Client Overview

Leeds Metropolitan University has been a chartered university since 1992. Originally established in 1824 as the Leeds Mechanics Institute, a series of mergers with nearby colleges led to the formation of Leeds Polytechnic before it acquired its present name. The university’s primary campus is in Leeds, West Yorkshire and it also has a campus in nearby Harrogate.

The Challenge

Leeds Metropolitan University's 50,000 students and 3,500 staff occupy some 300 classrooms and 750 offices on the university grounds. There are also several restaurant areas and coffee bars on campus where between 6,000 and 10,000 people eat each day. From the lecture halls to the administration buildings to the food areas, a tremendous amount of waste is generated at Leeds Metropolitan University. With its longstanding commitment to helping create a greener planet, the university places a strong emphasis on recycling as much of this waste as possible.

In running its recycling programme, Leeds Metropolitan University faced four major challenges: (1) how to instil a 'culture of recycling' amongst the university students and staff, (2) how to ensure the provision of a solid and reliable solution, (3) how to facilitate the recycling process for the 55 Rooms Assistants who are responsible for the upkeep of 134,000 square feet of university buildings and (4) how to make recycling cost-effective.
The Previous System

Three years ago, the recycling system in place at Leeds Metropolitan University involved the use of special cardboard boxes in which students could put paper or card to be recycled. The boxes were placed in major locations throughout the university and every two weeks, a recycling company came to collect the cardboard boxes and replace them with new ones. However, there were a number of problems with this system. First and foremost, it did not do enough to promote recycling at the university. The system only allowed for the recycling of paper and card – neither plastic, glass, aluminium nor any other materials could be recycled. At the time, only 23% of waste was being recycled at Leeds Metropolitan University.

Second, the cardboard boxes were easily damaged. “Students would frequently place materials that could not be recycled in the cardboard boxes, perhaps due to not understanding that they could only take paper or card,” explains Brian Bolton, the Campus Services Manager at Leeds Metropolitan University. “If a can was placed in there, for example, leftover liquid might leak out and ruin the boxes.” This, in turn, meant that the Rooms Assistants had to spend a considerable amount of time sorting through and monitoring the material put in the boxes to remove anything that was not recyclable. This was highly inefficient and time-consuming for the Rooms Assistants. Lastly, at £6 each the cardboard boxes were quite expensive. With hundreds of boxes all over the university having to be replaced every two weeks, this rapidly became costly.

The New Solution from Rubbermaid

Leeds Metropolitan University therefore sought a recycling solution that would enable it to recycle more effectively. After a through study of the options on the market, it selected a series of Rubbermaid products designed to facilitate the recycling process. In particular, it chose the Slim Jim and Untouchable plastic recycling bins and their accompanying lids with different shaped openings.
for either paper or bottles. The university also chose the Glutton Recycling Station, a block of four Slim Jim plastic recycling bins and their accompanying lids with hinges. Once again, these lids have different shaped openings as well as labels to indicate whether the opening is for paper recycling, glass recycling, plastic recycling or waste. In addition, Leeds Metropolitan University also purchased large posters to hang above the Glutton Recycling Stations (as well as in other parts of the university) in order to clearly indicate which bins are for which type of recycling materials.

**The Benefits**

(1) **Ease of use – helping to boost recycling levels**

The Rubbermaid solution has brought large-scale benefits to the recycling programme at Leeds Metropolitan University. For one, the Rubbermaid solution is extremely easy to use. With the bins’ different shaped lid openings, as well as their accompanying labels and posters, it makes it straightforward for students and staff to identify which types of materials can be put in each recycling bin. The ease with which it is possible to recycle, as well as the prominence of the solution, actively encourages recycling on the university campus.

Even more importantly, the solution allows for a greater amount of materials to be recycled than ever before. Whereas with the previous system only paper and card could be recycled, it is now possible to recycle a wide range of materials ranging from bottles to cans to all types of glass, plastic and aluminium. Three years after the implementation of the Rubbermaid solution, the recycling level at Leeds Metropolitan University has soared to 75%, with the university aiming to raise this to 90% within the next 18 months.

(2) **Durability and reliability**

Another key advantage of the Rubbermaid solution is the durability and quality of the bins. “Rubbermaid bins are made of strong plastic
and have a tremendous amount of longevity,” comments Brian Bolton. “This was a key factor in our choice of the Rubbermaid recycling solution. In comparison, bins made of cheaper plastics often break easily and metal bins rust. With the Rubbermaid bins, however, we expect to be able to keep them for decades.”

In fact, when evaluating potential solutions on the market Leeds Metropolitan University conducted a series of product durability tests, one of which involved throwing various bins across the university parking lot. The Rubbermaid bins came out with hardly a scratch. “Students abuse things,” explains Brian Bolton. “A sturdy solution is therefore essential in a university environment.”

(3) Greater efficiency for the Rooms Assistants

The Rubbermaid solution also facilitates the work of the Rooms Assistants, increasing efficiency and reducing fatigue. The simplicity and clear labelling of the solution means that almost all materials are correctly placed in the proper recycling containers the first time. The Rooms Assistants do not have to sort through the items in the recycling bins to make sure there are no incorrect items placed in there like with the previous system.

(4) Cost-effectiveness

In addition, the Rubbermaid solution has also helped Leeds Metropolitan University realise considerable cost savings. For one, it eliminates the need to replace the cardboard recycling boxes every two weeks. While the initial cost of the plastic Rubbermaid bins is considerably higher than that of the special cardboard boxes, the fact that the bins can be kept for many years means that the cost of the initial investment can be recouped within just one or two years. In addition, the adoption of the Rubbermaid system has meant that three times more materials are now being recycled. This has caused a drop in the price of disposing of general waste for Leeds Metropolitan University, which has fallen from £200,000 per year to £80,000 per year.
**Strong Customer Support: Yet Another Reason for Choosing Rubbermaid**

In addition, the strong customer support provided by Rubbermaid is another important advantage of the new solution. “Rubbermaid really works with us to make sure that they are meeting all of our needs. Our Account Manager, Helen, comes in regularly – even attending our staff meetings – and usually checks in once a week by email to ensure that everything is running smoothly.” Rubbermaid places a strong emphasis on working in close collaboration with its clients.

**Conclusions**

The Rubbermaid solution has enabled Leeds Metropolitan University to boost the size and quality of its recycling programme, promoting the recycling of all types of materials instead of just paper; providing a solid and durable solution that can withstand rough treatment; simplifying the work of the Rooms Assistants; and reducing costs. Within one year of the Rubbermaid solution being implemented, Leeds Metropolitan University achieved first place in the rankings of the most environmentally friendly universities in the UK by People & Planet. It plans to even further enhance its recycling programme with the implementation of a system that converts food waste into compost pellets in the near future. Once again, Rubbermaid bins will play a key role in the transport of the pellets.