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Honors Thesis

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The Bowerbird Project: Using Design to Solve a Problem

1. Introduction: Why Recycling?

One of the greatest outcomes for any design project is for it to have a positive impact in the world. Going into my Honors Thesis, I created a personal goal for myself: to brand and design for social good. After speaking with my advisor about a topic for this social design project, we decided my project's focus would be recycling. While it may be especially easy for many of us in Portland to write it off recycling in America as an "accomplished" solution, statistics tell us otherwise. A year ago it was reported in *Fusion* that "the amount of recycling that *could* be happening in America is pathetic, compared with what we're currently doing." In their article, citing a chart provided by the EPA, they explained that since the '80s we had slowed down our total percentage of waste that was being recycled (34%). Honestly, that isn't surprising — there have more pressing environmental and cultural issues in the forefront of Americans' minds lately, and when it comes to recycling there seems to be a stigma that it's solely the individual's responsibility to recycle and know what goes into a bin.

That isn't the case. For a wider impact in recycling it is not only our jobs to keep ourselves accountable, but also to keep businesses and organizations accountable for recycling. According to the interdisciplinary article *Psychological Factors Affecting Paper Recycling by Businesses*, very little attention and research is being focused on the recycling done by businesses. During my research into recycling and consumption habits, I conducted an interview with a former employee of local hotel, who stated that the hotel he worked at tended to avoid recycling due to costs, the lack of a set recycling system, and general disinterest. Logically a hotel, being full of many employees and guests, would put out more waste than an individual household, and many materials in a hotel should be recyclable. This is backed up by an article by *the New York Times*, where it was found that "[the average hotel guest throws away] about two

pounds—more than half of that paper, plastic, cardboard and cans that those same guests probably recycle at home. Yet according to a 2008 survey by the American Hotel and Lodging Association, just 40 percent of hotels have a recycling program.”

Going forward, my research question was how can a space of business (like a hotel) be branded to improve both the recycling habits of the people in that space and the eco-friendliness of the space itself? As a graphic designer, one of my roles is to solve problems and make systems and communications easier to use. I believe that the correct application of graphic design can serve as a crucial tool to help promote and encourage more environmentally-friendly behaviors, as well as help set up a successful recycling system. My goal was not to create another self-congratulatory campaign about recycling. Instead, the goal of this project was to design and brand a system that it encourages those within the space to be “greener” (here defined as the recycling and the use of more environmentally-friendly materials).

2. Research

As an Honors Thesis project, this project would not only include design theory and visual research methods like moodboards, but also interdisciplinary and scholarly articles. For scholarly articles linking design and recycling, I didn’t have to look too far. Recurring suggestions from scholarly articles when it came to approach was the use of social marketing, the application of marketing techniques to influence an audience’s rejection or adoption of socially-minded behaviors. Social marketing has been used for behaviors like biking and the reduction of smoking, but it also had the potential to be applied to our consumption habits for more environmentally-friendly impacts and benefits. The scholarly article “Social Marketing: A Pathway to Consumption Reduction?” by Ken and Sue Peattie suggested a mixed-model approach. This model consisted of concepts like the importance of accessibility, cost of involvement over price, and social communication instead of promotion.

This use of social marketing wasn’t purely theoretical either; it had been previously used to change environment-related consumption habits has been tested and proven to work here in Oregon. In 2010-11, Pacific University Oregon created a social marketing campaign focused on changing people’s recycling, paper reduction, and environmentally conscious purchasing habits. In the words of its organizers, their campaign successfully “demonstrated that CBSM

(Community-Based Social Marketing) is one model that can foster behavior change on higher education with faculty and staff” (Cole, Fieselman 193).

It was important to keep this mixed model in mind. For a recycling project in a hotel, the design and system would need to be easily accessible, emphasize and encourage participation, and engage the audience.

3. Defining the Project

While this project’s primarily question from a scholarly standpoint is how can design change interactions, the first more design-related question was how do you make the experience of recycling in a hotel easier? This question involved a lot of mind maps (writing down, framing, and connecting ideas, as seen in Fig.1), but ultimately the solutions—what *would* be designed for this project—were written below:

Fig.1

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When designing the “experience,” it was important to recognize the experience of two different groups—the guests and the employees.

