

Hillsborough and Leon Counties Innovative Recycling Grant DormOutfitter.com - Final Report

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This report summarizes the activities conducted for the DormOutfitter.com Innovative Recycling Grant. Hillsborough and Leon Counties (Counties) have developed an ongoing program to salvage and resell materials commonly discarded by college students. To implement this innovative grant program, the Counties have teamed with the University of South Florida (USF), Recycling Task Force of Hillsborough County (Project Team). Hillsborough County was the lead County for this project.

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Introduction

The focal point of the project has been the design, set-up, field testing, and on-going maintenance of **www.DormOutfitter.com**, an on-line exchange for students at participating universities to buy, sell, trade, and donate usable materials instead of throwing them into the disposal system. Examples of targeted materials for this program include bookshelves, refrigerators, couches, chairs, tables, bicycles, books, beds, school supplies, etc.

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The primary deliverable of this project is the web site itself. **DormOutfitter.com** is a dynamic and self-explanatory web site. It is up and running, trades are being made, and usage is increasing (see Appendix A, *Site Usage Statistics for April and May 2001*).

The Recycling Task Force of Hillsborough County (RTF) will be responsible for the ongoing maintenance and expansion of **DormOutfitter.com**. The RTF has identified support to keep the site running for another year, and will continue to seek funding to keep the program online indefinitely. The RTF will also extend the content offered at the site as well as market the site to other campuses within the State of Florida university system.

This report is organized in two sections, as follows:

1. **Project Tasks and Activities** - a summary of our work as it relates to the Scope of Services. This section includes discussion of problems encountered and solutions implemented.
2. **Anticipated Next Steps** - a plan for expanding DormOutfitter.com for additional participation.

Project Tasks and Activities

Our Scope of Work included four tasks: 1. Kick Off Meetings; 2. Develop Internet Component; 3. Web Site Maintenance and Transportation; and 4. Public Outreach.

1. Kick-Off Meetings

The project team held two kick-off meetings one in Tallahassee for the benefit of Leon County, and one in Tampa, FL, for the benefit of Hillsborough County. These meetings afforded project stakeholders the opportunity to strategize with campus and county representatives and assign project responsibilities. The meetings were held in the Fall of 2000.

Tallahassee Kick-Off Meeting

At the Tallahassee kick-off meeting, the project team discussed how to handle FDEP's reduction in the grant funding to approximately 25% of the original proposal budget. Because of these new budgetary constraints, the project team determined to focus on a pilot program in the Tampa area with the University of South Florida. The team agreed to design the web site for expandability and later roll-out in the Tallahassee area schools.

Tampa Kick-Off Meeting

At the Tampa kick-off meeting, the project team discussed implementation steps and coordination with University of South Florida (USF) personnel and procedures. A "game-plan" was developed for web-site design and promotion, with limited on-campus drop and swap

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stations for Fall 2000 and Spring 2001. If these pilot drop and swap stations are proven successful, an expanded diversion event could be planned for school year 2001-2002.

A separate kick-off meeting was held with leaders from the USF Leadership House, a student leadership society. This student group was targeted for providing day-to-day on-campus support.

2. Develop Internet Component

The core of this project was to design an internet web site for college students to buy, sell, trade, or donate reusable items that they no longer want instead of disposing of them. Among the critical components of this site, the project team determined that the site should provide:

- A method for buyers/sellers/donors to make trades
- A method of posting photos and descriptions of items
- A search engine for the site
- Informational sections that support reuse options
- Expandability for adding additional colleges and universities

These elements were incorporated into the web site planning and development process.

Implementing DormOutfitter.com

DormOutfitter.com has a relatively simple design. The site begins with a home page where users are asked to pick their school by clicking on the school logo. Currently, only one school is listed: USF. Others may be added with great ease.

The next screen is the DormOutfitter.com mission statement and "how to use this site" information page (<http://dormoutfitter.com/main.php>).

From this main page, the user can either go directly to the online Exchange for their school, (for example: <http://www.dormoutfitter.com/cgi-bin/classifieds/classifieds.cgi>) or go to other resource pages, such as a list of local thrift stores (<http://dormoutfitter.com/thriftstores.htm>), recycling tips (<http://www.dormoutfitter.com/recycletips.html>) or take the current online poll.

