effie Awards Australia

2026
Case Study



Entry ID Number
1479

Agencies
TBWA\Australia

Client
VicReturn

Title
How we turned 10 cents into a million bucks

Category
A10. Not-For-Profit Organisations

Author
Zac Martin
TBWA\Australia

Advertising Council Australia | Marketing Association of Australia | Google

© This case study is the property of Advertising Council Australia (ACA) and protected by copyright and intellectual property laws throughout the world. The case study can be used for personal reasons only and should not be reproduced, distributed, sold or published without the express approval of ACA. Any educational facility interested in using the case history for educational purposes should contact effies@adcouncil.org.au

Q1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY & WHY DOES THIS CASE DESERVE AN AWARD?

This is not a story about recycling. It's a story about how advertising can create value. How brands have the power to reframe a benefit to make it more attractive, without physically changing the experience. And how we overcame friction to prevent 363 million drink containers from entering landfill.

In 2023, Victoria launched a Container Deposit Scheme. People were asked to shift from effortless wheelie bin recycling to a more demanding behaviour: taking drink containers to a refund point. For every container returned, you get a 10-cent refund.

A launch campaign generated awareness, but not action. Despite [redacted]% knowing about the scheme after one year, only [redacted]% of Victorians were participating.

Behavioural analysis revealed a large Contemplator segment, who supported the scheme but were held back by friction. The perceived effort outweighed the small financial reward and environmental impact. The value equation didn't add up.

With incentives fixed and operational friction unavoidable, CDS Vic needed to find a new a new way to drive more participation and more returns.

Our breakthrough insight; the real reward wasn't the 10-cents, it was the pride of doing something good. Particularly when people participated with their family.

The strategy was to reframe the benefit. Not a 10-cent refund, but something far more valuable – the feeling of being rich.

The 'Feel Like A Million Bucks' campaign added emotion to the value equation, by capturing how good it felt to participate, through the eyes of children. This came to life through a clever media strategy which reset the social norm and contextually tapped into moments of celebration.

The results exceeded all expectations. Participation increased +[redacted]ppts, adding [redacted] million new Victorian contributors (+[redacted]%). And monthly container returns jumped +24%.

Beyond behaviour change, the campaign delivered a measurable environmental impact, preventing 55,432 tonnes of CO_2 emissions and generating $15.4 million in value. Our social ROI was 1.9x.

This paper will show how we achieved it. How research shaped segmentation to unlock the barriers holding people back. How when rational incentives fall short, emotional value can drive lasting behaviour change at scale.

And how 10-cents can feel like a million bucks.

© 2026 Advertising Council Australia

Q2. WHAT WAS THE STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS CHALLENGE?

AN OVERHAUL OF RECYCLING IN VICTORIA

In November 2023, Victoria introduced a Container Deposit Scheme (CDS Vic). On the surface, it sounded simple: return your eligible cans, glass, and plastic bottles to a refund point and receive 10-cents in return. But in reality, it marked a profound shift in behaviour, asking millions of Victorians to unlearn decades of habit overnight.

A BETTER OUTCOME FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

This disruption wasn't without reason. Victoria's existing recycling system was far from perfect, with 17% of material collected so contaminated it had to be diverted to landfill. That's four million tonnes. Every year. [1] [2]

CDS Vic would help address this by separating drink containers before they entered the recycling system. It was a win for the containers, which could be 100% recycled into clean, high value, reusable materials. And it was a win for the remaining wheelie bin waste which would be less contaminated and less likely to be dumped in the ground.

The only party who didn't win was Victorians, who were being asked to change their behaviour.

A LAUNCH CAMPAIGN WHICH DROVE AWARENESS BUT NOT ACTION

The 2023 launch campaign announced the new scheme, explaining how CDS Vic worked, and the 10-cent refund benefit. It was as functional as functional gets.

Chart 1 shows what the launch campaign looked like.

CHART 1

LAUNCH CAMPAIGN REFERENCE



Source: Launch Campaign Post-Campaign Report (VicReturn, 2024)

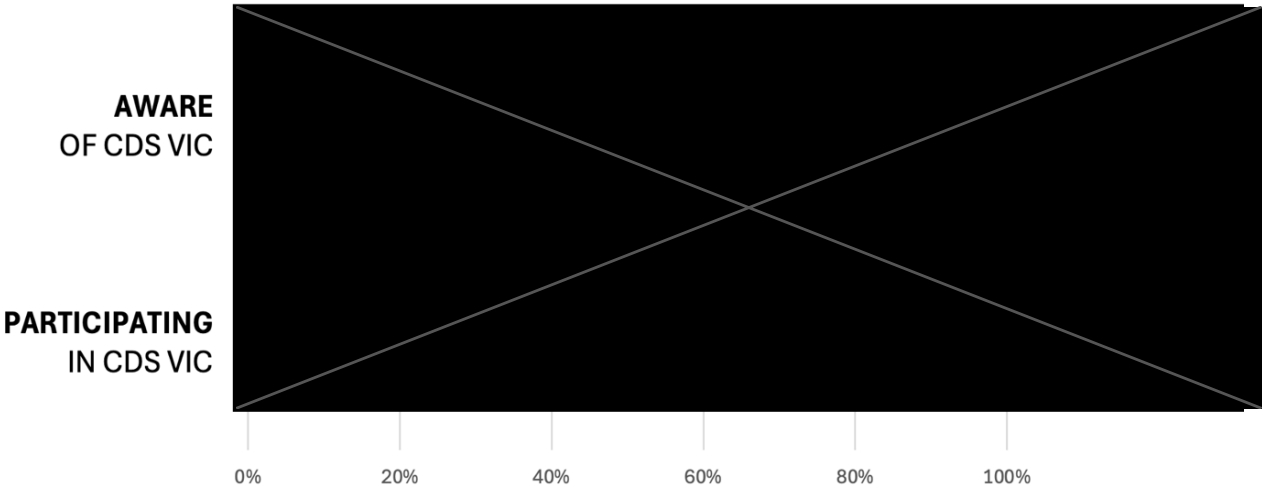
© 2026 Advertising Council Australia

It drove unprecedented awareness, with [redacted]% of Victorians having heard about the scheme. But there was a problem - a chasm between knowing about CDS Vic and taking part. After 12 months, only [redacted]% of Victorians had participated. [3]

See Chart 2.

