A HEALTHIER VENDING PROGRAM

Implementation and Evaluation

EAT WELL

UCLA HEALTHY CAMPUS INITIATIVE
ENVISIONED AND SUPPORTED BY JANE AND TERRY SEMEL

PARTNERS

• UCLA Housing & Hospitality Services (HHS) became a champion of this effort when Pete Angelis, Director of HHS, was inspired to improve the nutritional quality of vending items on campus, based on the decision-architecture studies shared during an EatWell meeting.

• Once HHS decided to move forward, doctoral student Joe Viana led the effort by partnering EatWell nutritionists and Bob Kitay and Daryl Ansel of Dining Services to design, implement, and evaluate the pilot.

• Dr. Wendy Slusser, EatWell pod leader at the time, provided both the impetus for the pilot project and high-level supervision throughout.

CONTACT

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OVERVIEW

In collaboration with UCLA Housing and Hospitality Services (HHS), the EatWell pod of the UCLA Healthy Campus Initiative, envisioned and supported by Jane and Terry Semel, implemented a healthier vending pilot program in Fall 2013 to test the feasibility of encouraging healthier vending choices without impacting the bottom line. "Healthier choice" criteria were based on Los Angeles County Department of Public Health guidelines and further refined by EatWell nutritionists. The pilot incorporated basic decision-architecture principles, including bringing healthier choices to eye-level, arranging them in cohesive groups, and identifying them with an HCI EatWell sticker. To evaluate effectiveness, roughly one-third of all vending machines on campus were redesigned according to these principles, while remaining machines served as a comparison group. **Redesigned vending machines sold over eight times the number of healthier items, compared to conventional machines, without losing revenue or profit.**

PROJECT DETAILS

In addition to stakeholder engagement and consensus building, essential steps included the following:

1. **Identify nutrition criteria to distinguish healthier choices from other products:** We used the LA County guidelines, but the UC Global Food Initiative Healthy Vending Policy, which has since been created, can provide helpful minimum nutrition standards. Contact Kyrie Bass for GFI Vending Policy and Toolkit.

2. **Catalogue the nutritional information and classify current product line:** At UCLA this was not commercially available and thus had to be done by hand. This process involved developing a dataset of nutritional information for current inventory and applying the nutrition criteria to classify the products.

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DATA SNAPSHOT

- Researchers compared machine-level vend group sales volume between redesigned and comparison machines to assess purchasing behavior.
- To analyze financial performance, researchers compared machine-level revenue during the study period to revenue during the same period in the previous year.
- In addition, 100 vending machine customers were surveyed after they had made their purchase to better understand the customer base and their decision process.

RESOURCES

- Los Angeles County Department of Public Health Healthy Vending Guidelines

- Robles, B et al. Comparison of Nutrition Standards and Other Recommended Procurement Practice for Improving Institutional Food Offerings in Los Angeles County, 2010-2012. (2013) *Adv Nutr.* 4: 191-202.

- The UC Global Food Initiative Healthy Vending Policy is available from Kyrie Bass

3. **Conduct secondary classification review:** EatWell nutritionists reviewed the initial product classifications and made adjustments based on their expertise. Products that met initial nutrition criteria were reclassified if they contained corn syrup or other added sugar as one of the first three ingredients, any trans fats, or were fried. In addition, unsalted nut and seed products that did not meet the initial nutritional criteria because of high caloric and fat content were reclassified as healthier products.

4. **Determine existing recording structures:** Before designing the evaluation, we determined how machine-level product information was recorded. At UCLA, items were classified and tracked through "vend groups" rather than single-item tracking, so healthier items were classified as a single vend group for comparison purposes.

5. **Redesign machines to feature healthier products:** One to two large-item rows were dedicated to healthier products, which created a visually impactful group of preferred choices at eye level. A minimum of 30% of all smaller items, such as bars, were dedicated to healthier options. All healthier items were identified by an HCI EatWell sticker.

6. **Analyze sales reports:** Researchers analyzed machine-level sales reports to evaluate the project.

PROCESS INSIGHT

- It is important to know whether vending operates in-house or through a third party. A third party may require a change in contract language.

- After initial discussions and goal setting, it is crucial to determine how vending data are reported to identify methodological challenges early. UCLA Dining Services aligned existing reporting structures with the research goal of tracking the proportion of healthier items sold. The redesign was expertly implemented by Bob Kitay.

- Schedule weekly meetings in the beginning to identify potential roadblocks as early as possible. As the project progresses, frequent meetings are less necessary.

READ MORE: Check out the UCLA Newsroom article "Snack on this: Healthier choices score at campus vending machines," by Rebecca Kendall, to learn more about the project.