



## **Trashmagination Podcast #14 – Celebrating Earth Day at Work**

Welcome to Trashmagination, a podcast about reimagining trash. I'm Carla Brown.

Happy Earth Day! Today I'm sharing ideas about how businesses can celebrate Earth Day creatively.

I gathered these ideas because in a week, Trashmagination is participating in a corporate Earth Day event.

The company asked for advice on activities for their event. So I gathered 10 ideas & I wanted to share them with you!

I got most of these ideas from my many years working in offices, as well as a few from my blog.

### **Make a smartphone holder from a sour cream or yogurt container**

- My husband Bob invented this activity - it can be done in five minutes.
- <http://trashmagination.com/make-a-smartphone-stand-from-recycled-plastic-container/>

### **Make an appreciation collage for colleagues, friends or family members**

- People bring in magazines, the business provides cardstock, scissors and glue sticks
- <http://trashmagination.com/appreciation-collages-made-from-magazine-clippings/>

### **Collect bicycles and teach about bicycle commuting**

- Many places have an organization that refurbishes bicycles and gives them to kids.
- In Arlington, Phoenix Bikes trains youth to refurbish the bikes and they earn the bikes through volunteer service - <http://www.phoenixbikes.org/>.
- The organization Bikes for the World has instructions on how to organize a bike collection event - <http://www.bikesfortheworld.org/organize/begin-organizing> - they ask for a donation of \$10 per bike to defray the cost of shipping and refurbishment. Their bikes get sent all over the world. They have found a use for more than 120,000 bikes.
- Many bicycle shops will take old bikes for parts or refurbishment.
- If you collaborate with a local bicycling organization or bike shop, you could ask if they might provide a guest speaker about bicycle commuting tips, such as how to pack your saddle bags or bicycling at night. A mechanic might share basic bicycle maintenance tips. You could hand out maps of bicycling trails near your business.

### **Collect out-of-date technology**

- Reach out to local companies that recycle old computers, tvs, stereos and phones - find out their fees.
- In the US, the site [earth911.com](http://earth911.com) lets you search by type of item & zip code.
- Sometimes this type of recycling is done by local government. Sometimes these are called e-waste companies
- It's a bonus if you find one who will come pick up items. You could also hire a hauling company to do that.
- The company could pay for the disposal fee as a benefit or collect fees from employees as they bring items.
- If you coincide your Earth Day events with your Bring a Child to Work Day events, you could have a deconstruction activity where kids take apart old technology.

### **Give out native plants**

- You could research local nurseries with plants that are native to your area.
- Native plants are those which thrive in your biome, and which support local wildlife. These are in contrast with invasive species that crowd out native plants.
- These could be seedlings of heirloom tomatoes. Heirloom species are rare versions of a plant. It's great to keep growing heirlooms in case a disease ever came along and wiped out the most common species.

### **Host a morning or lunch nature walk**

- Even if your business is not next door to a park, you can have a great nature walk
- You could seek a naturalist from your county park system or master gardener organizations.
- You might find that an employee has a hobby related to gardening or wildlife watching who could share.
- You might increase attendance if you offer snacks.
- You are more likely to see birds or other wildlife at morning walks.
- You could bring some plants to plant during the walk.

### **Demonstrate how to pack a garbage-free lunch**

- Find someone in the office who is particularly good at packing garbage-free lunches.
- Check out the website <http://www.wastefreelunches.org/> for calculations on how much \$ you'll save.
- Have a contest where colleagues share their best lunch ideas.

### **Collect items that are challenging to recycle for Terracycle**

- If you want to leverage Earth Day as a day to start a new green program, consider signing up to be a Terracycle brigade for many possible products - <https://www.terracycle.com/en-US/brigades>.
- The way it works is you collect items that are often not currently accepted in recycling programs, ship them to Terracycle and they reuse those materials creatively. Often the corporations which make those products are sponsoring the recycling program.
- Typically the shipping is paid for by Terracycle. Also in some cases, you earn money for the items you send which you can donate to a local charity – or to your own organization if you are a charity or school.
- Current brigades are toothpaste tubes & toothbrushes, pet food packaging, food pouches, aerosol cans, solo cups, instrument strings, water purifying supplies and more.
- This program works best for very large organizations where you can collect enough items to make it worthwhile.

## Host a Freecycle Event

- Freecycle is an online community where you can give unwanted items away.
- A freecycle event is one where everyone brings in unwanted items and other people take them away for free.
- No money is exchanged.
- I helped organize quite a few of these and my main tips are – Either arrange for a charity to pick up the leftover items that nobody wanted OR put stickers with people's phone extensions or last four digits of their phone number on the items. You don't want to get stuck with piles of stuff.
- Don't allow people to bring electronics – nobody ever takes them.
- It's great to host these events in a large room like an office cafeteria. Put signs on each table with categories like women's clothing, housewares, toys, tools etc. More items will go if things are sorted in categories.
- If possible offer a rack and hangers for clothing.
- We often had people bring in items in the morning and then allowed people to take what they wanted all day. We set a deadline for clean-up by around 3pm to allow time for boxing the unwanted items for the charitable pick-up.

## Encourage your colleagues to make a green pledge for 2017

- You could set up a station in your cafeteria or lobby with cards & suggested pledges.
- Have a drawing for each person who enters a pledge.
- You might get more pledges if there is a friendly competition between departments or floors.
- You could sponsor a tree planting for each person in your company who makes a pledge.
- People could hang their pledges from strings on a branch.

So those are my 10 ideas – and of course you can implement these ideas any day, not just Earth Day! For example, as I mentioned at the start, Trashmagination is hosting a table at a local business and we are doing our event May 2. At this event, I'm going to set up my vertical loom and show people how to weave plastic bags into mats. I am also going to bring a bunch of items from my Trashmagination project collection, such as my trash fashion clothing, my pillow made from men's ties and my wine cork mat. These are always great conversation starters.

So for today's Trashmagination checklist, here are some activities for you based on today's podcast:

1. **Pick your favorite activity and host your own Earth Day event** – You don't have to do them all! Just choose one that fits your company culture.
2. **Measure your company's water and energy use** – If you start today, and share ideas on conservation, you can then announce how much you saved year-over-year at next year's event.

So until next time – May you see your trash as just another source of community building in your life.