For the guests, I would design items like:

- Complementary materials that are labeled as to how they are or recyclable and can be recycled, like cups, bottles, caps (identified as not recyclable), and paper.
- Recycling bins for paper/plastic/aluminum in every room next to desk, larger bins in lobby and at front desk, bins near vending machines.
- Poster above bins informing what is/isn’t recyclable if confused (infographic)
 - A smaller tag that could go on smaller bins in guest rooms.
 - A scannable code that gives PDF document of poster for mobile.
- Signage informing front desk can shred your confidential documents.

- Instead of giving papers, the wifi would come with complimentary NYT and other news subscriptions.
- People don't like giving up plastic water bottles provided by the hotel, so those would be specially designed and cost a dollar.

While for the employees, I would design:

- Guides to assist them with the system.
- Specifically designed bags for separate bins along with small portable guides for recycling brand and list of what is/isn't recyclable.

All of these materials would be designed under a specific brand for visual consistency for the campaign.

The campaign would also need a story. Opting to avoid a basic recycling symbol as a logo, I decided to have this campaign have a story behind it that fit into its hotel context. **The Bowerbird Project**, this project, is a branded campaign that can be used by any hotel to improve its consumption and waste habits. The male Bowerbird collects waste—ranging from twigs to glass—to create beautiful nests to invite or “woo” the females. Much like the Bowerbird, this project looks to create an inviting and visually pleasing atmosphere in the hotels out of more recycled products that also encourages more environmentally-friendly behavior.

It should be noted that this was *not* an architecture project and this not a project for a specific actual hotel—this is about exploring more environmentally-friendly systems and how to design a space so that these systems are not only user-friendly and intuitive, but would encourage environmentally-friendly behaviors. For simplicity's sake in terms of recycling systems, this hotel will be in Oregon.

To grab the audience's attention, it's important to create a message that's personal and understandable. Since in some ways this project is asking guests to “pay” in their time and awareness, the voice should be simple and clear. The campaign would help customers realize what of their waste in the hotel is recyclable and providing them with even more easy,

convenient, and accessible places to recycle those materials. This approach extends itself to the employees, providing informational material and a solid system into how to properly recycle..

4. Developing the Project

My design research can be divided into 2 parts: visual voice and verbal voice. I was approaching this project with an “unlimited budget,” but I wanted in concept the campaign/brand to be seen as something that could live in *any* hotel, be it a small bed and breakfast or five star hotel. While it wouldn’t necessarily be adaptable perhaps to every single brand, I wanted it to be clean and accessible enough to be used with other brands.

For this reason, I decided that the logo and imagery would be more vector-based (as seen in Fig. 2). After discussions with fellow designers, it was decided that vector-based work, while not as detailed or illustrative (like those in Fig. 3), would help make logo and imagery immediately adaptable to other mediums and different types of hotels. The imagery, particularly when later used to identify whether a bin or item was a paper or plastic recyclable, would also be faster to recognize when in a hurry to throw something away.



Fig. 2



Fig. 3

Research for logo’s visual style.

In terms of typography, I looked at fonts like on Raleway (Fig. 4), before resting on Sk-Modernist (Fig. 5). This font was appropriate because the typeface would not only be used for

packaging, but also wayfinding and labels on recycling bins in this hotel. As a sans serif, this font would be also easy to read, whether in a hurry or relaxing in your hotel room.



Fig. 4

Font exploration



Fig. 5

Sk-Modernist

More in-depth insights into the aesthetics and ideas for this project can be seen in my original Matrix/Moodboard (Fig. 6-8). Please keep in mind some aspects changed during the design process.

NAME/THEME

TBD

ORGANIZATION/AUDIENCE

Hotel guests
Families
People on business
Hotel employees

INSIGHTS

A positive voice is instrumental and voice should feel personal and authentic. Humor helps approachability

Accessibility is key, both in terms of placement and what can be provided and presented as recyclable

More consumption and habit-based approach than a recycling campaign

BIG IDEAS/CONCEPTS

Making a more environmentally friendly hotel that also encourages "green" behaviors

Fig. 6

VERBAL VOICE

The voice to the audience should be open and honest. Personal, and definitely not in any way preachy.

