



CASE STUDY

ON THE JOURNEY TO 100% BIOBASED COMPOSTABLES

Organics recycling as a landfill diversion strategy at the Portland Trail Blazers Rose Garden Arena

The Disposables Situation

For decades professional sports teams and their venues have used primarily paper and plastic disposable drink cups and food packaging at concession stands. Much of the waste generated at events is destined for the landfill. Customers and event guests have grown accustomed to the 'one can fits all' approach to disposables. Little, if any, alternative to the garbage can is offered to guests. Achieving meaningful reductions of landfill waste, even at one venue, requires the implementation of coordinated changes to the business-as-usual system.

First make the commitment, then figure it out

In 2005, the Trail Blazers, in collaboration with the City of Portland, The Rose Quarter operations, and Ovations Food Service, undertook a comprehensive sustainability overhaul to improve the environmental performance of the Rose Garden facility, its operation and management, and the products and services offered to guests. As part of this initiative, team and venue executives made a commitment to divert 100% of solid waste from the landfill.

The strategic business objectives of this initiative were to:

- Enhance the fan and guest experience
- Reinforce the Trail Blazers brand
- Avoid added incremental cost for disposables
- Reduce operational costs
- Improve environmental performance
- Support City of Portland's waste policy goals and climate action plan initiative

On average, the Rose Garden generates approximately two million pounds of disposable materials, and hosts approximately two million guests, per year. In 2005, 35 percent of waste volume generated was diverted from the landfill through back-of-house and office recycling programs. To get from 35 percent to eliminating landfill waste entirely was a big change and required a scientific approach.

Apply the lens of sustainability

Operations management, executives and consultants applied the lens of sustainability to identify hidden business opportunity in the waste stream. Their first step was to better understand the waste problem. The venue's housekeeping unit conducted a waste audit (garbage inspection) to quantify the types and volumes of event waste being hauled to the landfill. Results from the audit determined that 60% of the contents *could* be composted. The biggest opportunity for diversion was primarily in food waste and disposables. *A switch to biobased containers at food concessions would allow both food waste and disposables to be diverted to commercial composters for disposal.*

With this opportunity identified, decision makers then examined "business as usual" practices to understand what it would take to operationalize composting. Analysis revealed waste reduction and cost saving advantages throughout the supply chain. The benefits could be realized by adopting industry best practices, such as source separation of waste by material type, using only compostable and recyclable disposables, and educating guests and employees about the venue's new strategies for reducing landfill waste through composting and recycling. However, given the systemic nature of the problem, *the key to improving diversion rates at the venue required a collaborative approach with the Rose Garden's public and private stakeholders, to realize results that no single player could otherwise achieve alone.*

Implement material management measures

Rose Quarter operations began by implementing back-of-house changes; the low-hanging-fruit under direct control. These changes included adoption of new materials management processes and infrastructure to separate waste into distinct streams, and training for housekeeping and concessions kitchen staff on materials sorting and waste minimization. The venue worked closely with ServiceMaster cleaners to actually sort recyclables and compostables after each event inside the seating bowl.

The Rose Quarter led development and implementation of GreenDrop Recycling stations for guests, with over 300 units placed in the Rose Garden. This measure addressed the most critical opportunity for engagement, the point of disposal, and provided a call-to-action to each and every guest and fan that enters the venue. The simple to use all-in-one-stop recycling stations have the additional benefits of “green” advertising space, are made with recycled content materials and are 100% recyclable at the end-of-useful-life. Eventually these stations led the venue to remove all trash receptacles inside the arena. GreenDrop Recycling Stations are now commercially available to other venues and buildings seeking to increase waste diversion rates.

Allied Waste provided two essential functions to enable the overall achievements, both at the end of the materials lifecycle. First, their hauling service transported recyclable materials to municipal recycling facilities for collection and eventual processing back into valuable raw materials. Second, the company opened the first agency-permitted commercial food waste composting facility in Oregon. This operation provides the essential step of professionally managed organic waste decomposition into nutrient rich compost products for resale.

