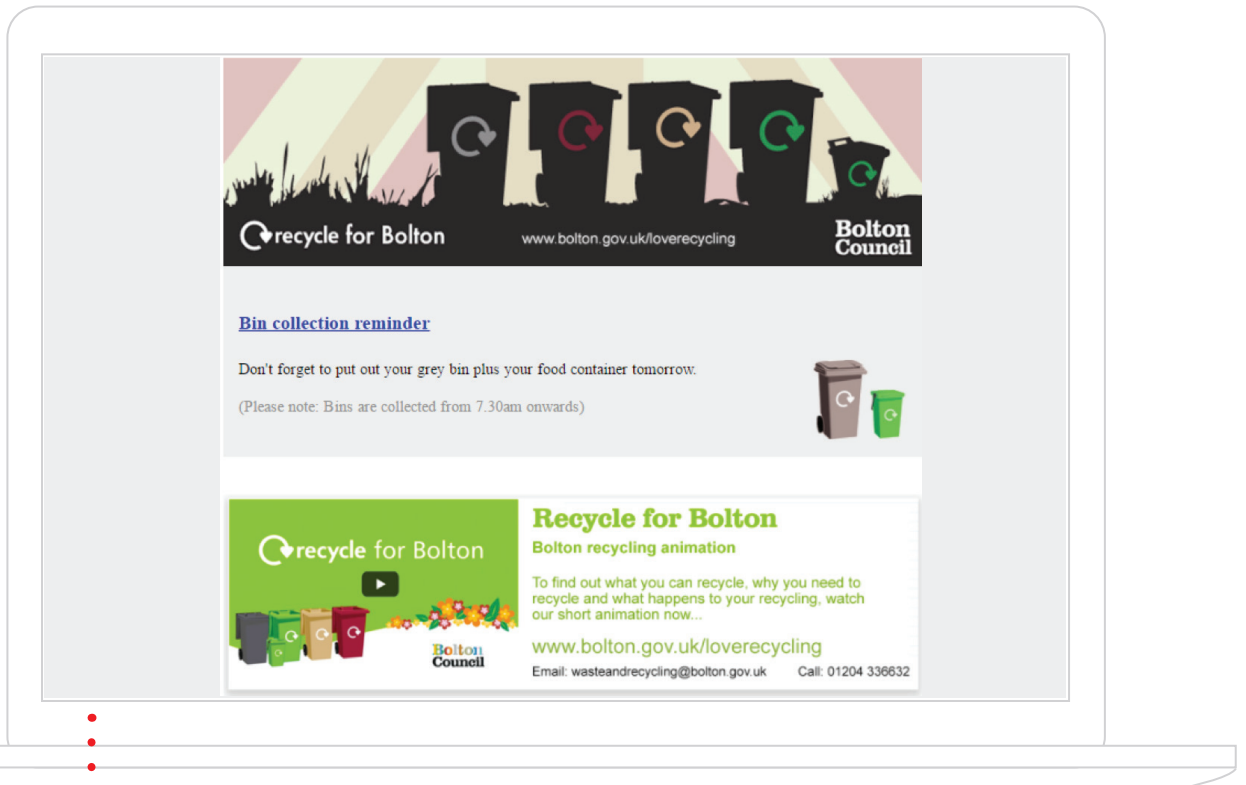
We like...

Louisville gives residents the option of receiving reminders by SMS or email.

EXAMPLE REMINDERS

3

Bolton Council



We like...

Bolton uses RSS page watch to automate delivery of targeted collection reminders. As residents sign up for email reminders, they enter their postcode and are assigned to the right reminder topic via an address look-up.

REDUCE CONTAMINATION RATES

Statistics show about 45% of household waste is currently recycled across the UK, however 3% of all recyclable waste is still being contaminated by non-recyclable items, and consequently incinerated or sent to landfill.