CHART 2

AWARENESS TO CONVERSION



Source: CDS Vic Brand Tracking (Quantum, 2024)

And this chasm was becoming a problem.

NOT CONTRIBUTING ENOUGH TO THE BIG SCARY TARGET

The Victorian Government has committed to a long-term goal of net zero emissions by 2045. To achieve this, the state must reduce 80% of all waste (not just recyclable waste) in landfill by 2030. [4]

In 2024, there was still a long way to go, sitting at 69.5%. [5]

Of course, many efforts contribute to this target. CDS Vic is just part of the solution. But it was clear the scheme needed to work harder.

For context, in Victoria's first eight months of CDS Vic, the average monthly volume was only [redacted]m. Queensland's first eight months was 77m. When you consider Victoria's population is 25% larger... the state was falling short. [6] [7] [8]

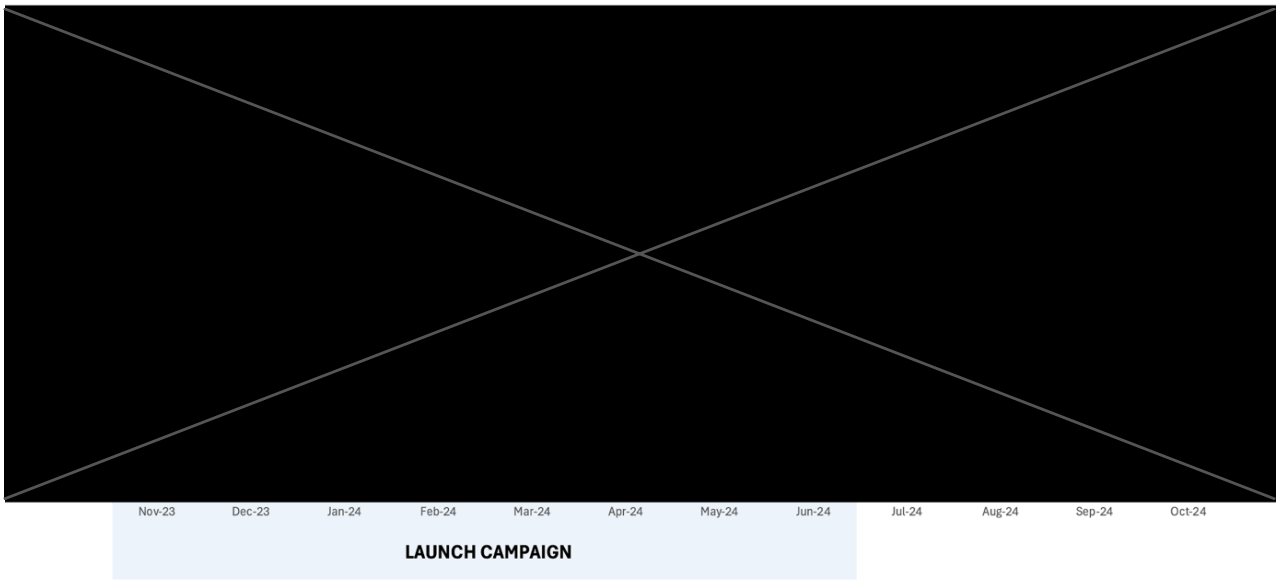
Chart 3 shows how after the launch campaign, returns continued to increase, but this was likely driven by seasonality (people drink more as the weather gets warmer). [6]

© 2026 Advertising Council Australia

Chart 3 shows how after the launch campaign, returns continued to increase, but this was likely driven by seasonality (people drink more as the weather gets warmer). [6]

CHART 3

CONTAINERS RETURNED BY MONTH



Source: Monthly Container Volume Data (VicReturn, 2023 - 2024)

It felt like an impossible challenge: to break a habit entrenched over decades, which Victorians were aware of, but not acting on.

Oh, and our media budget was -29% less per month than the launch campaign.

SOURCES

[1] “Recycling is changing for the better” (Sustainability Victoria, 2023)
[2] Waste Report (State of the Environment Victoria, 2023)
[3] CDS Vic Brand Tracking (Quantum, 2023 – 2026)
[4] Strategic Plan (Victoria Government, 2023-2026)
[5] Annual Report (Department of Energy, Environment & Climate Change VIC, 2025)
[6] Monthly Container Volume Data (VicReturn, 2023-2026)
[7] Annual Container Volume Data (Containers For Change QLD, 2019)
[8] Population Data (ABS, 2025)

© 2026 Advertising Council Australia

Q3. WHAT WERE YOUR OBJECTIVES? State specific goals.

The launch campaign had nailed awareness. This time it had to be about action.

So you won't see any soft objectives about brand health or intentions to act. Because to reduce landfill, there were only two hard-hitting measures that mattered.

