
Volume 13
Number 4
Going Green: Libraries and Sustainability
(Winter 2007)

July 2014

From Worthless to Worthy: Turning Media Trash into Recycling Treasure

Maureen Cole
Eugene Public Library

Recommended Citation

Cole, M. (2014). From Worthless to Worthy: Turning Media Trash into Recycling Treasure. *OLA Quarterly*, 13(4), 22-24. <http://dx.doi.org/10.7710/1093-7374.1180>

© 2014 by the author(s).

OLA Quarterly is an official publication of the Oregon Library Association | ISSN 1093-7374

From Worthless to Worthy:

Turning Media Trash into Recycling Treasure

by **Maureen Cole**
Technical Services Manager,
Eugene Public Library

The looming question is how did I get involved in this recycling project in the first place? Here's what I remember: at some point someone came up to me and said, "We really should try to do a better job of recycling." She said it with such force, passion, and charm that I actually stopped what I was doing and said, "What? Is there a problem? But we recycle."

Silly me. As we all know, there is always more that can be done. This is my story about recycling media by-products at the Eugene Public Library (EPL), the second largest public library in the state.

Project Scope

I am the Technical Services Manager at EPL. Almost every item that comes into the library which is headed for a shelf comes in through my department and almost every item that is weeded and leaves the shelf, goes out through my department. We have, therefore, a very close relationship with trash and recycling bins, and the wonderful custodians who move them. We have a good process for books which are weeded from our system. Many of the books go straight to the Friends of the Eugene Public Library. Many titles are sold at a gigantic Friends Book Sale, and the money earned comes back to the library via the Friends. Books that the Friends don't think will sell are recycled. Although it is unfortunate that these titles won't go to other readers, because of the quantity, recycling is a good option.

So that takes care of books. But at EPL, as with all libraries, we have other materials, including DVDs, CDs, audiobooks, cassettes, and other forms of media that are weeded out of the collection. I discovered that in addition to books, our waste collector could take book covers, inserts in DVD cases, DVD cases, and CD

sleeves if they have a recycle label. But, I also found out that most of the media by-products could not be recycled through our waste collector. These include:

- CD cases
- Audiobooks (cd or cassette, big black or white plastic cases)
- Video cases (there are two kinds, neither is recyclable)
- Audiocassettes
- Videocassettes

Concurrently, we discovered that the city department housed upstairs from us, the Information Services Department (ISD), had started recycling disks and asked if they could take ours. This included CDs (disks only), DVDs (disks only), and CD-Roms (disks only). We also heard that they might be using NextStep Recycling, a local business that had recently expanded to include all electronics and related materials.

A few other developments came to the forefront. First, there was a steep increase in the volume of weeding that was brought to our department. Next, Eugene Mayor Kitty Piercy made sustainability a major focus. She also challenged members of the Eugene community to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. We believed, as people employed by the City of Eugene, that we owed a special duty to make sure that we responded to this challenge by reducing waste and greenhouse emissions as much as possible. Therefore, this recycling effort, although it was not necessarily planned for this year, became a very timely project.

Finding Answers

I charged one of my staff with contacting Lorraine Kerwood, the Executive Director of NextStep Recycling, for answers to the following questions:



Is there a charge for picking up materials from the library? If so, how much?

Can materials remain whole or must they be broken down and separated?

Will they accept items with RFID tags?

How much can they accept and how often?

Do they really accept the kinds of materials we have?

At Lorraine's suggestion she visited the library and met with staff to see and discuss the materials we had. She told us that NextStep could indeed recycle all of our items, but she was unsure about the RFID tags that are on every single item deleted from the system.

If we delivered the materials to NextStep, there would be no fee. However, if we choose to have NextStep come to us, the estimated fee would be \$80 per month. If we were really organized, though, this fee could cover the entire building which consists of four floors and two departments in addition to the library: the previously mentioned ISD and the administrative offices for the Library, Recreation and Cultural Services Division.

We also learned from their Web site <http://www.nextsteprecycling.org> that NextStep is a non-profit organization that finds a vendor for each type of material received. They also donate refurbished computers and other materials to people who can really use them. Plus, NextStep has a ReUse Store and offers job skills training through a network of partnerships in Lane County. This non-profit organization is really changing our community in meaningful ways!

After our meeting with Lorraine, there was no doubt in my mind that I wanted to work with NextStep. However, there were still some pieces to put into place and more questions to be answered:

What about the RFID tags? What if they had to be removed before materials could go to NextStep? Could our staff handle this extra work? Could this task be worked into the tasks of our EPL volunteers?

If ISD was already recycling disks, and they were recycling disks through NextStep, could we somehow coordinate this effort?

Could we manage the bins? We have a limited amount of space. Would we be able to have another bin at each location that would need one? Could we find some space in the delivery area to place one large container for all the materials?

Should we get the City of Eugene involved in supporting these efforts in any way?

So much to find out! It takes time and energy to include all necessary people, and things were changing on the ground in Eugene. For example, the Mayor's sustainability effort had resulted in the hiring of Eugene's first Sustainability Manager in June 2007.

My supervisor also wanted me to check into what ISD was doing with disks and NextStep, so that we wouldn't duplicate efforts. Also, there might be other people in the city who could help. It appeared that this could turn into a citywide effort with the library at the leading edge. Who was I to slow down progress? But wait, I did have that two-week vacation coming up.

Three weeks and many e-mails later, I learned two very important things:

1. NextStep Recycling won a very prestigious National Recycling Award while I was away; and



2. My supervisors determined that my department should pursue this recycling relationship with NextStep on our own. Once we are set up, we will do outreach to other city departments about our project, and we will modify our plan as needed.

Can I just take a small moment and say “Hallelujah!” to both developments?

I quickly put in a call to the award-winning NextStep to schedule yet another meeting to review materials wanting recycling and questions wanting answers. But this time the end result will have my department recycling materials that were once thrown into the trash bin. One significant answer I received is that the RFID tags can be recycled! The tags still need removal from the materials, but my staff found it easy to add that activity into the withdrawal process. I can see the accomplishment of our goal on the next horizon; just a collective sigh away. Success will be sweet!

Conclusion

Many worthwhile projects take on their own life and for me, recycling, one of the most worthy, became more complicated than I initially expected. Much of this reflects the size of my institution and the novelty of recycling some of these materials. It is good thing to report that we are so accustomed to recycling in the Eugene area that we want, and expect, to be able to do more and more of it. It is a good thing to report that there are people who work for the city who are passionate about the environment and willing to work hard to further this project. It is a good thing to report that we live and work in an area which supports this kind of recycling business. And finally, it is a good thing to report that we are right on the cusp of implementing this project! May you someday enjoy as much success with your recycling project as I know we will enjoy with ours! 🌿

Energize Young Writers

Author Visits Bring Writing to Life

Award winning authors offer interactive presentations and workshops.

Inspire students.

Bring the arts to life.

Schedule an event at your school.

Call today to schedule an event!

360.597.3432 | info@provatomarketing.com

www.provatoevents.com