The amount of household recyclable waste rejected for recycling in England increased by 84% between 2012 and 2016, indicating that some residents are still putting the wrong items in their bins. The cost to local authorities of re-sorting contaminated recycle bins can be as much as £50,000 a month and is said to be the primary reason the majority of the waste is being rejected.

Given that financial penalties are imposed on local authorities by European, national and regional government for failing to recycle, and levies are imposed on the proportion of waste going to landfill, there is a clear financial incentive for local authorities to help residents and businesses put the right items in the right bin - not to mention the environmental motivations.

Many councils around the UK are taking bold action to reduce contamination rates through better education about what can and can't be recycled. We're supporting 88 councils using our email and SMS technologies to deliver proactive citizen engagement campaigns to help tackle this problem. Some are carefully tracking the impact to show that better communication really does lead to better recycling behaviours.



DID YOU KNOW?

Councils were unable to recycle 338,000 tonnes of waste in 2014-15 due to contamination - up from about 184,000 tonnes in 2011-12*. Do you need to reach more people and deliver educational campaigns that change behaviour? Get in touch with Granicus. ***Source: BBC**

EXAMPLE IN PRACTICE

Educating and motivating residents to reduce contamination rates

Kirklees Council

What they needed to do

Kirklees was already using an [Application Programming Interface \(API\)](#) to sync data from their CRM with the corresponding (collection round) topic in the GovDelivery Communications Cloud, and an RSS web feed to send automated personalised email reminders to residents the afternoon before collection day. While these reminders meant more residents presented the right bin on time, a high proportion of recyclable waste was still being rejected at the recycling plant due to contamination. The council needed to do more to help more residents recycle correctly.

What they did to make improvements

In summer 2016 Kirklees trialled an email campaign to target residents in two particular bin collection rounds, where contamination rates were high. This intervention targeted households the evening of their recycling bin collection, and the key messages were included in subsequent collection reminders too. The campaign educated residents about what can and can't be recycled, and asked them to acknowledge that they'd read the guidance by clicking a button in the email.



THE RESULTS

Contamination rates across the two rounds reduced by up to 56% in three months.

The email campaign achieved extremely high engagement rates:

Round 1 = 78% open rate / 58% click rate

Round 2 = 69% open rate / 38% click rate

Kirklees' Recycling team then monitored contamination rates on these rounds for the three months following the campaign, and compared them to the previous three months. There was a ~50% reduction in contaminations across the two rounds, which is testament to the power of a targeted email intervention with a clear call-to-action:

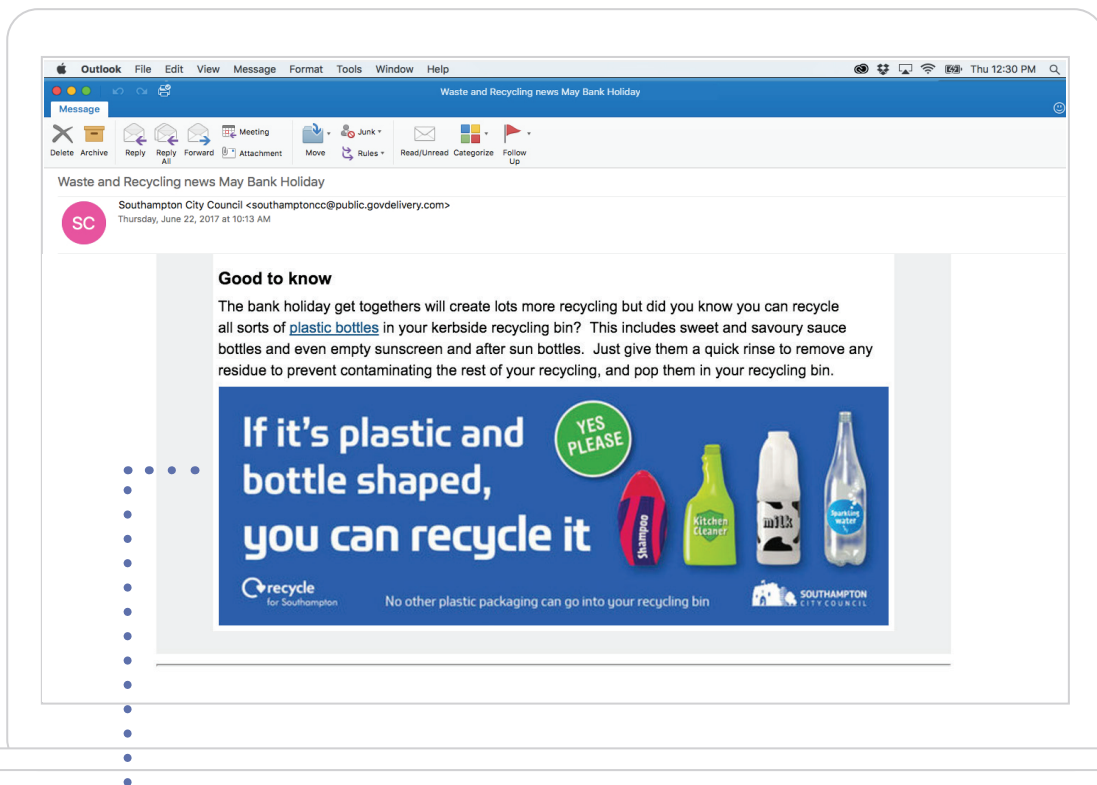
Round 1 = 42.22% decrease in contaminations

