



Seattle University Seattle, Washington Water

SCHOOL

Seattle University, private, 4-year, 7,755 students; Seattle, Washington.

ABSTRACT

Seattle University students succeeded in getting the Executive Team to stop selling single-use, plastic, bottled water everywhere on campus in September 2010. This was after a three-year student led initiative. As one group of students graduated, each year a new group of undergraduates stepped forward to keep the campaign going. In the first year, two seniors convinced the vice presidents of finance and student development to agree to phase out bottled water sales on campus provided the students educated the campus on the issue and provided water alternatives. In the following two years, many students were involved in putting posters on campus, an educational display in the Quad, conducting bottled versus tap water taste tests, and collecting over 1,000 signatures in support. The tipping point came in the third year when 1) the student leading the campaign collaborated with the student body president to get the student government to pass a resolution to remove bottled water, 2) the student got the faculty government to endorse the ban, and 3) the facilities department installed bottle fillers and filters on over 30 water fountains in the most heavily used buildings.

GOALS AND OUTCOMES

Goals

- Remove single-use, plastic, bottled water everywhere on campus
- Educate the campus community on all the reasons why tap water is better than bottled water
- Install water fountains with filters and bottle fillers
- Increase reusable water bottle use

Accomplishments and Outcomes

Goal: Remove single-use, plastic, bottled water everywhere on campus

Outcome: Seattle U renegotiated its contract with Pepsi, with two years to go on the contract, to remove bottled water. However, Seattle U had to agree to sell Pepsi's Aquafina Flavorsplash flavored water in the vending machines. However, Flavor Splash is similar to vitamin water, bottled teas, and sodas because the manufacturer has added sweetener and flavorings to the water.

Bon Appetit, our food service vendor, was always very supportive. Buzz Hofford, Bon Appetit, General Manager, said "By taking a supportive leadership role on this issue, Bon Appétit continues to build its strong relationship with students and further enhance our reputation as the industry leader on sustainability issues. That reputation is integral to our brand identity, so for us it makes perfect sense." The alternatives to bottled water for catered events are either water service (iced water and compostable cups) for free or an assortment of sparkling mineral waters sold in glass bottles and aluminum cans. One year after the ban they started serving fruit-infused water in two large dispensers

in the cafeteria – for free. When asked what the response has been to the ban he replied, “I have received only positive responses and not a single complaint.”

Goal: Educate the campus community on all the reasons why tap water is better than bottled water

Outcome: When Seattle U’s president made an announcement at faculty and staff convocation in September 2010 that bottled water was removed from campus as of that month, the room erupted in a cheer. When an email went out to all students and employees that bottled water was removed from campus, eight campus members replied back thanking the administration and there was only one negative email from a student.

Goal: Install water fountains with filters and bottle fillers

Outcome: During year two of the campaign, the facilities department installed bottle fillers and filters on over 30 water fountains.

Goal: Increase reusable water bottle use

Outcome: To increase reusable water bottle use, the Sustainability Manager conceived an idea whereby the SU Bookstore would sell stainless steel bottles and donate the proceeds to a clean water project in Haiti being led by SU’s Engineers Without Borders student chapter. Eighteen months later, the arrangement can only be described as an unqualified success. The Bookstore sold its first shipment of 1,000 bottles by the end of the first year of the bottled water ban. A second shipment of 1,000 sold out within six months into the second year of the ban. “Obviously the project struck a chord on campus as the



momentum of sales keeps going up,” said Bookstore Manager Bob Spencer. The 2,000 bottles sold thus far translates to a total donation of \$4,400, which “provides up to 80,000 Haitians with safe water for a year,” said Phil Thompson faculty advisor for SU’s Engineers Without Borders (EWB) chapter. Thompson said the first year’s proceeds helped EWB create five water treatment systems, and the second year’s donations “will go toward a fund that we are developing with Rotary International and Seattle International Foundation to provide 10 clinics with safe water this year.” The university is sourcing the bottles from the non-profit Corporate Accountability International (CAI). This assures that \$1 on every bottle sold supports the organization’s Think Outside the Bottle campaign to remove plastic water bottles from other schools.

Challenges and Responses

Challenge: Different students worked on the campaign each of the three years and each fall the new students started over from scratch.

Response: Seattle University’s Sustainability Manager wanted the students to succeed and she had seen other initiatives fail in the past when the student leaders graduated and didn’t take care to set up a process for other students to take over the next fall. To address the first challenge of the two seniors who started the campaign graduating, she asked if they would accept her offer to help them. When they

agreed, she was included on their email from the VP for Business and Finance clearly stating what the students needed to do before the Executive Team would support the ban; she kept his email for all three years and sent it to each new group of students in the fall. She also asked the graduating students to email her all their documents tracking what they had done because they had no other place to store them safely. The graduating seniors did find a group of students who said they were interested in taking on the campaign the following fall. The two seniors met with these students and the Sustainability Manager at the end of spring quarter to get a download of what the two seniors had done and what they felt needed to be done the following fall. However, when fall came, none of these students decided to take on the campaign. In the campaign's second year, a junior contacted the Sustainability Manager to ask if she knew what the seniors had done. She emailed all the documentation to the student.

Challenge: Students tried by themselves to get the Executive Team to ban the sale of bottled water without seeking out a staff or faculty member ally to coach them on how to go about doing this.

Response: Professor Gary Chamberlain, who teaches the course Religion and Ecology and wrote the book "Troubled Waters," wanted the students to be successful. He took it upon himself to have his spring quarter students in the first and second years of the campaign collaborate with the students leading the campaign to collect petition signatures and educate the campus community about the harmful effects of bottled water.