Between November 2024 and March 2026, our job was to:

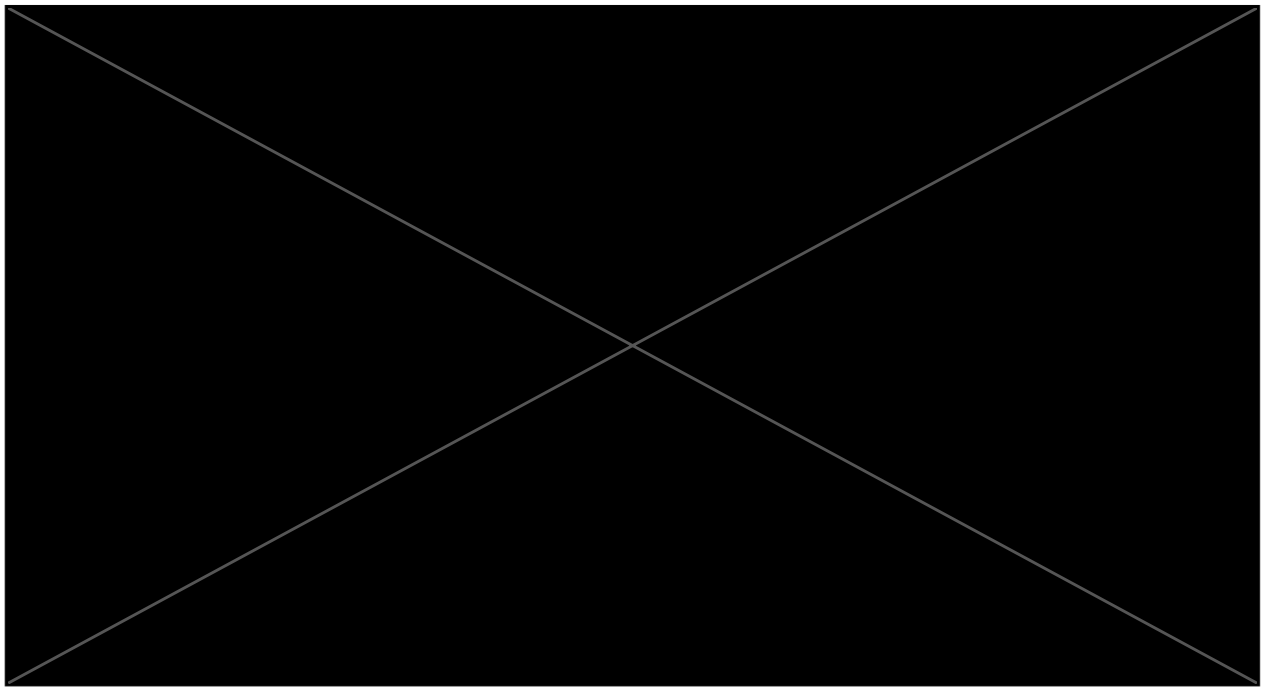
OBJECTIVE #1: PARTICIPATION
Increase participation from [redacted]% of Victorians to [redacted]% (+[redacted]ppts)
At the end of the launch campaign, only [redacted]% of Victorians had participated in the scheme. [1]

Our objective was to increase this to [redacted]%. Social norming has long been used as a powerful tool in driving behaviour change [2]. Our target was to capture more than half the state to drive a 'tipping point' effect.

See Chart 4.

CHART 4

PARTICIPATION RATE TARGET



OCTOBER 24 MARCH 26

Source: CDS Vic Brand Tracking (Quantum, 2024)

To reinforce how ambitious this would be - based on the Victorian population, this would drive an additional [redacted] people participating in CDS Vic. Or an increase of 42%! [3]

© 2026 Advertising Council Australia

OBJECTIVE #2: VOLUME

Increase containers returned from [redacted] million to [redacted] million a month

Every container returned through the scheme is a container that's guaranteed to be diverted from landfill. The more returned, the better for the environment.

Our objective for the campaign period was [redacted]b containers returned, or [redacted]m per month. This target was set based on CDS Vic's commitment to partners who facilitate the program, where a contractual promise had been made on volume in line with the state's broader net zero objective.

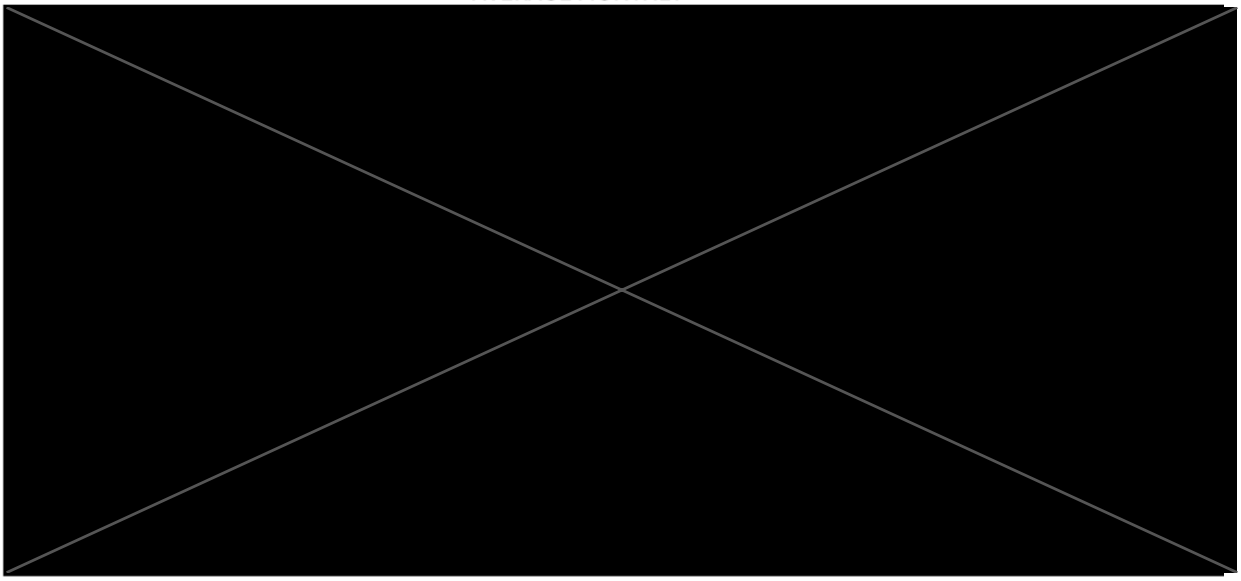
Setting a baseline wasn't easy given how young the scheme was. But for context, the average of the six highest performing months prior to the campaign was [redacted] million per month. Our target was to grow this by +14%. With less monthly media investment than last time. [4]

