

A vibrant green-themed illustration centered around a large globe featuring a prominent recycling symbol. The globe is encircled by a ring of various icons representing sustainability and waste management. These include a house, a person carrying a recycling bin, a trash can, a smartphone displaying a recycling app, a water bottle, a glass bottle, a person dropping litter, a car, a recycling bin, and a person holding a recycling bin. The background is white, and the overall design is clean and modern.

Accelerating in-house recycling rates through internal stakeholder engagement



Australian Packaging Covenant

The Business Case for Packaging Sustainability

Summary

OfficeMax provides business and government customers with a complete range of office supplies and related services. This case study examines how OfficeMax has reinvigorated its approach to packaging sustainability by reviewing the membership and activities of its sustainable packaging team made up of representatives from multiple business divisions. This approach is helping OfficeMax to build on recent achievements by improving the reuse and recycling of secondary packaging.

Lessons from this case study

- Involve personnel from multiple business divisions to gather new ideas and to build support for packaging reuse and recycling efforts.
- Use the development of Greenfield sites as an opportunity to review waste management contracts and to 'design-in' recycling infrastructure and systems.
- Periodically review your organisation's approach to its Australian Packaging Covenant (APC) action plan. This can prompt new ideas on how staff might more effectively contribute towards packaging sustainability outcomes.



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About the company

OfficeMax Australia Limited (OfficeMax) provides workplace solutions in a range of areas including stationary, printing and office furniture. The company has over 700 employees in Australia with sales and distribution centres in every State. Customers include large businesses, educational institutions, government bodies and more recently, small businesses. OfficeMax Australia is the local subsidiary of OfficeMax Incorporated, which operates in the US, Canada, Mexico and New Zealand.

OfficeMax has actively sought to provide products and packaging that incorporate recycled material, including pens and notebook covers that incorporate recycled PET (**Figure 1**). This helps customers to meet their APC commitment to 'buy recycled' under KPI 4. Offering products with an 'environmental' differentiation has also been an effective business strategy since many corporate customers have specific environmental procurement requirements for office supplies and services. These have been priced competitively so that clients can purchase recycled products without paying any more than the price of a conventional (non-recycled) alternative. By creating this pricing strategy OfficeMax hopes to drive increased demand for the Eco products, resulting in improved sales of these products.

Figure 1: OfficeMax Eco products and packaging incorporate recycled material

Highlighter pens contain 75-78% recycled PET and ballpoint pens up to 89% recycled PET. Notebooks contain up to 75% recycled paper.



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Approach to packaging sustainability

In mid-2013 the environmental manager and a manager in the private label merchandising team reviewed the OfficeMax approach to packaging and recycling. They found that there had been significant achievements. For example, OfficeMax received the 2011, 2012 and 2013 Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) Retailer of the Year Award as well as the FSC Australia Responsible Procurement Award in 2012. The FSC provides a certification program for wood and fibre products sourced from sustainably managed forests.

Increasing staff engagement

Despite these achievements it was recognised that while staff were generally aware of the importance of packaging sustainability, there was limited opportunity for them to propose and progress new ideas. The implementation strategy for OfficeMax's Australian Packaging Covenant (APC) action plan was adjusted to improve the involvement of staff across different business divisions and to better engage with operational staff as well as managers.

To drive internal staff engagement the packaging sustainability team was restructured. Previously the team had a strong focus on administration and compliance rather than engagement and innovation. Individuals from different parts of the business were invited to nominate to join the team, which now includes representatives from: product administration, environment, merchandising, bid team and the warehouse store (**Figure 2**).

It was also decided that each team member should be given responsibility for progressing specific commitments in their action plan. Allocating responsibilities in a way that aligns with the interests and departmental focus of each team member has been very effective. It encourages team members to identify ways of embedding sustainable packaging into their day to day business operations.

Figure 2: The sustainable packaging team. Team members are from the Supply Chain, Warehouse, Pricing, Product Administration, Bid writing and Merchandising departments at OfficeMax.



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A focus on improving internal recycling rates

OfficeMax have found that improving internal recycling rates can deliver significant business benefits. In recent years they have focused on integrating recycling infrastructure into the development of two new Greenfield sites – Hazelmere in Western Australia and Eastern Creek in NSW. The environment manager used the potential cost savings, APC action plan and the company's ISO 14001 certification commitments to justify the business case for the purchase of an 'Elephant's Foot' cardboard compactor at these sites (**Figure 3**).

At the same time, the national waste management contract was being reviewed, and the new contract included dedicated recycling bins for office waste. The cost savings associated with sorting recyclable materials from waste on-site helped to further justify the investments made at the two Greenfield sites. The review of the contract has also led to a more collaborative approach with the waste contractor. For example, the waste contractor attends quarterly sustainable packaging team meetings and provides data on progress towards recycling targets. Audits and checks are also carried out periodically to inform opportunities for improvement.

Figure 3: The Elephants Foot compactor purchased for two new distribution sites



Currently the warehouse store representative and the environment manager are leading a trial that involves re-using waste packaging. The project was identified during a trade show visit where this process was being demonstrated. It will involve the purchase of a machine that crimps cardboard boxes into a form that allows them to be used as a filler in distribution boxes. The re-used crimped cardboard is particularly suitable for wrapping fragile items and substitutes the use of virgin materials. An important factor in the trial is that the warehouse store representative on the packaging sustainability team will be closely involved in planning and implementation. This is expected to help address potential issues associated with changed practices on the part of the packers themselves. Potential benefits include cost savings, meeting APC commitments and improving the product integrity of fragile items.



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Next steps

The team is aware that it will be important to continue building momentum for packaging sustainability. Receiving an APC High Performers Award in 2014 reinforced the spirit of accomplishment among the team and helped raise awareness of the APC action plan within the organisation. The team is currently planning a series of guest visits by sustainable packaging practitioners from other organisations. They see this as an important way to share their own experience and to get new ideas about the technology and stakeholder engagement approaches used in other organisations.

"Receiving the APC Award this year has provided a real boost for our packaging sustainability team. It has helped us to promote our achievements internally as well as externally."

Peter Luczek, National EHS & Workcover Manager

Selling the benefits of a project to stakeholders: keys to success

- **Involve personnel from multiple business divisions** to gather new ideas and to build support for packaging reuse and recycling efforts. At OfficeMax, reworking the packaging sustainability team has given new momentum to sustainable packaging improvements. It has been particularly beneficial to involve personnel that are more 'hands on' with operations since they can develop new ideas and support implementation through their networks at an operational level.
- **Be strategic by linking packaging sustainability projects to other business processes.** The APC project manager at OfficeMax improved in-house recycling systems by ensuring that these were considered during the development of two new warehouses and during renegotiation of the national waste management contract.