The junior who took up the campaign in year two collaborated with two environmental student clubs and a class's project to collect over 1,000 petition signatures. But she did not accept the Sustainability Manager's offer to help. Because the students did not set up processes to communicate with each other, the petition signatures were lost and in year three, a senior who took over the campaign had to start over collecting petition signatures. This senior, in year three, did take advantage of the Sustainability Manager's offer to help coach him. She coached him on how to hone his key messages, understand the VP for Business and Finance's perspective and talk to him respectfully to get his support. The VP told the student to get the student government to pass a resolution to ban bottled water as the Executive Team would not move forward without their official support. When the student contacted the student body president, he was an ally and from his position in student government he knew of and was comfortable in the presence of the university president. The student body president met with the university president who was very helpful in explaining that the students needed more petition signatures to show broad campus support.

After the student met with the VP, the Sustainability Manager took it upon herself to meet with the VP a couple times to learn how he felt about the ban, what he would like her role to be and what else he felt was needed to get the Executive Team's support. The VP said the student needed the faculty government to also endorse the ban. She contacted a faculty member she knew in the faculty government to learn their last meeting of the year was coming up in two weeks and she was able to get the student on the agenda to ask if they would endorse the ban. She coached the student how to write a proposal to the Executive Team in an executive brief format and edited many of the drafts.

Campus Climate Action: Your School's Carbon Footprint

Stopping the sale of bottled water indirectly addresses global climate change. Oil consumption and emissions are reduced from a reduction in the quantity of disposable plastic water bottles produced, transported and recycled or put in landfills.

Commentary and Reflection

Buzz Hofford, Bon Appetit General Manager, gave this advice, “For this to be successful, you need your customer base, your foodservice vendor and the school administration to agree that taking a stand on this issue is important. In this case, the University and Bon Appétit sacrificed revenue while the students sacrificed convenience. Nonetheless, all three parties appear very happy with the outcome.”

Spencer Black, Class of 2011, gave this advice, “It is important for your administration to understand that as student customers who supply the pay checks and budget for the entire school you should have a lot of input in the type of products that are sold on campus.

Read Corporate Accountability International’s Think Outside the Bottle campaign’s Student Activism Guide <http://www.stopcorporateabuse.org/resource/think-outside-bottle-student-activism-guide>

ENGAGEMENT AND SUPPORT

Leaders and Supporters

Key individuals who were directly involved: students, Sustainability Manager, Facilities Director because he paid for the water fountains out of his budget

Key decision makers: VP for Business and Finance, University President, the Executive Team, faculty government representatives, student government representatives, the bookstore manager because he manages the Pepsi account, Bon Appetit’s General Manager

Key organizations: Clinton Global Initiative because the students leading the campaign in the third year attended and it gave them tools and inspiration, Corporate Accountability International because they got us great media attention

Key class project: Professor of a Religion and Ecology class had his spring quarter students in the first and second years of the campaign collaborate with the students leading the campaign to collect petition signatures and educate the campus community about the harmful effects of bottled water.

Funding and Resources

The materials and labor cost to replace existing water fountains with an Elkay fountain, filter and bottle filler was about \$1,500 per fountain. The cost was \$3,000 if installing a fountain in a location that does not have plumbing or electricity access. The cost to retrofit an existing fountain with a bottle filler is about \$150 for the filler and \$300 plumbing labor.

Education and Community Outreach

The Sustainability Manager partnered with Corporate Accountability International’s (CAI) Think Outside the Bottle campaign on the press release to media. CAI wrote the release, sent it to their media and blogger list, as well as Seattle U’s, and called the media to pitch the story. It is more impactful to have a third party like CAI send the press release than for a school to send it themselves because they will work harder and give the story authenticity. The story was mentioned in the Huffington Post which a lot of bloggers link to, the NY Times, our local newspaper and their online news blog and web site, a local alternative weekly publication, and a radio station aired the story and put it on their web site. Seattle U’s communications director was very pleased with the positive, international press Seattle U received.

A follow up article one-and-a-half years later on the bottled water ban in the bi-monthly online employee newsletter was the most read article the entire year with 669 unique page views. The article talked about how much money was raised from reusable water bottle sales for the Haiti project and that the Sustainability Manager had assisted 14 schools who had contacted her about how to ban bottled water at their campus. View the article online at <http://www.seattleu.edu/commons/article.aspx?id=88140>.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Contacts

Karen Price
Sustainability Manager
206-296-6997
kprice@seattleu.edu

Case study submitted by: Karen Price, Sustainability Manager, kprice@seattleu.edu

MORE ABOUT YOUR SCHOOL

Campus Sustainability History

The Sustainability Manager in the Office for Sustainability coordinates and advocates sustainability efforts by consulting and collaborating with administrators, faculty, staff and students on their sustainable initiatives; connecting campus members to sustainability expertise, resources on and off campus and opportunities to engage with sustainability; raising visibility and awareness on campus of sustainability issues, and developing programs, policies and practices. Sustainable campus operations include four LEED Gold buildings, carbon neutral buildings, an onsite compost facility, compostable to-go ware in the campus cafes, pesticide-free landscape, 58% waste diversion rate, Spring Move Out collects and donates students' unwanted things, one-third of campus vehicles are electric; ultra low-flow toilets, urinals, faucet aerators and shower heads; signatory of the American College & University Presidents' Climate Commitment, and a Climate Action Plan. For more information go to www.seattleu.edu/sustainability

Image Credit: Karen Price, Sustainability Manager