See Chart 5.

CHART 5

CONTAINERS RETURNED TARGET

AVERAGE MONTHLY



AVERAGE OF TOP PERFORMING SIX MONTHS
Prior to November 2024

AVERAGE DURING CAMPAIGN
November 2024 - March 2026

Source: Monthly Container Volume Data (VicReturn, 2023 - 2024)

SOURCES

[1] CDS Vic Brand Tracking (Quantum, 2023 – 2026)
[2] "Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion" (Cialdini, 1984)
[3] Population Data (ABS, 2025)
[4] Monthly Container Volume Data (VicReturn, 2023-2026)

© 2026 Advertising Council Australia

Q4. WHAT WAS YOUR STRATEGY AND HOW DID YOU GET THERE?

GOOD INTENTIONS THAT DIDN'T RESULT IN CHANGE

As of 2024, 81% of Australians considered themselves good or very good recyclers [1]. And 92% of Victorians were supportive of CDS Vic [2]. Most people want to do the right thing. And yet only [redacted]% were participating. We needed to investigate who wasn't, and why.

THE MOVABLE MIDDLE

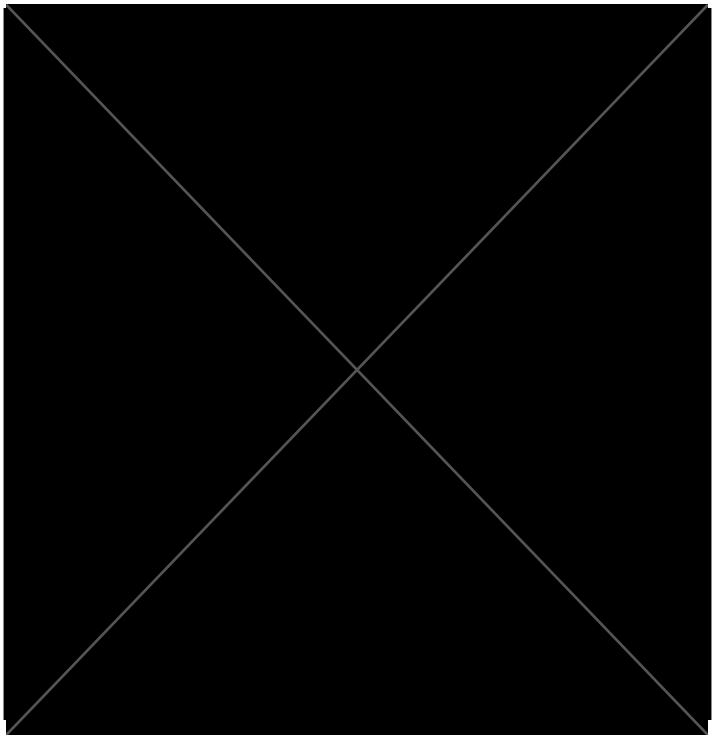
We started with a behavioural segmentation, which revealed a clear opportunity.

At one end, the Rejectors and the Non-Considerers. Both too hard to convert. But in the middle - a large group of people who weren't opposed to the scheme, they just hadn't acted yet. Some had considered participating but hadn't taken the step, others intended to but hadn't found the moment. Aligned in principle, but not in practice.

Combined, this audience of Contemplators made up [redacted]% of Victorians. See Chart 6. [2]

CHART 6

CDS VIC SEGMENTATION



Source: CDS Vic Segmentation, Motivation & Barriers Research (Verian, 2024)

FOR THESE 'CONTEMPLATORS', THE VALUE EQUATION DIDN'T ADD UP

We dug deeper into what was stopping Contemplators from turning interest into action. The answer? Friction not ideology. [2]

Research showed they believed in the environmental benefits. But there were just too many barriers getting in the way.

For years, recycling had been effortless. The wheelie bin was trusted, convenient, and automatic. The new scheme disrupted this deeply ingrained behaviour, suddenly requiring more planning and more effort.

© 2026 Advertising Council Australia

To participate in CDS Vic, you had to work out which containers were eligible, store them, then load them into your car. And deal with any spills. Then drive to a refund point, maybe one suburb over. And perhaps wait in line. Then discover the collection machine is full. Or broken.