Engage local government support

The venue took advantage of two helpful programs offered by the City of Portland, Recycle at Work and Portland Composts!. Portland Composts! provides access to commercial composting to the Portland business community. Recycle at Work is a City of Portland recycling program. As a benefit, the city provided the Rose Garden with bulk handling containers to manage large volumes of compostable and recyclable materials in preparation for hauling. Metro, Portland’s tri-county regional government, provided an equipment grant to fund the purchase of a food waste compactor. This device streamlined the consolidation and hauling of organic materials for composting.

Switch to certified biobased compostable disposables

Ovations chose to switch to StalkMarket Products, a local Portland-based business, as the supplier of genuine compostable food ware. StalkMarket demonstrated leadership in the initiative by ensuring that all of its products comply with comprehensive ASTM testing standards, receive Biodegradable Products Institute certification, and would be accepted at regional composting facilities. The range of items used in the initiative are all from the StalkMarket family of 100% compostable products, including Jaya Ingeo CPLA cutlery (97% USDA Biobased certified), Planet+ hot cups and Jaya Ingeo PLA clear cups (100% USDA Biobased certified), and StalkMarket sugar cane molded pulp plates and platters (99% USDA Biobased certified).

This switch would enable the venue to effectively divert almost all disposables into the food waste stream for composting. Through financial analysis, Ovations realized that the switch could be implemented at no additional incremental cost when considered in the overall procurement mix. The insight came by looking at the entire line of disposables used in the venue; “some will cost more and some will cost less.” Ovations was able to achieve price parity on compostable disposable cups, while almost entirely removing petroleum-based plastics from the supply chain.



Engage employees and guests in ongoing behavior change

Winning at this sustainability initiative demanded that the line staff and of course, the fans and guests, were fully on-board. Ovations incentivized their staff to participate through incorporating it into unit management goals and even organized a friendly competition to see which concession area could generate the least landfill waste. Ovations and Rose Quarter operations invited Portland State University to study the program. Students volunteered to be “waste monitors” at the new recycling stations, to help communicate the new program to fans. A major contribution was the students’ “confusion analysis” which led to improved signage on waste receptacles, enabling and exciting guest compliance with the new diversion program.

Initiative Results

Financial return on investment made to infrastructure and programs have been realized in the form of reduced operational costs of landfill tipping fees and solid waste hauling. Pre-sorted recyclable and compostable materials cost significantly less per ton than trash destined for the landfill. Recycling stations increase guest participation in carrying debris out of the seating bowl and sorting it properly, reducing cleaning labor costs.

Increased brand equity, strengthened relationship with the City of Portland and enhanced customer experience at the venue are all tremendously valuable, yet harder to quantify, benefits from this initiative.

As the Trail Blazers teamed with this broad group of facility managers, concessionaries, product suppliers, haulers, local government and educational institutions, they not only achieved strategic business goals, but also improved environmental performance of the venue in the following ways:

- Achieved 80% landfill diversion rate in 2010
- Removed petroleum-based plastics from the supply chain
- Avoided greenhouse gas emissions by diverting food waste decomposition in the landfill
- Stimulated the regional composting industry and supporting industries

Possibly the most lasting change from the composting initiative is ongoing engagement with visitors as active participants in a higher-quality and more sustainable “game night.”

StalkMarket's Role

StalkMarket is an international supplier of certified compostable disposables. Within four weeks of an introductory meeting, StalkMarket had become both a key product supplier to and “green partners” sponsor of the Trail Blazers. The company continues to play a pivotal role in the landfill diversion strategy as the major supplier to the venue.

StalkMarket is a champion and advocate for commercial composting and organics recycling in the Pacific Northwest and beyond. The company’s Founder and President, Buzz Chandler, sits on the board of directors of the Biodegradable Products Institute (BPI), and participates in a testing standards review committee of compostable and biodegradable plastic products, for ASTM International.