The Exchange Page is the main page for students to start moving their items, and it can be accessed in three clicks: (1) type in URL (www.dormoutfitter.com); (2) click you your school; and (3) click on "exchange".

The Exchange page has eight categories, as listed below with short descriptions:

Announcements Dorm Sales, Yard Sales, Events, Lost and Found

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<u>Books</u> used and new textbooks, paperbacks, written things of all kinds.
<u>Carpools and Ride Share</u> Rides offered and rides needed
<u>Computers & Software</u> Desktops, laptops, accessories, software
<u>Employment</u> Job openings, resumes
<u>General Merchandise</u> Tickets, furniture, appliances, music, video games, and more
<u>Places to Live</u> Apartments, sublets, summer housing, rentals
<u>Wheels</u> Bicycles, cars, trucks, motorcycles, and parts

Each category is then sub-divided into categories.

Listings may be viewed without registering, however to make a listing (advertisement) or to respond to a listing, the user must register and log into the site. Currently there is no cost for registering, listing, or otherwise participating in the exchange.

DormOutfitter.com Management Features

In order to streamline site management, many functions have been automated, including the following settings:

1. Listings run for a prescribed period of time and are deleted after the period has expired.
2. A list of censored words that are banned from listings.
3. There is an automatic check for duplicate ads.
4. There is an optional auto-responder function.
5. Registered user emails are entered into a list that can be used for sending electronic mail.
6. Banner Advertisements can be added and rotated.
7. Administrator is notified when listings are placed/deleted.

3. Ongoing Web Site Maintenance and Transportation

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The project team made a concerted effort to coordinate with on-campus student groups for both design and maintenance of DormOutfitter.com. The principal student organizational partner has been the Leadership House, a civic oriented group. Members of Leadership House participated in program design, and are being groomed by the project team for ultimately taking over the entire maintenance function for DormOutfitter.com.

In addition, the team recognized that students' main priority is completion of academic requirements, and that students may not have the time and energy to actively manage the web site on a continual basis. Therefore, DormOutfitter.com has been designed to be as self-maintaining as possible.

Some of the self-maintaining features include:

- Users of the site enter in all their own information, both for contact information and offerings. This eliminates an administrative function of basic data entry.
- Users of the site set their own notification and advertisement/listing expiration dates. This avoids the webmaster from performing this function. Old listings are automatically removed from the site after a certain period, or individuals may remove their own out-dated listings.
- Banner ads rotate automatically and run for prescribed duration (number of weeks).
- Site usage statistics are captured automatically. However, reports need to be run by the webmaster or other person with access to site management controls.

Some of the on-going site maintenance activities conducted include:

- Developing and Updating content. The project team created or assembled all the information, exclusive of listings, that is present on the web site. Quality content is important for attracting visitors, and keeping the interest of site users. For example, the pages on thrift shops, recycling information, the mission statement (introduction page) and other pages with information about reuse and recycling were all developed specifically for DormOutfitter.com.

Some content is ever changing, such as links to current events, volunteer opportunities, and activities on campus. Some information changes only periodically. For example, when a thrift store opens up or goes out of business, the page that lists thrift shops will need to be updated. Adding or changing content is a manual process, and has occurred throughout the project.

- Facilitating Trades. During web site development, a number of stakeholders raised the issue of facilitating trades through providing a "safe place" for buyers and sellers to meet. While the project team discussed several options for implementing a facilitated trade model, none were deemed feasible to be evaluated within the initial

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project period. Therefore, the current version of DormOutfitter.com does not offer a facilitated trade option.

The project team is working closely with the Leadership House and USF Student Resident Life, in developing a model that will work within campus and student logistics. The team is exploring an option where students could drop items at the Leadership House during set times and buyers could purchase items during set times. The buyer would pay for the item, and payment would be held in trust by the Leadership House. After the exchange, the seller would receive the payment.

Leadership house may charge a fee for this service, which would support their scholarship fund. If feasible, this option would enable wary sellers/buyers to trade anonymously. If the details can be worked out, the Leadership House may offer this to students in the Fall 2001.

- Tracking diversion. The project team has been evaluating mechanisms for tracking how much trading occurs through the web site, and how much diversion can be attributed to the web site. So far, documentation of diversion has been a challenge. The site software offers a number of mechanisms to help manage information on the site. The project team is exploring automatic email follow-up surveys, an on-line poll, or direct mail to track diversion.

