

Knock, Knock!

Dr Anna Scott and Purva Tavri look at the issue of changing behaviour through doorstepping and how to use it to forge a more effective path in recycling communications

Face-to-face engagement with residents on the doorstep, also known as doorstepping, has long been a tool at the disposal of local authority waste managers looking to improve the performance of their domestic recycling services. Doorstepping campaigns aim to improve recycling participation and capture rates, and reduce contamination through conversations designed to identify and overcome any barriers to effective recycling.

As a charity dedicated to creating behaviour change around waste and recycling, Keep Britain Tidy (and Waste Watch before it – the two charities merged in 2011) has delivered more than 100 doorstepping campaigns over the past decade. This has involved knocking on more than 1.5m doors and engaging with more than half a million residents. We conduct doorstepping campaigns in a wide variety of ways – ranging from targeted smaller areas (down to the collection round level) to entire local authority areas. In doing so, we have used doorstepping to support waste and recycling service changes and promote established services. We have taken a blanket approach by knocking on all doors in a given area and targeted particular households only based on their recycling behaviour.

Historically, much of our doorstepping activity has taken

the aforementioned blanket approach, covering substantial geographical areas and supporting well-established services. However, shrinking waste communications budgets and questions about the effectiveness of this type of doorstepping means that this campaign tool is being used less and less by local authorities.

In 2014, Robert Pocock and Jill Jesson from MEL Research highlighted the limitations of traditional, large-scale doorstepping campaigns; in short, the odds are stacked against actually reaching and converting a high enough proportion of non-recyclers in a given area to create detectable and meaningful changes in participation rates or recycling tonnages.¹ As such, Pocock and Jesson called for commissioners and practitioners to establish ways to use doorstepping to greater effect. Keep Britain Tidy contributed to this debate. In 2016, we emphasised that doorstepping remains an important technique, particularly for driving up participation in established, but underperforming, services such as food waste collections.² However, we share Pocock and Jesson's view that doorstepping campaigns need to forge a more effective path. The results of a recent campaign in the London Borough of Croydon shed some light on what this path looks like.

The Case Of Croydon

CROYDON COUNCIL offers a comprehensive recycling service to kerbside properties with alternate weekly collections of green box materials (cartons, mixed glass, tins, cans and plastic bottles, pots, tubs and trays) and blue box materials (paper and card). Food waste is collected weekly while residual waste is collected fortnightly. Croydon's recycling rate in 2016/17 was 38.6 percent. As Joanna Dixon, lead recycling policy, projects and promotions officer from Croydon Council explains: "Within Croydon there are many areas where recycling is well established, although there are pockets of poor performance which we wanted to target to achieve increases in participation and capture rates. This required some careful analysis to understand what poor performance meant, which helped in evaluating the impact of the project."

As such, in 2017, Croydon Council commissioned Keep Britain Tidy to deliver an engagement campaign with the aim of increasing recycling participation and the capture of materials across a number of low-performing rounds in the borough. More than 7,000 households across five low-performing rounds were subject to three weeks of participation monitoring

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where waste set out of the blue box, green box and food waste caddy was recorded, along with any instance of an overflowing residual waste bin. Households identified as non-recyclers or poor recyclers (not presenting recycling, overflowing residual waste bin or not presenting food waste/only presenting it infrequently) were doorstepped with a 50 percent contact rate.

This included providing a service leaflet to all contacted and non-contacted households, and leaving a personalised "sorry we missed you card" with non-contacted households explaining the reason for the visit, eg no recycling presented.

The outcomes of the doorstepping were evaluated through three further weeks of participation monitoring. "Thank you for recycling" cards were then delivered

to households identified as recycling through the post-doorstepping monitoring.

Following the doorstepping, participation in the dry recycling service increased by nine percent (from 70 to 79 percent) while average set out rates increased by 10 percent (from 52 to 62 percent). Food waste participation increased by eight percent (from 48 to 56 percent) while average set out rates increased by six percent (from 34 to 40 percent). Furthermore, to assess the effectiveness of doorstepping, →

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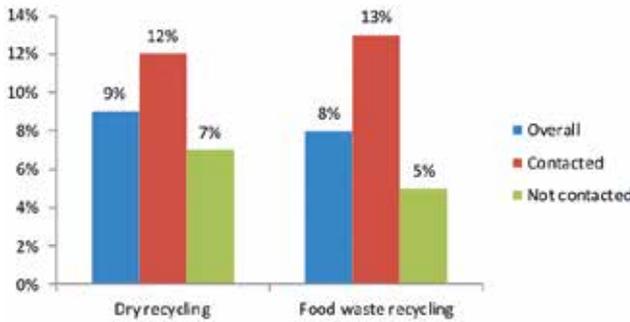


Figure 1: change in participation rates after doorstepping

We investigated the change in behaviour among those who had actually been engaged in a conversation at the doorstep compared to households who had only received a leaflet and “sorry we missed you card”. The increase in the dry recycling participation rate was higher among contacted households compared to non-contacted households (12 percent compared to seven percent, respectively), as was the increase in average set out rate (15 percent compared to seven percent, respectively). Similarly, the increase in the food waste participation rate was higher among contacted households compared to non-contacted households (13 percent compared to five percent respectively), as was the increase in average set out rate (11 percent compared to three percent respectively). These changes are summarised in Figure 1 and Figure 2.