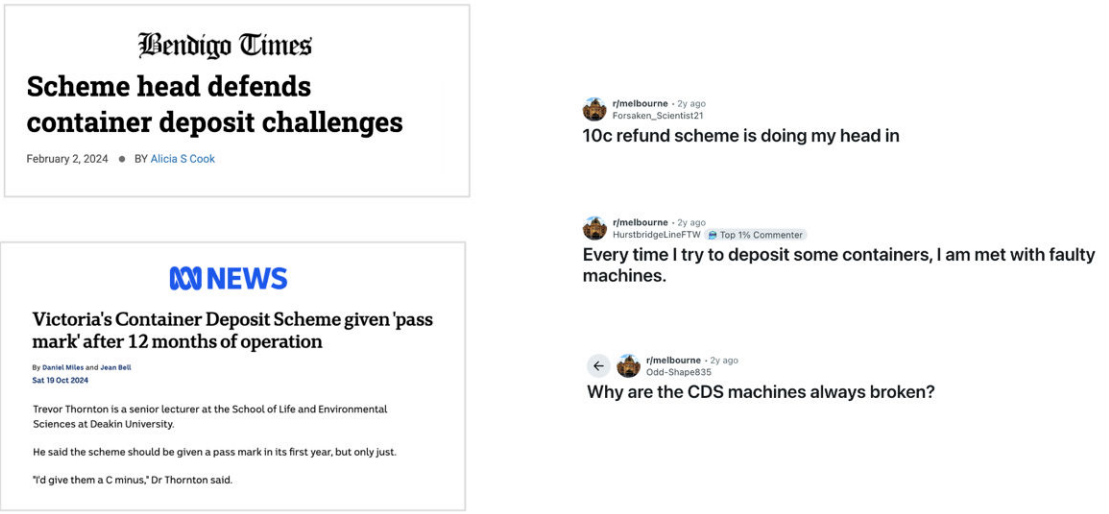
It was just too hard.

In the media, for every 'this person paid for their wedding by returning containers' story, there was an another about the scheme's challenges. On places like Reddit, Victorians vented: "I have been frustrated so many times that I gave up on trying". [3]

Chart 7 shows some examples of the narrative that was stopping Contemplators from converting.

CHART 7

SOCIAL COMMENTARY ABOUT CDS VIC



Source: Bendigo Times, ABC News, Reddit (2024)

What had previously been seamless, was much, much more difficult.

Behavioural theory tells us even high motivation collapses when effort becomes too much [4]. And for Contemplators, that is exactly what happened.

In their minds, it just wasn't worth it. Too much time, effort, planning, petrol, and more... all for 10-cents.

The value equation didn't add up.

So how do you add value without changing a system? Because we couldn't add more incentives. The 10-cent refund is regulated nationally. And we couldn't eliminate friction, at least not quickly and not through communications alone.

© 2026 Advertising Council Australia

REFRAMING HOW REWARDING 10-CENTS FELT

When we spoke with Victorians who were engaged, it unlocked our powerful insight: participating in the scheme sparked pride. [2]

It allowed people to contribute to their community and to the planet. This was particularly strong among families - where they often participated together.

Every trip to CDS Vic was an opportunity to model and reinforce good family values. The reward wasn't the 10-cent refund. It was the feeling of doing the right thing, which was priceless.

And good news: nearly half of our Contemplators audience had young families. [2]

Our strategy was simple but powerful; reframe the benefit. Contemplators wouldn't change their behaviour for 10-cents, but they would for something worth far more; the feeling of being rich. To drive action, CDS Vic would show that participating in the scheme was good for your family. And that's something you could feel great about.

SOURCES

[1] Recycling Behaviours Report (Cleanaway Waste Management Limited, 2021 - 2024)
[2] CDS Vic Segmentation, Motivation & Barriers Research (Verian, 2024)
[3] "Why are the CDS machines always broken?" (Reddit, 2024)
[4] BMAT Behavioural Change Model (Fogg, 2024)

© 2026 Advertising Council Australia

Q5. HOW WAS YOUR STRATEGY BROUGHT TO LIFE?

Out of this reframing, came our big idea: 'Feel Like A Million Bucks'.

MAKING VICTORIANS FEEL RICHER
At the heart of the campaign was the story of a young girl returning her containers. In exchange she gets not only the 10-cent refund, but something much more valuable – the feeling of doing the right thing. She's the envy of her friends. And most importantly, standing next to her is her dad. He's even prouder.

Telling this story through the eyes of children unlocked greater emotion, particularly for parents and grandparents. The tone was energetic and vibrant, something you don't see much of in non-profit advertising. We knew our Contemplators couldn't be rationalised into compliance, instead we cut through with an unexpected hit to the feels.

RESETTING THE SOCIAL NORM
If the job of creative was to reframe the value, the job of media was to establish a new social norm.

The media strategy was designed to make participation feel like the default social expectation. We showed up everywhere - across TV, radio, audio, and outdoor. Each time creating a sense that this wasn't emerging behaviour, it was already happening at scale.

The campaign extended into online video, catch-up TV, digital, social, and influencers, ensuring the idea followed people throughout their day. We embedded the scheme into culture through podcast integrations like on *The Toni and Ryan Show*, where Toni spoke about her addiction to Diet Coke and the unexpected satisfaction of returning her cans.

Community partnerships, sports clubs, and local activations pushed the million-dollar feeling out of advertising and into real life. It became visible, shared, and socially endorsed.