Round 2 = 56.31% decrease in contaminations

OTHER EXAMPLES

Educating residents about what can and can't be recycled to reduce contamination rates

1 Southampton City Council

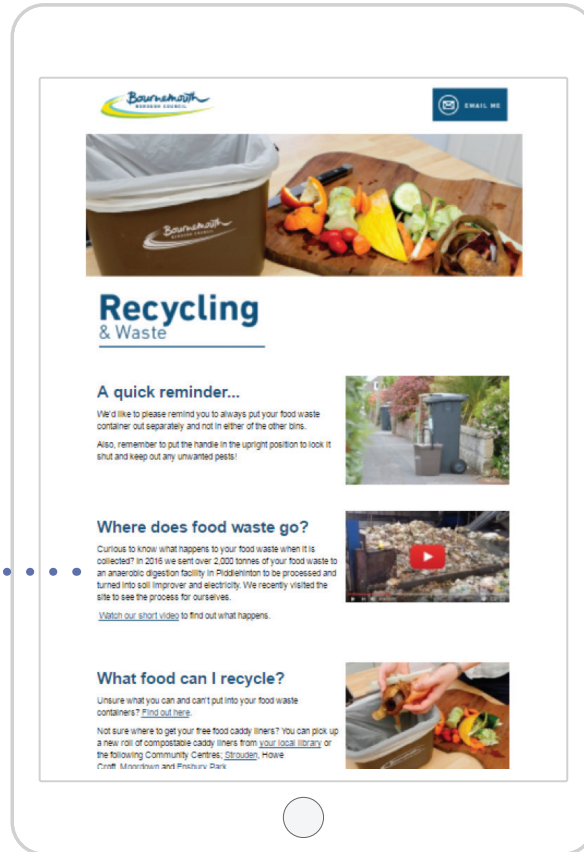


We like...

Southampton added this banner advert to the bottom of different email bulletins to reach different audiences. The message is simple and clear.

OTHER EXAMPLES

2 Bournemouth Borough Council



We like...

- This bulletin had a 54% open rate and
- 18% click rate. The friendly tone and
- straight formatting helps make the
- message engaging.


INCREASE PROGRAMME TAKE-UP AND RECYCLING RATES

.....

Having a strong citizen engagement strategy to help residents adopt positive recycling behaviours is critical to the success of recycling schemes. [Government research](#) indicates improvements in recycling and reuse in the UK tend to be linked to the programmes available, and crucially, the supporting communications and promotion. Hooray for good #govcomms!

