

Track-the-Trash

Track-the-Trash - Innovation Team 16

Where our Corporate Responsibility Efforts can be Improved

Currently, Wayfair offers a “haul-away” service for large appliances and mattresses that customers can choose to purchase with a replacement item. In the last six months alone, over 10,000 items were ‘disposed of’ through haul-away services. This amounts to about \$466,000 of retail items. The ultimate destination of those items is unknown within our organization.

Understanding the disposal of our products is the first step to minimizing the detrimental impact of our waste on our environment. For this project, we were challenged to find an innovative way for Wayfair to extend corporate responsibility (CR). We chose to focus on Wayfair’s broader initiatives of waste reduction by investigating the final destination of haul-away items.

The Track-the-Trash Initiative: Monitoring Product Disposal

We propose that Wayfair tracks our hauled-away products through a product disposal tracker tool. Track-the-Trash would measure metrics such as the condition of the item, where the product was hauled from and where it was disposed of, how it was processed upon disposal, lifespan, and (for Wayfair products) the composition of materials.

A standard external interaction – for a haul-away service team member, with our tool – would look like this: Upon opening the page, a list of the day’s scheduled pickups (product name, SKU if Wayfair) would be displayed with an image of each product (from wayfair.com – not specific to the exact item). When the pickup is complete, the worker would click a “picked up” button, which will mark the current location to track the item’s origin point. After that, the job would progress to drop-off, where two more actions are required. First, the worker again clicks a button to indicate and mark the location where the item was “dropped off”. Second, the worker must complete a few quick questions to indicate 1) the product’s relative condition upon drop-off and 2) the facility’s processing procedure.

A key risk of this proposal is the potential for the haul-away providers to disregard or lie on the tool. We would combat this by giving our haul-away providers, Handy and GE, detailed instructions on how to use the tool which they can then relay to their employees. During negotiations, Wayfair would emphasize how failure to accurately report product disposal sites could result in the termination of our partnerships.

Intended Impact: Understand the Problem

Large appliances can contain CFCs, known for contributing to the depletion of the ozone layer. The 10,000 items trashed over the last six months equates to the yearly absorption of 160,000 trees; this number would be greatly reduced if these appliances were recycled properly. In the 2022 CSR report, Wayfair cited combating waste reduction as a key initiative for increasing Wayfair’s overall sustainability. Monitoring and measuring product disposal play a key role in proving to our customers and investors that we are committed to becoming a more “green” company. “Not knowing” where our haul away products end up is an unsustainable model.

The Track-the-Trash initiative holds Wayfair accountable for its commitment to waste reduction by ensuring that when customers utilize Wayfair’s haul-away option, their products are being disposed of in socially responsible and sustainable ways. Using the information this tool would provide, we can alter our disposal practices and, ideally, ensure we have the optimal partnership for eco-friendly disposal practices.

Thinking Ahead

Developing this tool is only the first step in the process of reworking our disposal practices to be more environmentally friendly. We know that data is key to making significant and impactful changes, and we hope that by creating this tool, we can initiate this clean-disposal effort a bit further down the line. Wayfair would develop a stronger understanding of what item materials are recyclable, reusable, or neither. We can then use this information to restrategize our disposal plans to be more environmentally friendly.