The question has also come up regarding how much level of effort should be spent to track diversion, versus effort spent to get people to use the site. The team fears that requiring users to provide more information will "turn off" users and result in less diversion overall. Consequently, the project team has focused on driving traffic to the site, versus implementing mechanisms to track diversion.

- Web Hosting. Originally, the project team envisioned the web site as being part of the University's Internet presence and therefore it would be hosted on the server of the University. However, the University has extensive restrictions on advertising on University hosted servers. Therefore, the project team opted for privately hosting the web site. In future years, these fees will be supported with banner advertising and other corporate support.

Overall, the site has required minimal maintenance. The on-going challenge foreseen by the project team is getting the word out about the site, attracting and holding the interest of visitors, and creating a robust marketplace. The bulletin boards on campus fill up with offered items of all kinds. The site needs to attract the individuals that post to and read these boards to use DormOutfitter.com. Strategies for sustaining the site are discussed in the "Anticipated Next Steps" section, below.

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4. Public Outreach

DormOutfitter.com has been well received by all parties that have reviewed it. The project team has promoted the project primarily through five activities:

- Beta Testing of web site.
- Formal proposals to speak at conferences.
- Email invitations to target audiences.
- Informal presentations to stakeholder groups.
- Postings to public bulletin boards.
- Publications

These activities are discussed below.

Beta Test Results

As part of the development process, the website went through an Alpha and Beta test period. During these tests, DormOutfitter.com was accessed by various groups of users including USF students, recycling professionals and systems developers. Feedback was obtained through the use of a survey developed specifically to help make improvements and modifications to the web site as deemed necessary. A copy of the detail survey questions can be found in Appendix and a copy of the statistical analysis performed on the survey responses can be found in Appendix A.

The project team performed an Alpha test in March 2001. Students primarily from the USF Leadership House were given a brief explanation about the project and the purpose of the web site. They were then asked to log on to the DormOutfitter.com web site and explore the different pages and utilize the available features. The group of twelve (12) participants was then asked to complete the Opinion Survey (see attached, "Alpha Opinion Survey Form") regarding their experience using the site. Comments were encouraged since they are vital to make modifications to make the site more usable and appealing to the target user population of college students. The Alpha test Opinion Survey did not include demographic information on the participants of the test.

The results of the Alpha test were almost entirely positive. Responses to Question 5, regarding the site's mission statement, identified that this screen was not working properly and the students could not display the mission statement. This minor problem was corrected before conducting the Beta test period.

Members of the project team performed the Beta test inside the USF Student Union during April 2001, with help of volunteers from the Leadership House. A table with two computers was set up in an area of high traffic and passing students were asked to spend a few minutes exploring the **DormOutfitter.com** web site. The participating students were then asked to complete the Beta Opinion Survey (see attached, "Beta Opinion Survey Form") regarding their experience using the web site and any constructive comments were also encouraged.

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In an effort to have a high participation rate, the students were offered an opportunity to win a free Polaroid camera, donated by Resource Management Group, Inc. The camera was given to a randomly selected student who participated in the Beta test and completed the survey.

The Opinion Survey was modified to include demographic information on the Beta test participants to better analyze the results. Once again, the responses to the Opinion Survey were almost entirely positive. Twenty-five students (25), ranging in age from 18 to 45 years old participated in the Beta test. Our discussion here is limited to questions on the survey that identified areas of improvement.

- Question 3 identified that 20% of the participants did not find the colors on the Initial Screen appealing.
- Question 11 deals with the ease of setting up a user account. The raw data shows that only 60% felt that the process was easy, while 12% responded that it was not easy. 28% of the participants did not set up accounts and left the response blank. When analyzing only those participants who set up accounts, the positive response increases to 83% and the negative response increases to 17%.
- Question 12 is similar to Question 11 and deals with ease of placing an ad on the site. The raw data shows that only 64% felt that the process was easy, while 8% responded that it was not easy. 28% of the participants did not place ads and left the response blank. When analyzing only those participants who placed ads, the positive response increases to 89% and the negative response increases to 11%.