Dramatic shifts in residents' behaviour over the last two decades mean most people are now happy to separate their household waste for recycling, and in 2015 the UK recycled [43% of household waste](#). This was four times as much as in 2000, although a slight decrease on 2014 figures - indicating that there's still much work to be done to reach the 2020 target of 50%.

Your council may be among those which have rolled out financial incentive schemes to get more residents recycling properly. You may already be aware though, that analysis of these schemes shows they are only really effective when accompanied by good communications. If your council is incentivising household recycling, do make sure you're communicating regularly to inform, educate and move citizens to action. Check out our [Content Marketing Guide](#) for guidance on campaign tactics.



Residents need to be reminded how to use a recycling scheme and why it is important, and this communication needs to happen regularly, particularly if the area has high levels of transience.

Chartered Institution of Wastes Management (CIWM), Waste on the Frontline (2015)



TOP TIPS TO ENCOURAGE RECYCLING

- Keep your messages clear, concise and actionable
- Communicate regularly
- Explain in simple terms why it's important and the process
- Deliver seasonal and topical campaigns to keep your message fresh
- Engage with schools to educate the next generation of recyclers
- Recognise good behaviours and achievements
- Be transparent with feedback and results

EXAMPLE IN PRACTICE

Increasing the take-up of programmes to improve recycling rates

London Borough of Hackney Council

What they needed to do

Hackney needed to increase local recycling rates by encouraging residents to throw away less and recycle more. They saw an opportunity to increase participation in [Hackney's Recycling Rewards](#) scheme (funded by the government's Recycling Rewards Fund) with email campaigns delivered via the GovDelivery Communications Cloud.

What they did to make improvements

Hackney introduced an email bulletins service in autumn 2016 and is already reaching nearly 75,000 subscribers. So far over 32,000 residents have subscribed to the council's "Greener Hackney" email bulletins to stay up-to-date with recycling services, including the incentive scheme. Every three months, Hackney measures the amount of rubbish and recycling produced by each ward in the borough, and when a ward recycles more and wastes less, all of its members earn points. Winners and runners-up receive vouchers for local shops or funds for local charities. By sharing details about the take-up of the scheme and results through regular email bulletins, Hackney is boosting engagement with the programme.

Remember, [social influence and social proof](#) can be extraordinarily powerful in driving behavioural change among whole communities! So we recommend you do show residents what they're neighbours are doing.

RESULTS SO FAR

The latest batch of Hackney Recycling Rewards awarded £100 to 44 winners and £40 to 103 runners-up.

More than 28,000 residents have signed up to the scheme since October 2016, many activating their account after clicking a call-to-action button in an email campaign.

EXAMPLE BULLETINS

Boosting participation in a rewards scheme to increase recycling rates

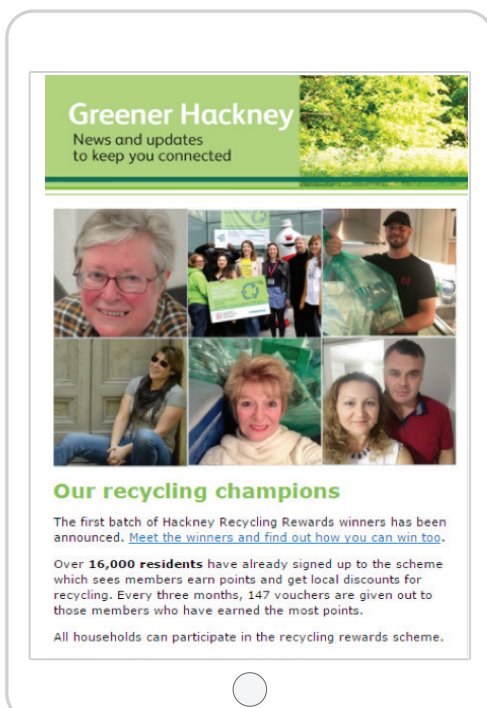
1 London Borough of Hackney Council



Bulletin results

- 54% open rate
- 15% click rate
- Side rewards advert (used a dynamic GIF to prompt clicks)
- 605 clicks to rewards landing page

