

# More carrot, less stick

## How to use incentives to reduce littering



# Using incentives to change behaviour

**Every day, we all make hundreds of choices. In many cases, we come to a decision by weighing up the perceived benefits against the costs. That might be in money, time, energy or something else.**

Understanding how people make this kind of decision helps us when we want to change human behaviour for the better – what we need to do is rebalance the equation.

Specifically, this guide is about incentives: ways to boost the benefits of the 'right' behaviour to make it the most appealing option.

## **Combating litter with choice architecture**

Incentives can help us to target groups that are hard to reach with other litter prevention tactics.

That could be people who see walking an extra 50 paces to the bin as too much effort. Or others who value a tidy pocket more than a clean street. Once we add in the incentive, the equation looks different – what was perceived as an inconvenience has now become worthwhile.

## **The incentives effect**

Incentives don't suddenly make disinterested people care about litter prevention – the effect is more superficial than that. But they do earn people's attention, and we can use that as an opportunity to shift behaviour in other ways.



# What counts as an incentive?

An incentive is a benefit that's unrelated (directly, at least) to litter prevention, but is introduced as a motivator to get people involved. Incentives can be tangible – money or prizes – or subtler, such as public recognition or personal pride.

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There isn't a single incentive that works for every age, region, group or gender – so you need to set your agenda before you begin:

- **Duration** – are you planning a one-off 'big push' or a more sustained effort?
- **Objectives** – are you hoping to produce a short-term tidy-up or a long-term behaviour change?
- **Budget** – how long can you afford to offer the incentive for? Is that long enough to make an impact?
- **Suitability** – who are you targeting? What will appeal to them most? Will you reward individuals or groups?



## The best incentives are the simplest

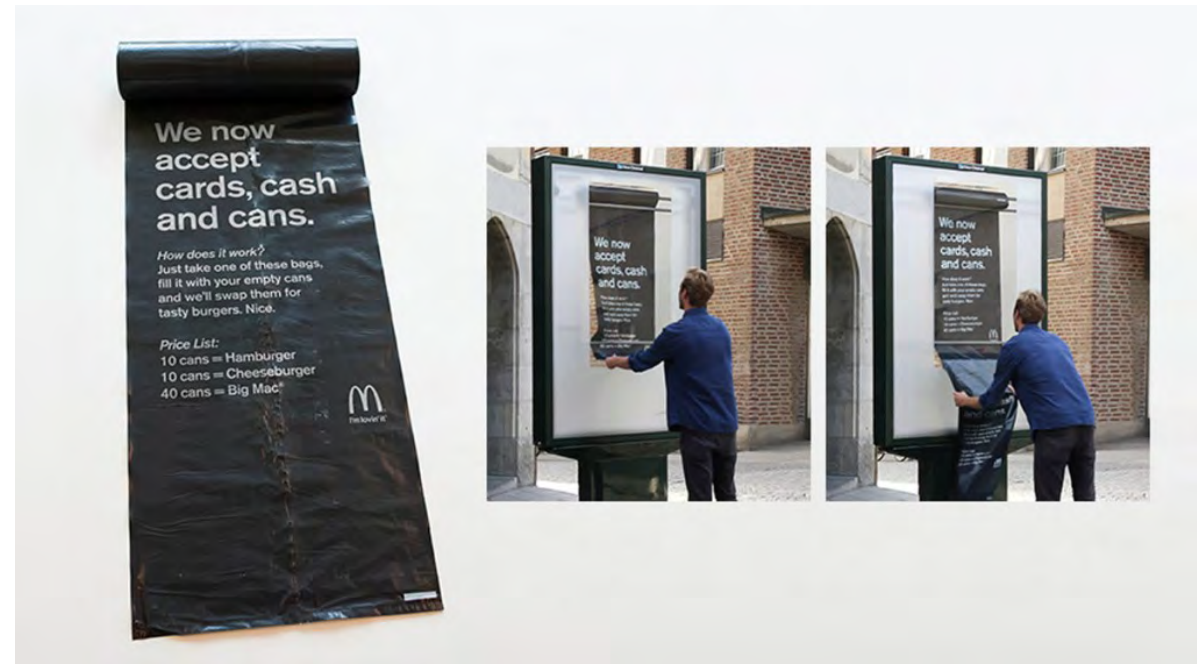
Beer for binning cigarette butts .  
Rewards for reporting flytippers .  
There are lots of incentive schemes out there – but what separates those that work from those that don't?

Start by looking to the mindset of your audience – then create a suitable incentive using one or more of these principles:

- **Small steps** – take it in stages.  
Your target audience may balk if you ask for a big behaviour change straight away.
- **Something for nothing** – almost everyone is interested in something for free, even if it's not a high value giveaway. In saying that, a major prize can grab attention.
- **Persuasive savings** – saving money is on most peoples' minds, so offering a discount or deposit in return for preventing litter is a sure way to appeal to a wide range of people.
- **Feel-good factor** – charity partnerships work especially well, because of the altruistic glow people get from contributing to a good cause.
- **Set a goal** – people respond to targets, whether that's personal challenges or shared objectives they can work towards as a team.
- **Tell it straight** – give your audience the best chance of seeing the benefit by communicating the incentive clearly and concisely.

# Introduction to incentive design

Consider each point to create incentives with the potential to change littering behaviour for the better.



## Prevention vs. management

Before you start your incentive efforts, double-check you're rewarding the right things. For example, incentivising people for picking up litter doesn't tackle the factors that led to the rubbish being on the street in the first place. You might not be solving the right problem.

## Solo vs. partnership

Incentives don't need to be expensive to be effective – but they do need to be something your target audience wants. That's where partnerships come in.

Joining forces with a local business or charity can be a great source of giveaways, funding or practical support. With the right partner on board, your incentive programme could be on the road to success straight away.



# Types of incentive



## Financial vs. non-financial

If budgets are stretched, staying away from financial rewards can make your money go further. If the incentive is a cash sum, the value matters. Give out goodies and it doesn't – people can be as motivated by cheaper giveaways as expensive ones).

That said, there are examples of successes on the financial and non-financial sides:

### FINANCIAL INCENTIVES

## Same bang, no buck



Keep Wales Tidy managed to **cut gum stains on streets by 56.5%** simply by giving away gum-bin keyrings – and running a prize draw for everyone who returned theirs full.

Zero Waste Scotland also changed behaviour at the HebCelt Festival in Stornoway, by asking people to drop their bottles and cans into a reverse vending machine (rubbish goes in, rewards come out). In return, festivalgoers earned the chance to win a prize – from food vouchers to an iPad. The result? The site was almost entirely litter-free throughout the event.

## Individual vs. group

When you create an incentive, you need to decide whether people will respond better to being rewarded personally, or as part of a group. Both can be effective in the right context.

Incentives aimed at individuals are usually more tangible, for example, offering students the chance to participate in an activity that will strengthen their CV. They can also be compelling to a wide range of people. Cambridge City Council runs a scheme where residents earn credits for the time they spend supporting community causes. Participants can cash their credits in for fun stuff – like admission to cinemas, gyms, swimming pools or music venues. Over 10,000 hours have been given through the programme

and 12% of survey respondents started a community group as a result.

According to reports by research body Eunomia, community-wide incentives – such as providing sports kits for a community football team in return for litter prevention activity – are better at sustaining long-term public interest.

Birmingham City Council and Keep Britain Tidy collaborated to create bins where the amount of rubbish collected translated into donations to charity. As a result, the city's residents binned 8.9% more rubbish than usual, and dropped 30% less litter during the three months the bins were branded up with 'Bin it for Good'. A local charity received £1,300.

### FINANCIAL INCENTIVES

## A tried and tested formula



Deposit-return is a common financial incentive. When Nottingham Trent University ran a two-month trial of returnable plastic bags in Sweden, they **cut carrier bag use by 80%**.

Starbucks launched a similar scheme in the UK, targeting

coffee cups. They've seen similar success. By offering a 25p discount to anyone who brings their own cup, they've boosted reusable tumbler use by **235% in four years** – this means a significant cut to the number of single-use cups with the potential to end up as litter.



# Making incentives stick



## IMPORTANT

**Already run an incentives campaign that's reduced litter?**  
**Don't forget to create a case study so others can learn from your successes.**

## Short-term motivation vs. long-term change

The decisive measure of success is whether your incentives translate into a long-term change in behaviour. So, while your incentive programme is running, identify and include ways to motivate people to re-evaluate their behaviour in the long-term.

## INCENTIVE DESIGN

### Top tips for long-term change

#### Shout about it

The more people you get on board, the better the chance of change taking hold for the long haul. Spread the news of your scheme far and wide, and encourage participants to do the same.

When it comes to publicity, traditional channels will do the job – but social media is your not-so-secret weapon. Create a hashtag, share your success stories, upload videos and do whatever you can to make your efforts go viral.

#### Explain why

While you have people's attention – even if only briefly – tell them why litter prevention matters. This can help them see beyond the incentive and change their actions by choice instead. Here, the sense of free choice is key – if people feel controlled, your chances of changing their underlying attitudes may be reduced.

#### Swap action for skills

Perhaps because they shift people's view of the world in other ways, incentives that deliver skills or experience are better at getting people to change their ways for good. Case in point: Govanhill Community Development Trust in Glasgow offered English classes to any non-native local residents willing to help regenerate the local area. Some of the people involved went on to join an initiative to revamp nearby tenement gardens – for no incentive at all.

#### Stick to your guns

Changing habits takes time – up to 245 days if you believe recent studies. This means that running your incentive for at least eight months is a good idea if long-lasting change is your goal – which it should be.

# Further reading

**Want to know more?**

**Here are links to further  
information about the ideas  
we've discussed in this guide.**