Students were more willing to provide comments during the Beta test. This may have been as a result of the chance to win the free Polaroid camera. These constructive comments were very important in identifying ways to improve the site for maximum usage. Samples of the comments received include:

- “I think the site is a wonderful thing. I plan on using it a lot.”
- “Works just as well as E-Bay”
- “Very well presented, easy to understand.”
- “Colors looked strange together”

As a result of the Alpha and Beta testing of the **DormOutfitter.com** web site and Opinion Survey, there were several areas of improvement that were identified.

1. Reduce the number of subcategories.
 - Computer, subcategories should be simplified to: Hardware, Software, Complete Systems (CPU, Monitor, mouse & keyboard); Laptops.
 - General Merchandise, subcategories: eliminate medical equipment, baby & child, food; and combine some categories like CD/Movie/Video
2. List heading with class and categories.

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3. Make a Donation category.
4. Create a place for on-campus donation drives to be listed and promoted.
- 5.

The project team has either completed these modifications or these improvements are scheduled to be completed as part of the website maintenance. A focus group will be used to improve the colors used for the initial screen.

Formal proposals to speak at conferences

The project team submitted proposals to present DormOutfitter.com at the Recycle Florida Today (RFT) annual conference, which was held in St. Petersburg, FL in June 2001. However, the proposal was not selected for presentation.

A proposal to present at the National Recycling Coalition (NRC) annual conference (to be held in October 2001) has not been accepted or rejected. A copy of the final report will be submitted to the College and University Recycling Council (CURC), a technical council of the NRC, for possible publication.

Email invitations to target audiences

The project team has announced the web site to the National Waste Prevention Forum by email, and this has generated national interest in the site as a replicable model for colleges and universities. Additional emails have been sent to Florida Recycling Coordinators on an individual basis.

Informal presentations to stakeholder groups

The project team has presented DormOutfitter.com at the Reusable Resources Association annual meeting in April, 2001 (Melbourne Beach, FL), at the ad-hoc meeting of the Florida Reuse Network during the RFT annual conference (St. Petersburg Beach, FL), the RTF annual business luncheon in May, 2001 (Tampa, FL) and will be presented at the SHOPA Foundation/Kids in Need annual summit in June, 2001 (Atlanta, GA).

Postings to public bulletin boards

The project team has placed numerous post cards (see attachment) and tear-off announcements (see attached) on bulletin boards at USF. These are critical placements for reaching the target audience.

Publications

The project team has written articles that have been published in The Tampa Tribune in April 2001 (see attached) with a daily circulation of 230,000 (Hillsborough County). An article was also printed in the Reuse Development Organization, Inc. Newsletter (Spring 2001) with a

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national circulation of 1,800. A single page flyer will be inserted in the Marshall Center's back to school folder distributed to 4,500 USF students living on campus in August 2001.

Anticipated Next Steps

The Leadership House of USF has committed their members and resources to maintaining the web site and to advance participation by the student population, especially the incoming resident life students in the Fall of 2001. The Leadership House will distribute information during the orientation classes and back to school events as well as working with the Residence Life staff at USF. Allowing a student group to take "ownership" of the site will further longevity and keep the site current since the population has a 25% turnover rate annually.

To encourage registration and participation, the Recycling Task Force (RTF) through a business partner (GATX Capital), will give-away a refurbished laptop computer in the Fall 2001 in a random drawing of registered site participants. The RTF will continue to work with the Leadership House as part of its ongoing community involvement in reuse, recycling and education by providing project oversight and semester reviews, as well as lending a hand when asked by the students. The RTF will continue to develop strategic business partnerships and seek other funding that will sustain the site.

In seeking to promote the transferability of DormOutfitter, the RTF will distribute a copy of the final report to all state universities in Florida and to all campuses that have a Leadership House. Additionally, the RTF will contact the University of Tampa and Florida College (in Hillsborough County) and Eckerd College (in Pinellas County), to further participation with DormOutfitter.

Michael Murphy, with RTF, will be meeting with Lisa Heller of Dump & Run, Inc. (see RFT Renewable News, Winter 2000, page 7) in July to share the results of each respective program and discuss how these two programs might work together.

Ongoing promotion to the student population is a continual challenge that the Leadership House is ready for. The RFT will provide to the Leadership House single page flyers for insertion and distribution in the Marshall Center's orientation folder. This folder is given to all 4,500 students living on campus in August of each year. The Leadership House will also distribute a flyer at orientation tours for new students during open houses.