LEVERAGING MOMENTS OF CELEBRATION
To make participation feel even more rewarding, the media plan was built around moments of celebration. In these occasions Victorians were more likely to be:

1. With their family
2. Drinking
3. Already celebrating and feeling like a million bucks!

We upweighted our investment targeting moments like Christmas and Easter, as well as cultural celebrations like Moomba Festival and The Royal Melbourne Show. Bespoke contextual creative leveraged major sporting events like the Australian Open, AFL Finals and the summer of Cricket. Even the journey there became part of the plan, with Uber placements targeting people on their way to events, and UberEats targeting people ordering drinks.

© 2026 Advertising Council Australia

With 30% of the population born overseas [1], we extended this strategy across cultural celebrations like Lunar New Year, Diwali, Ramadan and many more. Translated executions of outdoor advertising ran in high-density multicultural communities, and the campaign extended through retail media in Asian and Indian supermarkets, local press, and digital platforms like WeChat, Webo, RedNote, and Viber.

A LITTLE INCENTIVE FOR THOSE WHO NEEDED IT

We said up top that changing the incentive wasn't possible. Which it wasn't. But we were committed to motivating all Contemplators to take action, even the ones who wouldn't be converted by communications alone.

So we bypassed the red tape and gave Victorians an extra nudge, with a non-traditional sales promotion: 'Win a Million Cents'. The more people returned, the more chances they had to take home $10,000. While it would never be enough on its own, this full-funnel approach complemented the bigger strategic reframe.

The result was a campaign designed not just to communicate, but to convert - moving Contemplators from passive awareness to active participation. And make Victorians feel like a million bucks for doing so.

See the Creative Reel for a taste of the integrated campaign.

SOURCES

[1] Population Data (Health Victoria, 2024)

© 2026 Advertising Council Australia

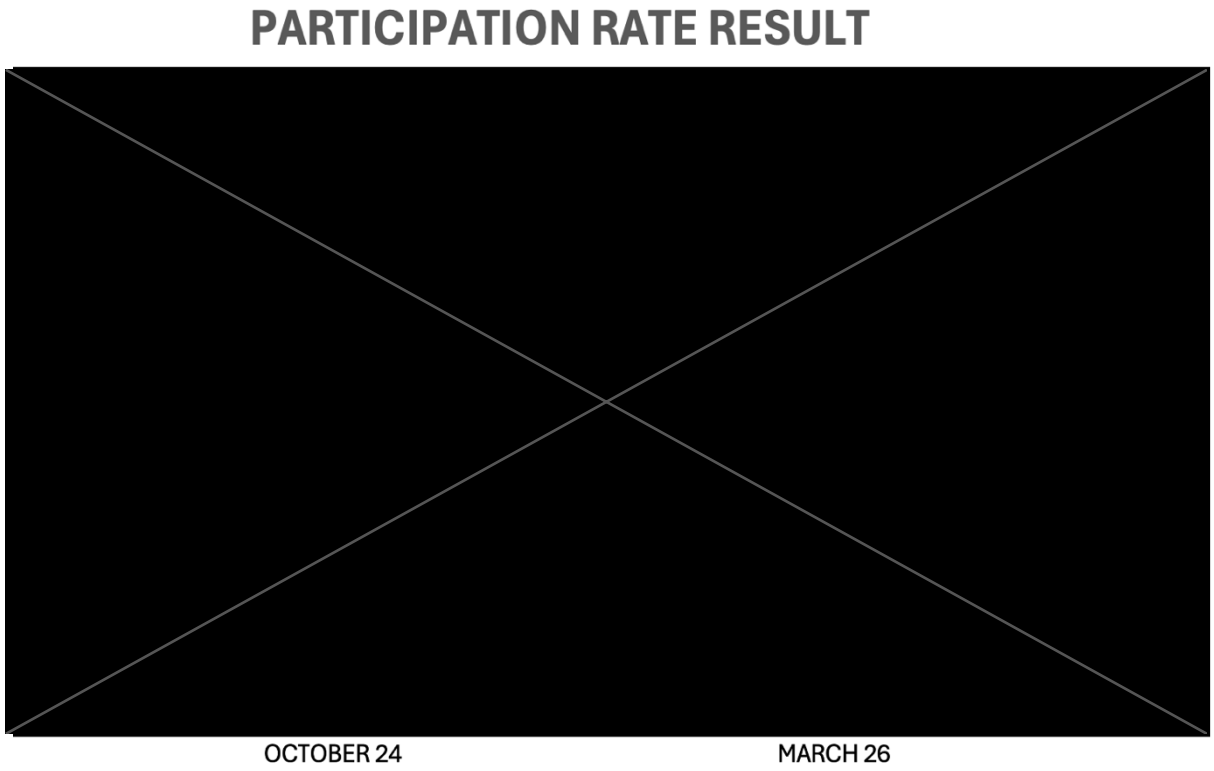
Q6. HOW DO YOU KNOW THAT YOUR CAMPAIGN WAS SUCCESSFUL?

We had two objectives to deliver between the campaign period of November 2024 to March 2026.

OBJECTIVE #1: PARTICIPATION
Increase participation from [redacted]% of Victorians to [redacted]% (+[redacted]pts)
Participation didn't increase to [redacted]%, it exploded to [redacted]%! The number of Victorians participating in the scheme climbed +[redacted]%. [1]

This growth of +[redacted]pts resulted in [redacted]m incremental Victorians participating for the first time. A new norm was established. [2]

See Chart 8.