Not condescending in tone, but with a strong sense of humor and self-awareness that's encouraging you to recycle (hell yeah).

Fairly wholesome and kinda dorky humorous tone.



Fig. 7

VISUAL VOICE

Simultaneously clean and professional, but also a little rough. It would be nice to suggest through visuals that some of these "products" are being made out of many recycled materials.

A cross between brush and marker type and a nice clean typeface.

Clean vector images that also have a sort of timeless quality to them.

Playful visual tone.

Earth-y color palette.



Fig 8.

6. The Finished Result

The end result for this design was a clean, adaptable wordmark (Fig. 9) and visual system that was easy to identify. Something we intuitively wanted to suggest was that much like how it should fit into your life, recycling should just be another piece. This mark would serve as an identifiable icon that could be associated with recycling in the context of a hotel campaign instead of the standard recycling logo. This also makes the campaign feel all the more special for

hotel guests. There icons and layout would follow this minimalist style, as seen in the **Bowerbird Project** attached document. In the end, I was able to successfully use this thesis to apply design to solve a real world problem.



Fig 9.

Annotated Bibliography/Research

Cole, Elaine J., and Laura Fieselman. "A Community-based Social Marketing Campaign at Pacific University Oregon." *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education* 14.2 (2013): 176-95. Web. 27 Oct. 2016.

This article summarizes a college recycling campaign at Pacific University Oregon that used community-based social marketing—the use of marketing techniques to influence the rejection or adoption of a behavior with positive social effects—for six months. The campaign was focused on increasing paper reduction, the use of commingled recycling, and the purchase of more environmentally friendly products. This a great example of a consumption-based campaign, and the article provides valuable observations to creating a campaign encouraging recycling. The article also supports the importance of social marketing as a tool in encouraging behavioral changes.

The article was published by the International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education and written by Elaine J. Cole, Ph.D. and Laura C. Fieselman M.A.. The Journal is a scholarly publication focusing on documenting research, projects, and developments in a wide range of sustainability for people in the academic sector, practitioners, consultants, and writers. Elaine J. Cole, Ph.D. is the Sustainability Coordinator at Portland Community College-Rock Creek Campus. Laura C. Fieselman, M.A. currently works as the UNC Social Innovation Initiative Coordinator at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Peattie, Ken, and Sue Peattie. "Social marketing: A pathway to consumption reduction?" *Journal*

of Business Research (2007): n. pag. *Science Direct*. Web. 19 Oct. 2016.

In this article, Professor Ken Peattie and Dr. Sue Peattie look at the possibilities of using social marketing, the use of marketing techniques to influence the rejection or adoption of a behavior with positive social effects, as a tool for encouraging consumption reduction. The article provides valuable insights in how to apply a social marketing approach to engage audiences in a campaign focused on positive health, social, or environmental impact, using the TravelSmart and Truth campaigns as prime examples in how to conduct these campaigns.

The article was published in the *Journal of Business Research*, an academic journal for executives, researchers and scholars covering all types of business research business theories to real world use, and written by Professor Ken Peattie and Dr. Sue Peattie. Professor Ken Peattie is the Professor of Marketing and Strategy at the Cardiff Business School, where he currently resides as the Director of the ESRC Research Centre for Business Relationships, Accountability, Sustainability and Society (BRASS). Dr. Sue Peattie also worked as lecturer of Marketing at the Cardiff Business School.

Stellin, Susan. "Getting the Guests to Sort." *New York Times*. New York Times, 5 Oct. 2009. Web. 20 Nov. 2016.

This New York Times article delves into problems facing many challenges recycling in hotels. The article touches on how many hotels don't recycle or have a good system, citing studies and interviews. Other interviews show the pros hotels found recycling and gave insight into how some of these systems worked. Additionally this is a great article due to its identification of many problems and challenges getting hotel guests to recycle.

Sarah Stellin is a freelance reporter and has frequently written for the New York Times, specializing in the travel industry, transportation security, technology, and consumer advice. The New York Times is the second most circulated newspaper in the United States.