



**Trash Routes, They Are a-Changin':** Several years ago, the Oklahoma City Solid Waste Management Division embarked on a bold project. To reduce costs, improve air quality and accommodate city growth, they began a Route Optimization Program. It promised to reduce equipment breakdowns and improve customer service. There was just one catch – the program would change trash collection schedules for approximately 56,000 customers. Some had been accustomed to the same trash collection day for 35 years or more.

**Changing Routes, Changing Minds:** Old habits can be hard to break. The city was searching for a way to make the transition as painless as possible. In a 2008 survey, the division was ranked number 1 in customer satisfaction

among all city services, including the ever-popular Fire Department. The Division didn't want to sacrifice its hard-earned popularity by disappointing or confusing customers.

**The New Face of Trash Collection:** In the 1990s, the city distributed two large trash bins to each household. Citizens affectionately nicknamed the bins "Big Blue," and the name stuck. As part of our communication effort, our artists turned Big Blue into a loveable cartoon character with a slightly dopey, yet loveable personality. We designed a direct mail campaign around the character and sent targeted communications to affected households.

The direct mail campaign was coupled with a personal letter from the Solid Waste Manager, public relations support and pre-recorded calls to each household. The calls were made by an actor playing the character of Big Blue. They offered a playful follow-up to the direct mail campaign. In addition to phone and direct mail tactics, waste collectors were armed with hangtags. When citizens improperly set out their trash bins, they got a friendly reminder hanging directly from their Big Blue.

**Results at the Curb? Simply Superb:** Together, these tactics worked beautifully. The campaign was simple, clear and perfectly timed. Oklahoma City Solid Waste credits the communication strategy for successful implementation of the Route Optimization Program.

"We planned for the worst, but we got the best," said Jim Linn, manager of Solid Waste Management. "The first day, about 76% of the customers had set out their Big Blues on their new collection day. That compliance rate got better each day – 98% by Friday. By the second week, it was pretty much business as usual."