Bulletin boards have been the preferred method of information and material exchanges on campus for years. While **DormOutfitter.com** will increase the ease and volume of this exchange, we believe that the bulletin board and pushpin will still be in use. To this end the Leadership House will continue to placard DormOutfitter.com info flyers on campus bulletin boards throughout the year. The Leadership House is also discussing with The Oracle (USF daily newspaper) publicity opportunities and linking to their website.

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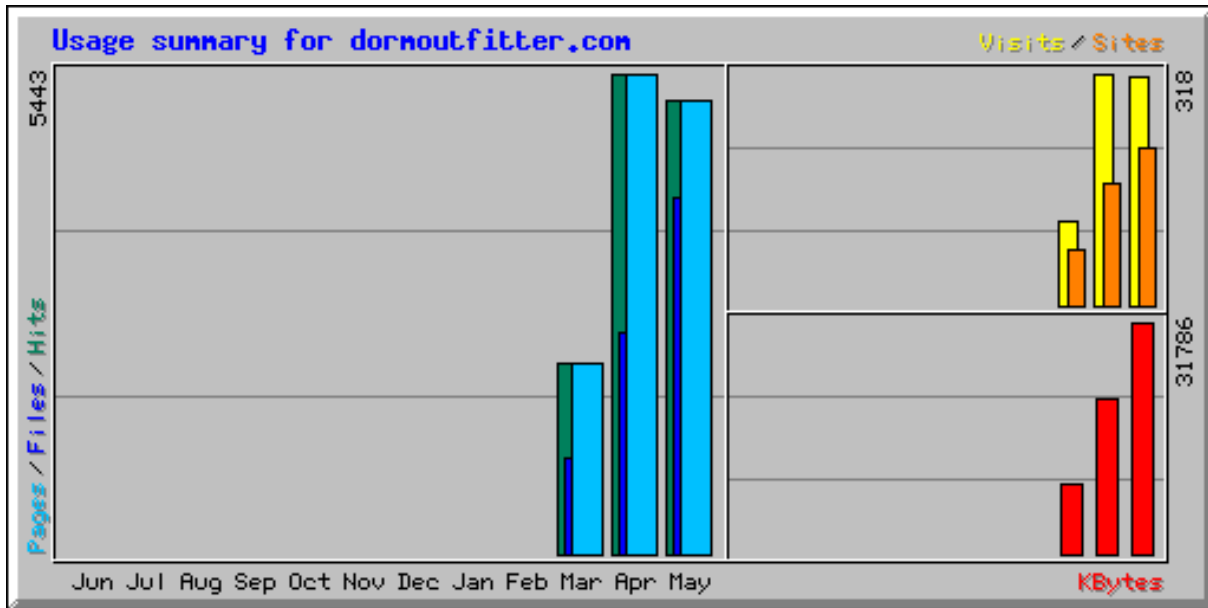
In discussion for future updates are a “How to restore your stuff” page on DormOutfitter. This page would give helpful information to assist the restoration of the “stuff” you acquire through DormOutfitter. Topics such as cleaning stains from fabrics/furniture, and restoring the finish to bookshelves/cabinets are just two areas that would provide assistance.

Another future update is a “non-toxic” page. This page would provide information and links to products and services that are environmentally friendly and non-toxic.

Solicitation and development of sponsorship partners is an ongoing activity that the RTF and the Leadership House will continue. To date, over 100 businesses have been contacted via a letter (see attachments), the telephone or in-person. We expect to have paid sponsors by the start of the Fall 2001 semester.

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Appendix A, Site Usage Statistics for April and May 2001



Summary by Month										
Month	Daily Avg				Monthly Totals					
	Hits	Files	Pages	Visits	Sites	KBytes	Visits	Pages	Files	Hits
May 2001	244	192	244	14	217	31786	312	5127	4035	5127
Apr 2001	181	83	181	10	167	21324	318	5443	2503	5443
Mar 2001	107	54	107	5	75	9423	115	2158	1098	2158
Totals						62533	745	12728	7636	12728

Attachments

1. Alpha Survey
2. Beta Survey
3. Survey Stats
4. The Tampa Tribune, April 23, 2001 tabloid insert (hard copy only)
5. ReDo Newsletter, Spring 2001 (hard copy only)
6. Bulletin board flyer
7. Orientation hand out card
8. Sponsor solicitation letter