2 London Borough of Hackney Council



Bulletin results

- Uses social influence / real faces to increase engagement
- 42% open rate
- 8% click rate
- 1,300 clicks to rewards landing page
- 10% conversion rate (open > click on rewards link)

EXAMPLE BULLETINS

3

London Borough of Hackney Council

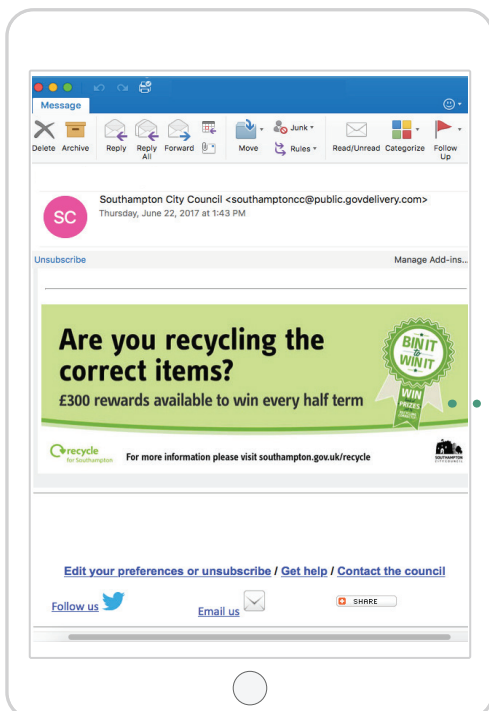


We like...

Hackney uses a bold call-to-action button to encourage recipients to take action.

4

Southampton City Council



We like...

Adding a banner advert like this to the bottom of other email bulletins can help you engage new audiences, not just residents subscribed to specific "waste and recycling" updates.

REDUCE CROSS-BORDER USAGE

Household waste and recycling centres (HWRCs) continue to play a significant role in enhancing the recycling and waste management services that local authorities provide for the public. They accept significant tonnages of waste and can achieve high recycling rates. These sites provide residents with an alternative to kerbside collections for the responsible disposal, recycling or reuse of their household waste, particularly for items that are not collected or are costly to collect at the kerbside.

Naturally residents tend to use the HWRC closest to them, although this means many local authorities receive “imports” of cross-border waste from residents living outside of the area, stretching council budgets further. While some councils accept the situation and allow free usage, often with a tacit understanding between their neighbouring boroughs, some choose to intervene to reduce cross-border use, for example by insisting on proof of residency.

However you choose to manage the use of your HWRCs, it’s important you are proactive in communicating your policies to the public. Educating citizens about service changes and shifting their behaviours takes time and effective campaigning. If you’re cutting off access to your HWRC for non-residents, how will you let them know and ensure they understand why? Don’t wait for them to turn up at the recycling centre and be turned away; be proactive and use all available channels to get the word out.



NEW RESOURCE FOR YOU:

Need to deliver a communications campaign that helps drive specific citizen action? Download our **[content marketing guide](#)** for the public sector to help you.

EXAMPLE IN PRACTICE

Engaging a wide audience to reduce cross-border service usage

Nottinghamshire County Council

What they needed to do

Household waste costs Nottinghamshire County Council approximately £30 million a year, and in 2013/14 waste tonnage per household deposited at its recycling centres was 239kg compared to 54kg at a neighbouring local authority. Research indicated that cross-border usage could be as much as 15% for some facilities due to their close proximity to county boundaries, and because there were fewer facilities and shorter opening hours in neighbouring areas.

The council knew a large number of people who weren't living in Nottinghamshire were using its facilities and therefore local residents were subsidising the costs. They estimated they were spending over £1 million dealing with out-of-county waste each year: an unsustainable sum in the context of shrinking budgets and pressure to find more cost effective ways of delivering services. They decided to take action to reduce and stop cross-border usage where possible.