Source: CDS Vic Brand Tracking (Quantum, 2024 - 2026)

In addition to the above, we also increased the number of Victorians who started *indirectly* participating. These are people who weren't previously active, but began, for example, giving their containers to children next door. This more than doubled from [redacted]% to [redacted]% of Victorians (+[redacted]pts). [1]

© 2026 Advertising Council Australia

OBJECTIVE #2: VOLUME

Increase containers returned from [redacted] million to [redacted] million a month

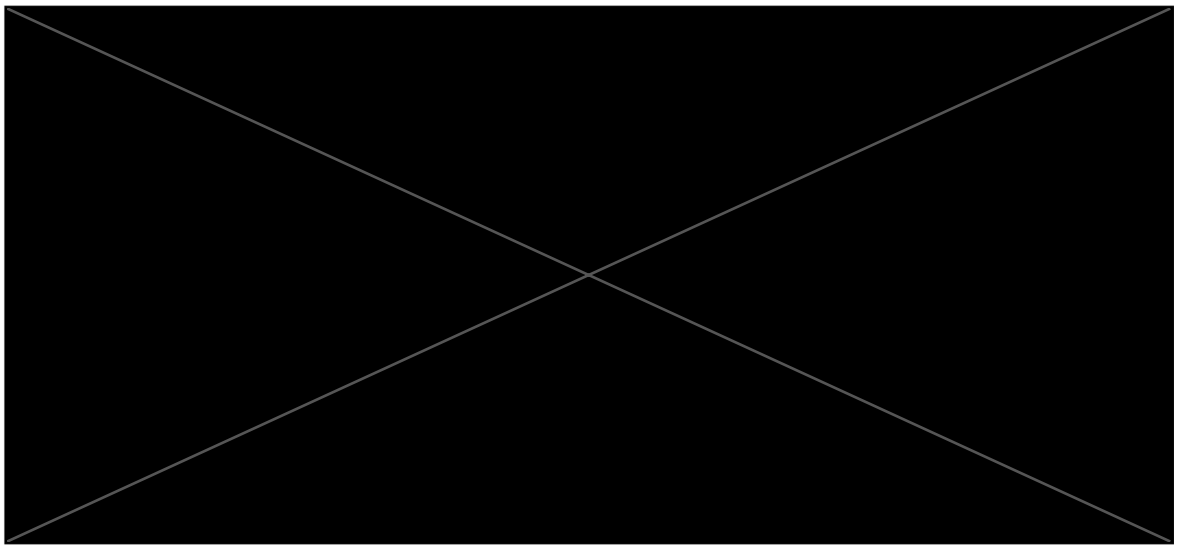
During the campaign, the average monthly containers returned increased to [redacted] million. [3]

This was +8% above our target, and +23% above our baseline.

See Chart 9.

CONTAINERS RETURNED RESULT

AVERAGE MONTHLY



AVERAGE OF TOP PERFORMING SIX MONTHS
Prior to November 2024

AVERAGE DURING CAMPAIGN
November 2024 - March 2026

Source: Monthly Container Volume Data (VicReturn, 2023 - 2026)

Chart 10 shows the number of containers returned by month – with the campaign delivering new records throughout peak season (summer) and low season (winter).

CHART 10

CONTAINERS RETURNED BY MONTH



Source: Monthly Container Volume Data (VicReturn, 2023 - 2026)

© 2026 Advertising Council Australia

AD TRACKING

To help isolate the effects of the campaign versus other factors, ad tracking research was conducted in March 2026. This report found a significant lift in participation when comparing those who saw the campaign versus those who didn't. But here's the killer stat: More than 1 in 7 Victorians who recalled seeing the campaign said they started collecting containers as a result! [4]

SOURCES

[1] CDS Vic Brand Tracking (Quantum, 2023 – 2026)
[2] Population Data (ABS, 2025)
[3] Monthly Container Volume Data (VicReturn, 2023-2026)
[4] CDS Vic Ad Testing (Quantum, 2026)

Q7. WAS THE CAMPAIGN A GOOD INVESTMENT?

To measure our success, we look to the purpose of CDS Vic; to reduce landfill and ultimately lower the state's carbon footprint. Using a forecast equivalent to 'customer lifetime value', we calculate the tonnes of CO_2 that were prevented from entering the atmosphere. This is achieved both through the reduction of waste in landfill, and the reduction in demand for virgin resources to create new containers.

Here's how we calculate it:

During the campaign period, we converted [redacted] million new Victorians from contemplating to participating. [1] [2]

The average participant returns [redacted] containers per year [3]. Which means the campaign generated [redacted] million additional containers per year.

However this behaviour does not stop after one year. Research in social psychology finds that other similar behaviours can continue for years or even decades - long after they are established unless disrupted by external change [4].

Modelling by CDS Vic forecasts that after five years, only [redacted]% of people who participate in the scheme will defect out. [5]

So we reduce our volume by -[redacted]%, then multiply this by five years. Which gives us a forecast impact of [redacted] billion incremental containers returned.

You'll recall up top that 17% of recycling wheelie bins were previously diverted to landfill due to contamination [6]. So, it wouldn't be fair to claim all incremental containers returned, only 17%. Therefore 363 million containers are forecast to avoid landfill.

For every 6,548 containers returned, one tonne of CO_2 is prevented from entering the atmosphere [7]. Therefore, we saved 55,432 tonnes.

Studies show for every tonne of CO_2 saved, the environmental benefit is valued at $277.50. [8]

© 2026 Advertising Council Australia

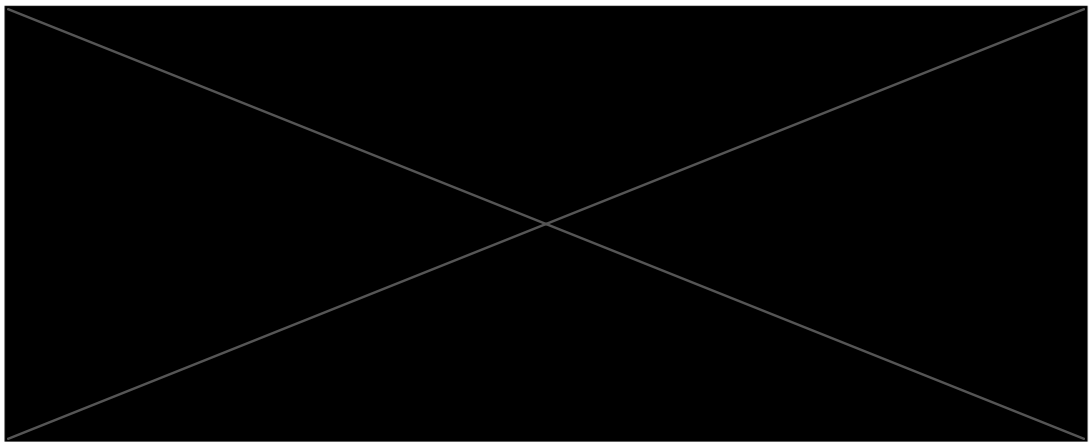
Therefore the campaign generated $15.4m in environmental benefit.

With a creative investment of $[redacted]m and a media and sponsorship investment of $[redacted]m, our combined campaign cost was $[redacted]m.

Therefore **our social ROI is 1.9x**.

For a detailed breakdown of this calculation, see Chart 11.

CHART 11
RETURN ON INVESTMENT CALCULATION



However, this assumes the average Victorian will stop using the scheme after only five years. If you forecast using a 10-year retention figure (and allowing for a [redacted]% defection), **our social ROI is 3.2x**.

We'll also highlight, this methodology only captures the value of the containers diverted from landfill, and not the improved quality of the remaining wheelie bin recycling. It also doesn't reflect additional benefits of the scheme like the reduction in litter, the increase in charitable donations, job creation, or the money back into Victorian pockets (which increased +$14.9 million during the campaign).

One last point. In case you're wondering "Why haven't you included the 10-cent refund in your ROI costs?" Well, the scheme is structured in a way where the beverage industry (eg. Coca-Cola) funds this expense.

SOURCES

[1] CDS Vic Brand Tracking (Quantum, 2023 – 2026)
[2] Population Data (ABS, 2025)
[3] Monthly Container Volume Data (VicReturn, 2023-2026)
[4] "A revive and analysis of the use of 'habit' in understanding, predicting and influencing health-related behaviour", Health Psychological Review (Gardner, 2014)
[5] CDS Vic forecast defection rate extrapolated from 2.4 years of data (VicReturn, 2026)
[6] "Recycling is changing for the better" (Sustainability Victoria, 2023)
[7] Life Cycle Assessment of Tasmania's Container Refund Scheme (Lifecycle Australia, 2026)
[8] "Comprehensive evidence implies a high social cost of CO_2" Nature (Rennert et al, 2022)

© 2026 Advertising Council Australia

Q8. DEMONSTRATE THAT THE RESULT WAS NOT DUE TO OTHER FACTORS

For a behaviour change campaign like this, we acknowledge it is almost impossible to truly isolate the effects of advertising. As a non-profit, we don't have the privilege of expensive econometric marketing mix modelling tools either. But here is our best effort:

Did you benefit from inertia rather than the campaign?
Unfortunately the scheme hasn't been around long enough to isolate significant periods where campaigns were not in market or still growing simply for being 'new'. This makes it difficult to isolate organic growth.

Nor is there widely available data from other similar markets. But as a comparison, Western Australia's scheme took 44 months to reach 65% participation. CDS Vic achieved [redacted]% in just 28 months. [1][2]

Did you benefit from seasonal spikes?
Actually yes. An avid judge would notice our campaign period includes two summers, where Victorians drink more and therefore have more containers to deposit. However, we can adjust for this, and a like-for-like comparison still shows a +19.3% increase in containers returned. [3]

Did an increase in refund points drive physical availability?
No. Between the start and end of our campaign, the number of collection points was stable. [3]

Did you invest more in media?
While the campaign media spend was bigger in absolute terms compared to the launch campaign, it ran for a much longer period. The average monthly media investment was -29% less than the launch campaign. We were more efficient.

Did you benefit from changes in broader recycling attitudes?
No, these have been stable since 2023. [4]

Does cost of living make 10-cents more attractive?
Yes, this may have factored. However, when the campaign launched NAB's Household Financial Stress Index was 58.5. While it fluctuated up and down, the average since has been 58.4. You also have to remember this work was in market long before the recent interest rate rises and petrol prices skyrocketing. [5]

Are people drinking more now than a few years ago?
No. It is difficult to source publicly available manufacturing data but we use NSW as a proxy. The number of containers introduced into their system (as opposed to recycled) was flat between 2024 and 2025. [6]

Did the consumer promo drive all the results?
No. The 'Win a Million Cents' promo only ran for six weeks, to encourage a lift in the off season.

© 2026 Advertising Council Australia

SOURCES

[1] CDS Vic Brand Tracking (Quantum, 2023 – 2026)
[2] Container Deposit Scheme Press Release (Department for Water & Environmental Regulation WA, 2026)
[3] Monthly Container Volume Data (VicReturn, 2023-2026)
[4] Recycling Behaviours Report (Cleanaway Waste Management Limited, 2021 - 2024)
[5] Consumer Sentiment Survey (NAB, 2024 – 2026)
[6] