

Hartz & Minds 30: Waste Reduction – WHY Business Must Innovate

On February 3, *Wired* magazine issued an exciting article, “The Pro Dumpster Diver Who’s Making Thousands off America’s Biggest Retailers.” See link:

www.wired.com/2015/02/high-end-dumpster-diving-matt-malone.

While the subject is fascinating, what is revealed about our society is devastating. Matt Malone, while keeping his white-collar day job, earns hundreds of thousands of dollars a year collecting, repurposing, and reselling “garbage.” Randall Sullivan, the journalist who wrote this masterpiece, did his homework to provide context for and draw conclusions from the entrepreneur’s experience.

- A 2004 study by Columbia University and BioCycle revealed that the US produces *7.1 pounds of trash every day for every person* living here.
- The late William Rathje, a University of Arizona garbage researcher, through his study of ancient civilizations’ waste, found the *tipping point* that signaled their inevitable decline: “when extravagance began to outstrip resources.”
- In *Garbology*, his comprehensive 2012 book, Edward Humes, calls for a break in that historical pattern with a serious commitment to reducing waste. However, Rathje revealed to him, “*no great civilization has ever pulled this off. None.*”

As a corporate social responsibility professional and a consumer in our society, I simply cannot be defeatist about the implied inevitability of our national decline. The challenge for our country and culture is multi-fold: we are not land-constrained; we are profit-driven; we are litigious; we are both over and under regulated; we are comfortable throwing things away. In my work, I have created sustainable partnerships among retailers, manufacturers, consumers, and nonprofits to reduce, reuse, and recycle the very trash that Matt Malone is monetizing.

What can be done to address the environmental and humanitarian issue of waste?

Take the long view. Be creative. Partner with others. Share success stories like these:

-When I worked in CSR for a national retailer, we worked with manufacturers to donate items that were traditionally ordered to ‘Return to Vendor’ or ‘Destroy in Field.’ In the process, we helped a national charity set up a chain of thrift stores in communities of need.

-A pharmaceutical client conducted an extensive facilities audit, then reduced energy consumption and increased recycling; this led to prouder employees and net cost savings.

-At another client, an international hotel franchisor, we designed a protocol to renovate hotels in a way that cut landfill use (and cost), donated durable goods to local charities, recycled a number of basic materials, all while increasing employee and guest satisfaction.

I hope that this white paper elicits a reaction and drives action that will turn the tide of history, decelerate the pace of climate change that is attributable to our own behaviors, and reverse the crash course to decline of our civilization that Humes and Rathje foresee.

Jennifer Levine Hartz, Corporate Hartz, LLC, www.corporatehartz.com.