“EcoWare, Everywhere!” EcoWare Campaign Case Study
Fall 2017 | By Nate Steers

Project Overview
The University of Vermont (UVM) implemented reusable EcoWare to-go containers in retail locations 2011. Data collected from the past 4 years has shown that EcoWare uses became concentrated in residential dining locations once the program was expanded there in 2015 and usage has fallen much lower in retail locations. Due to the volume of disposable containers used in retail locations, there is a significant opportunity for waste reduction if usage there increases. The low usage of EcoWare in these locations likely occurs due to a lack of awareness around how EcoWare memberships can be used. As many students are signed up within residential dining halls as first-years, it is not as apparent to students that they can use EcoWare in retail dining locations as well. During the first half of the Fall 2017 semester, the UVM Eco-Reps carried out a campaign to increase EcoWare memberships and uses of EcoWare in retail dining locations.

Background
In an effort to reduce the use of take-out packaging and the excessive waste that it produces, the UVM Dining partnered with the GreenHouse Residential Learning Community, the UVM Eco-Reps, students from the Honors College and UVM’s Waste Management team to develop and test the EcoWare reusable take-out container program. This program works as an exchange in which students who are registered for the program swap out a cow tag for an EcoWare container bowl or box. When using the container and retail locations, students receive a discount on their meal and can take the container to be returned at any residential or retail dining location on campus. The container is then washed for the student and the next time they want to use their EcoWare, they simply have to present their cow tag to the server or cashier (depending on location). Initially costing $7.50 for non-first year students, EcoWare memberships are free for all students who matriculated in fall 2015 and beyond. Below is a timeline explaining additions to the EcoWare program over the past several years.

2011 - EcoWare box program beings in select retail locations
2012 - EcoWare soup bowl added to program
2013 - Program expanded to all retail locations
2015 - Free EcoWare memberships for First Year students; EcoWare expanded to include all residential dining locations
2017 - Free EcoWare memberships for all students matriculating in fall 2015 and beyond; retail discount increased from $0.15 to $0.25 per use

While recorded EcoWare uses in the residential dining locations on campus are generally high, uses in retail dining locations have declined over the past 4 years. In 2013 EcoWare was used 3,482 times in retail locations during the first five weeks of the fall semester. In examining use rates in the first five weeks of school for each
subsequent year, one can identify a considerable decline in EcoWare use perhaps due to a lack of knowledge and promotional marketing. For each year following 2013, the recorded total EcoWare uses for the first five weeks of classes are 2,584, 780, and 1,386, respectively.

Due to the decline in retail EcoWare uses, the UVM Eco-Reps carried out a half-semesters campaign in an effort to sign up additional students and employees for the EcoWare program and promote EcoWare usage in retail dining locations across campus.

Goals

Through increased outreach and promotion, the campaign goal was to increase EcoWare memberships, uses of EcoWare at retail dining locations, and overall awareness about waste reduction in retail dining locations.

Implementation

The UVM Eco-Reps consists of 20 students that are divided up into five community teams of Change Agents, with each team assigned to a specified residential area on campus. Based on the residential location and its proximity to retail dining locations, each team was assigned anywhere from one to three dining locations to focus their outreach on, with a total of nine locations being addressed. Each team was responsible for tabling at these dining locations throughout a three-week period.

On a community team level, Eco-Reps promoted EcoWare in specific locations by tabling and acknowledging existing members while simultaneously signing up new EcoWare members. Using the data from those locations for each week, the process and impact was recorded and compared with data from previous years. Along with tabling, the Eco-Reps designed stickers to be handed out and new signage for retail dining locations, reminding students and faculty to use EcoWare and notifying them of the increased discount offered when using EcoWare.

In an effort to complete campus-wide outreach, the Eco-Reps ran an Instagram photo contest throughout the campaign. The contest sought to promote the program by encouraging students to submit photos of them using EcoWare and tagged with #sustainableuvm. A $100 gift card to a campus retail dining location was the prize awarded for the best photo. 23 photos were entered and they received 50-200 likes. A typical post by the Eco-Reps Instagram account would only get 15-40 likes. The UVMdining and main UVM account shared a photo and received 35 and 957 likes respectively. The Eco-Reps account gained dozens of followers through the campaign.

The campaign finale was a collaborative event with one of the retail locations on campus who was holding an outdoor concert. Eco-Reps acted as the student partner and tabled at the event with waste sorting and EcoWare inspired carnival games with prizes. The Instagram contest winner was also chosen here and a $100 gift certificate was awarded. Over 100 people attended, resulting in about 20 new memberships.
Timeline

The UVM Eco-Reps carried out this campaign throughout the month of September, 2017. While the data being compared was over the first 5 weeks of classes, outreach efforts such as tabling and promotion were carried out between September 11th and September 30th.

Weekly Schedule
9/4/17 - 9/8/17
- Educate Eco-Reps about UVM Dining
- Evaluate EcoWare presence and marketing at various retail locations
- Determine tabling locations, times, and strategies for effectiveness
9/11/17 - 9/15/17
- Initiate community level outreach by tabling at specified locations
- Initiate campus wide outreach with instagram contest
- Educate UVM Dining staff on campaign efforts and components
- Begin data collection of EcoWare uses in retail dining locations
9/18/17 - 9/22/17
- Continuation of community level outreach
9/25/17 - 9/30/17
- Continuation of community level outreach
- Conclusion of campus wide instagram contest
- Eco-Reps partner with Whirly Gig concert series to promote EcoWare program
- Data recorded and compared with previous years
10/1/17-11/1/17
- Case study written
- Results infographics designed and distributed to dining locations to thank staff for their participation in the successful campaign

Financing

Additional resources for the EcoWare Everywhere campaign were financed through the UVM Eco-Reps budget. While UVM Dining Services provided the EcoWare resources such as containers and cow tags, the Eco-Reps offered food at some of their tabling events and EcoWare stickers throughout the entire campaign. The cost of the food, which consisted of ingredients for baked goods, totaled $25.42. The 500 EcoWare Everywhere stickers, which were designed by Eco-Reps, were purchased from The Sticky Brand for a total of $280.00. Compensation for Eco-Rep time as well as the minimal cost of in-house printing were also components of this campaign.

Results

After the completion of the campaign, the recorded data was analyzed and compared with previous years. While the data consists of the first five weeks of classes, the outreach campaign was started after the second week. It was clear that after the implementation of the outreach campaign, EcoWare usage increased in every retail dining location being focused on.
The total amount of EcoWare uses in retail dining locations after the five week period was 2,209. In comparison to previous years, this figure is a 59.4% increase from 2016 and a 183.2% increase from 2015.

Lessons Learned

The data proves that community level and campus wide outreach was a successful means of promoting the EcoWare program and increasing the use of EcoWare containers in retail dining location. By conducting outreach in specified locations, all of which data could be gathered from, improvements in EcoWare usage were present across all locations. Not only were increases recorded after each week of the campaign, but the overall levels of EcoWare uses were performing better on average than the previous two years.

It was clear that this campaign was successful through means of direct and indirect outreach. While tabling efforts provided direct interaction with students and faculty, campus wide efforts such as posters and the Instagram photo contest allowed for a broader level of outreach. Students responded positively to the incentivized components of the program as well. Not only did the increased discount provide a financial incentive to join the program, but the ease of signing up made for a quick process with little inconvenience.

Perhaps the most important takeaway from this campaign was its timing. As this was carried out in the first weeks of the fall semester, the campaign sought to create a sustainable habit for first-year students who had just arrived. Addressing the issue at the beginning of the semester is crucial as new students are entering the system and returning students have likely adopted an alternative meal plan that is primarily used at retail dining locations.

Marketing

Instagram Contest Photos
Results

5 Week Retail Dining Eco-Ware Usage in First Semester

Athletic 2: Marche 5-week Eco-Ware Count