Short-Term Success?

THESE POSITIVE results indicate the effectiveness of doorstepping in this context, at least in the short term. It is important to note that residents in Croydon were advised there was the possibility of receiving a Fixed Penalty Notice of £80 if they failed to recycle, and this may have influenced the results. Nonetheless, we have a number of general reflections on how to use doorstepping for greater effect.

Firstly, doorstepping should be highly targeted – both in terms of the lowest performing rounds and the households that are in the most need of support. In addition to non-recyclers this can also include poor recyclers; there are still behaviour change gains to be made here and there is efficiency in visiting both types of household when already doorstepping in an area. The over-claiming of recycling behaviour on the doorstep is well-established. Indeed, Pocock and Jesson quantified that typically only around one-third of non-recyclers actually admit to not recycling, meaning that around two-thirds of non-recyclers will not get a conversation tailored to their actual behaviour.³ Utilising participation data increases the likelihood of the “right” conversation. This is certainly not a new approach, but its use has declined in recent years. Participation monitoring can be costly, but data recorded through in-cab technology may provide a cheaper alternative – it’s an avenue we’d certainly like to explore with local authority partners.

In terms of the nature of the conversation itself, the traditional format of a doorstepping script has involved asking about whether the resident uses the recycling service or not at the outset; we typically find that around 90 percent of residents claim to recycle even when observed participation rates suggest otherwise. We feel that a more creative line of questioning needs to be utilised to better uncover the

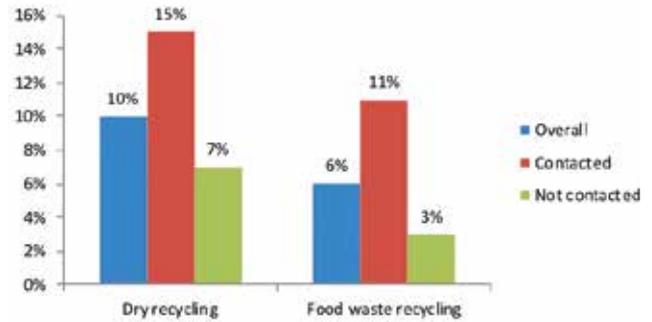


Figure 2: change in average set out rates following doorstepping

behaviour and understanding of residents and therefore advise them accordingly. For example, in Croydon, we opted to open the conversation by asking the resident a more open-ended question about whether there were any items they struggled to know which box or bin to put them in. Interestingly, 28 percent of respondents admitted to struggling or not using the service at all, suggesting that this type of question may help to put residents at ease and stimulate their thinking.

Finally, we also suspect that the effectiveness of doorstepping may depend on the nature of the recycling service. When doorstepping to promote services which use boxes, bags, disposable sacks and caddies (as opposed to wheeled bins), we typically find that the most common reason non-recyclers cite for not using the service is not having a container – a barrier which doorstepping is well-placed to overcome through the ordering of containers. The results in Croydon were no different; indeed, we recorded orders for more than 2,600 recycling containers, which averaged around one container for every resident contacted. As such, doorstepping may be better utilised in conjunction with services that use containers other than wheeled bins.

In summary, forging a more effective path to changing behaviour through doorstepping campaigns is all about using this tool as smartly as possible. We are always ready to work with local authority waste managers to plan and deliver smarter doorstepping. ■

References

1. Robert Pocock and Jill K Jesson, As One Door Closes... CIWM Journal, August 2014
2. Anna Scott, Stick(er) With Doorstepping, CIWM Journal, November 2016
3. Robert Pocock and Jill K Jesson, As One Door Closes... CIWM Journal, August 2014

Anna is a Chartered Waste Manager with 15 years’ experience in the waste and recycling industry. She leads Keep Britain Tidy’s Waste Services and applies her expertise in domestic waste behaviour and behaviour change gained through doctoral research to practical projects designed to reduce waste and increase recycling – over 200 to date.

Purva is a Chartered Waste Manager and an Associate Fellow of Higher Education Academy. She is currently focussed on doctoral research exploring how organisations adopt reuse behaviour in practice. She has applied her knowledge to more than 30 practical projects designed to reduce waste and increase reuse and recycling.