What they did to make improvements

In order to be able to use the county's HWRCs, residents had to register their vehicle to their address via a new online portal, developed by the council. Staff at the centres used handheld devices to check each vehicle had been registered online. Nottinghamshire estimated a minimum saving of £200,000 as a result of introducing the system, and with a goal of 100,000 vehicles to be registered in 2016/17 and 75% to be completed online, they needed to deliver a pervasive integrated campaign to drive citizen awareness of the initiative and increase take-up.

Having an audience ready to engage with via social media channels and email marketing helped build campaign momentum quickly. The council's Email Me bulletins service (powered by the GovDelivery Communications Cloud) had been running since 2013, and with over 160,000 subscribers (by 2016) already receiving email updates on a range of topics (including nearly 8,000 signed up to receive recycling service updates), Email Me was a unique opportunity to reach county residents as well as people in neighbouring areas.

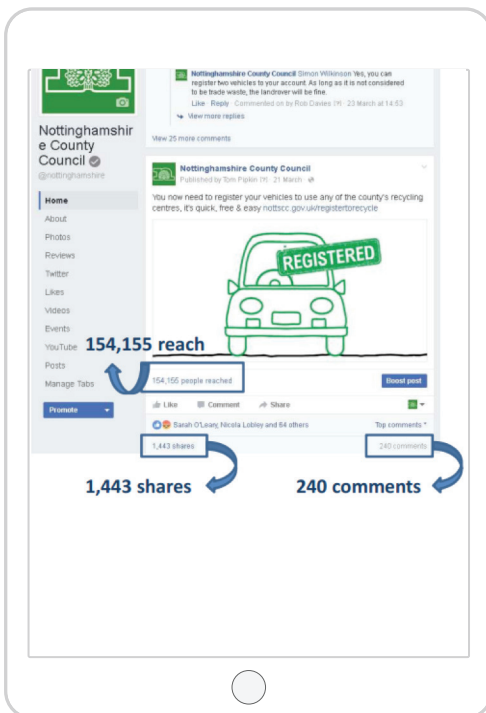
Consistent messaging, imagery and a clear call-to-action across all collateral were crucial to the success of the campaign. Banner adverts were used in popular bulletins to cross-promote the initiative and were the most-clicked item in each bulletin. By driving people to register online directly from email and social media, the council delivered a streamlined and easy digital customer experience.

EXAMPLE IN PRACTICE

1 Email bulletin banner advert



2 Engagement on Facebook



3 Engagement on Twitter



Results

Between the launch of the campaign and the end of March 2017, Email Me contributed to the following results:

- 272,217 visits to the council's "Register to use our recycling centres" webpage
- 135,857 unique users registered a total of 212,314 vehicles
- 81% of registrations were completed online
- The registration form saw a high completion rate of 84%
- Cost savings are currently being calculated and will be reported soon

GENERATE MORE INCOME FOR YOUR ORGANISATION

.....

Spurred on by austerity and the reduction in funding from central government, many local authorities in the UK have had to become more commercially astute and do what few councils have done before: find their own ways to generate income.

Communicators, traded services teams, and others are working together to make the absolute most of all resources and assets available, and keep a beady eye out for new opportunities! Enter the rise of entrepreneurialism in local government...

For some councils (for example [London Borough of Havering Council](#)), this has taken the form of [selling advertising space in popular email bulletins](#) or across their digital real estate, like Croydon, Birmingham and Derby councils. For others like Southampton City Council and [Bedford Borough Council](#), commercialisation is about nurturing their digital communications channels to build a huge audience (of potential customers) and drive engagement with council-owned traded services and income-generating opportunities: health and leisure facilities, arts and heritage venues, ticketed events, and, chargeable waste and recycling services.



DID YOU KNOW?

42% of UK local authorities charged residents an annual fee for kerbside garden waste collection in 2016. **Source: Mantis**

EXAMPLES IN PRACTICE

Increasing the take-up of waste and recycling services that generate income

London Borough of Havering

Outcome: £770k+ from annual garden waste collection sales

Each year Havering promotes its chargeable garden waste collection service across a suite of email bulletins, to increase renewal rates and attract new customers. The bulletins drive people to transact online, reducing call centre demand. Email marketing is central to the service area's sales strategy. In the first year of introducing targeted and timely email reminders, renewal rates increased by 375%, reducing service inefficiencies and running costs. Three years on and more than 90% of customers renew on time, and nearly three quarters of renewals are completed online or via an automated phone system (and therefore do not require customer service interaction). In 2017/18, the council generated £770k in online/automated phone sales.

Snapshot of Havering's email marketing operations:



Subscribers: 136,000 (equivalent to ~57% of local population)



Average engagement rate: 66%*



Popular topics: Living in Havering, travel, housing, arts, crime prevention, active living, business, fostering and adoption



Subscriber boosts from: Food Standards Agency, Essex, Hackney and Thurrock councils, Parliament and Met Office (via cross-promotion in GovDelivery Network)

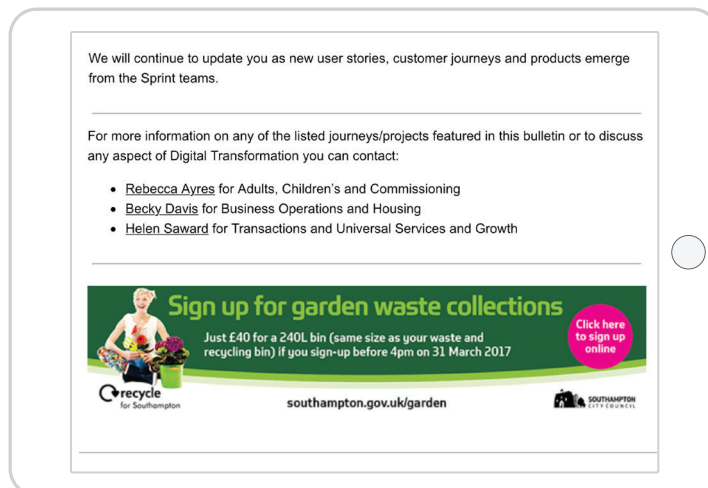
*Engagement rate = % of total recipients who have opened a message or clicked a link over past 90 days.

EXAMPLES IN PRACTICE

Southampton City Council

Outcome: £325k+ annually from garden waste collection sales

Southampton promotes its commercial waste and garden waste collection services via 'Stay Connected' email bulletins, driving thousands of residents to its website to register for the services. In spring/summer 2016 the council launched a financial incentive to encourage more people to buy its garden waste collection service online. The £5 discount was promoted through dedicated waste and recycling email bulletins as well as via banner adverts on the bottom of other subscription topics. Already by June 2016, 9,300 people had bought online representing a 23% increase in online transactions on the year before. The revenue generated equated to over £325,000 of income.



Snapshot of Southampton's email marketing operations:



Subscribers: 112,000 (equivalent to ~47.2% of local population)



Average engagement rate: 61%



Popular topics: Sustainable travel, waste and recycling, events, arts and culture, city developments, jobs

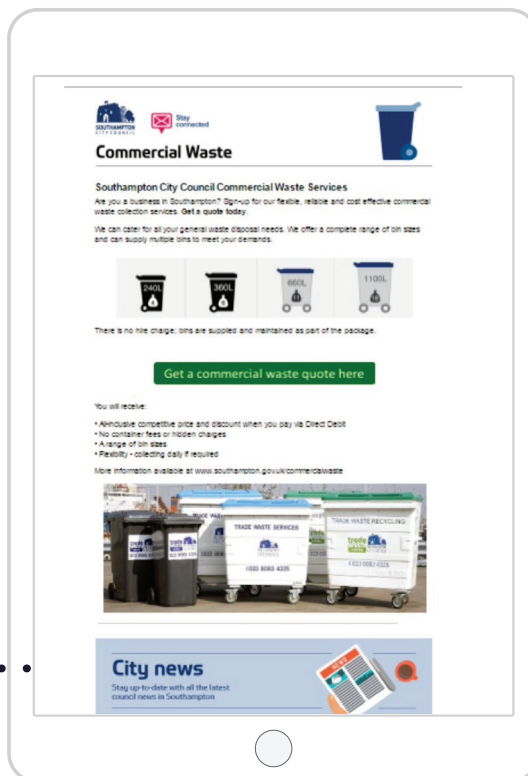


Subscriber boosts from: East Hampshire, Bournemouth, West Sussex, Poole and Havant councils (via cross-promotion in GovDelivery Network)

EXAMPLE BULLETINS

Promoting income-generating waste and recycling services

1 Southampton City Council



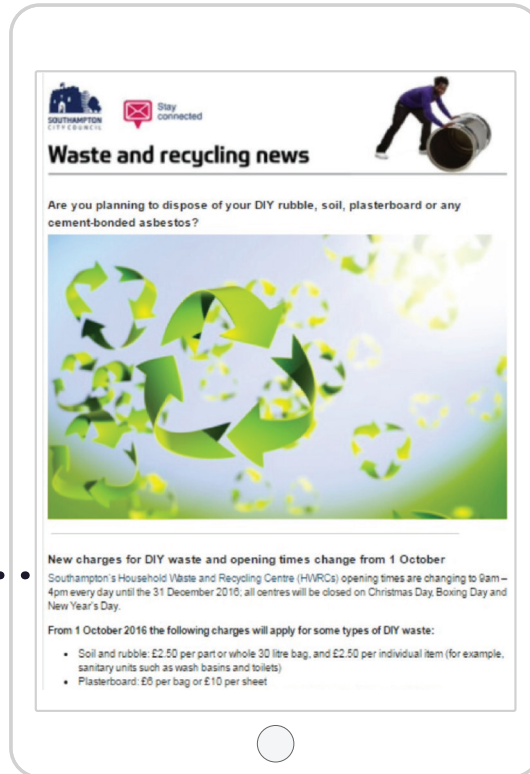
We like...

- Southampton appeals to a business audience with plain language, helpful imagery and an easy-to-follow list of benefits. They've also cross-promoted their "City News" subscription topic on the bottom.

EXAMPLE BULLETINS

2

Southampton City Council



We like...

Southampton lets residents know about chargeable services available at local HWRCs, providing a link to the centres at the top of the body copy.

NEED SOME HELP WITH YOUR COMMUNICATIONS?

.....

Proactive communication between local authorities and residents can help give people the information and instructions they need to act in an appropriate and timely manner. If you're able to deliver clear messages at the right moment to the right people, you stand a better chance of encouraging those people to behave in ways that improve recycling rates and the efficiency of your waste and recycling services. You may also score some brownie points with residents for your helpful approach... who knows?

If you'd like some more information and examples of how other local authorities are using Granicus technologies to deliver better waste and recycling services – for the benefit of residents, businesses and staff – please get in touch. We'd love to help you engage more people in your programmes.



Call

0800 032 5769



Email

info@granicus.com



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uk.granicus.com



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The Beehive, City Place, Gatwick, RH6 0PA

Please give us feedback

Did you find this guide useful? Please [let us know here](#).



Bin collection email works and is useful.

I like the updates. I have mental health problems, this causes me to be forgetful. With updates I can be reminded of bin collections to ensure I can get the right bin out in time.

I just enjoy the variety and, of course, the bin reminders! All council matters in a handy place – good idea, thank you.

Snapshot of feedback from Wrexham residents subscribed to email updates.



uk.granicus.com