Better World Books

From its premises in Dunfermline, where it has 45 members of staff, Better World Books collects, sorts and resells used books online. Between 2008, when the company was established in Scotland, and December 2012, it had reused or recycled over 95 million books, raised over £8 million for literacy projects and donated nearly 6.8 million books.

Benefits

This case study shows how working with its waste contractors, as part of a wider resource efficiency initiative, has helped Better World Books to reduce costs and minimise the amount of waste that it disposes of to landfill. The business benefits achieved by Better World Books through this initiative include:

• Reduced the amount of waste going to landfill by almost 50% saving over £5,000 per year
• Established a water-use baseload and reduced water use per employee
• Excellent working relationship with waste management and recycling companies
• Improved staff awareness and motivation

You can do it too

Better World Books took advantage of the free support available through the Zero Waste Scotland website. Useful resources that are available to help you reduce business costs by working with your waste contractor to prevent waste include:

Working With Your Waste and Recycling Contractor to Reduce Waste and Cut Costs
Business Reuse and Recycling Directory
Background

One of Better World Books’ guiding principles is ‘Invest Well. Waste Not. Choose wisely; consider the return on your efforts and the impact in your actions. Reuse, reuse, reuse... then reduce and recycle’. So, following its US parent company’s lead, Better World Books in the UK established a Green Team with the aims of saving money and addressing a number of environmental issues, including being more responsible for the waste the company generates. The company also sees the Green Team as being central to informing and advising the workforce on how to continue to be resource efficient.

In addition, the company decided that reviewing its approach to waste management would help to ensure that it was fully compliant when the Waste (Scotland) Regulations came into force in January 2014.

Working with waste management contractors

Waste streams at Better World Books comprise discarded books for pulping, cardboard packaging that is damaged beyond use, linear low density polyethylene (LLDPE) used for pallet wrapping, waxed label backings, toner cartridges, small amounts of waste electrical and electronic equipment, and ‘black bag’ waste. The company uses three licensed waste management and recycling contractors to handle the various types of waste it produces.

The warehouse manager makes regular visits to the waste contractor used for the company’s main waste stream (books and cardboard) to foster a good working relationship and ensure waste is handled correctly from when it leaves the company’s premises to the final point of recovery or disposal. The company also conducts annual contract reviews to ensure it is receiving the best price and service from the waste companies.

Better World Books liaised with its waste contractors to find ways of improving its waste management. Following this, recycling points were introduced that have separate bins for paper, metal and plastics. To establish a baseline for waste generated, staff now weigh the contents of the bins on a weekly basis and the figures are published on the Green Team noticeboard.

With accurate figures and increased awareness of waste issues in the company, the company intends to set a challenge for staff to reduce the amount of waste that is generated.

When processing orders, paper with a wax backing is used to produce labels. By changing to a type of paper where the wax backing can be easily separated from the paper and optimising the way information is displayed on the labels, the company has reduced the amount of waste it sends to landfill by over 12 tonnes/year saving over £5,000 per year.

The volume of LLDPE waste produced is insufficient to make it cost-effective for the recycling company to collect on a regular basis and there is no on-site facility for storing the quantity that would make collection viable. Therefore, the company is liaising with its contractor regarding the purchase of a compactor to reduce the volume of waste. The compacted waste can then be stored on site until there is sufficient quantity to be collected cost-effectively.

Reducing water use

Since May 2012, water use at Better World Books has been measured twice a day – in the morning and at the end of the working day. In June, cistern volume adjusters were put in the cisterns of each toilet. Since that time, the number of staff has increased by 50%, but the total amount of water has stayed the same (i.e. water use per head has reduced). With the success of this measure, the company is now considering fitting water saving devices to the urinals to reduce water use further.

Waste prevention

Fitting modern, warm-air hand dryers in all toilets has prevented waste from being generated by significantly reducing paper towel use.