

Ripple Glass: Shattering the Glass Ceiling

In 2008, Kansas Citians threw away 150 million pounds of glass – hundreds of millions of bottles and jars. To the dismay of the people at Boulevard Brewing Company, Kansas City’s home town brewery, this included some 10 million empty Boulevard beer bottles. And Boulevard was tired of being part of the problem. With the support of local companies and community organizations, they came up with a solution—Ripple Glass. Ripple Glass was founded in 2009 in Kansas City, Missouri. With the construction of a state-of-the-art processing facility and an innovative collection system, Ripple is building a new way to recycle glass.

Ripple’s collection program has more than quadrupled Kansas City’s glass recycling rate in just a few years. And, it’s still growing. Most recycling professionals are familiar with the 20-60-20 rule in which 20% of the population will collect a material and deliver it to a recycling facility, 60% will recycle if it’s conveniently collected in a curbside program, and 20% simply won’t recycle. Ripple Glass is breaking the 20% glass ceiling for drop-off recycling, and its best practices will help other communities excel in glass recycling too.

Before Ripple Glass, there were only a handful of locations for residents to drop off glass for recycling, and they were all inconvenient. Mostly located in remote, industrial settings, fewer than 10 collection points existed in a metropolitan area that extends nearly 8,000 square miles.

When Ripple Glass launched in November 2009, it significantly increased the number of collection points for residents and businesses making it much easier and faster to deliver glass to a recycling bin. Ripple selected strategic locations based on visibility, convenient access, and surrounding commercial establishments.

Community engagement as a key component to Ripple’s success. Indeed, the program relies on local businesses and organizations as partners. These partners “host” Ripple Glass bins. Hosts provide space for Ripple Glass bins in their lots, tidy up when necessary, and call for service when bins are full. Parking a bin in a host’s highly visible parking space (and using bins that are painted a bright, attractive purple) raised community awareness for glass recycling and residents responded. People now recycle while they run errands to grocery stores, box stores, or liquor stores.

Hosting a Ripple Glass bin is good for our partnering businesses as well. Providing this community service increases foot traffic to a commercial center. Surveys of recyclers show that they choose retail destinations based on the availability of a Ripple Glass bin. Furthermore, 65% of recyclers know which host to thank for hosting a bin, and 53% make purchases at the host’s stores and surrounding stores when they recycle.

Before Ripple Glass, less than 4% of glass in the Kansas City metropolitan area was collected for glass recycling. Building a ground-breaking collection system overcame the barriers which kept people from recycling: lack of recycling locations. Today, Ripple Glass collects more than 20% of metro area glass, and it’s still growing.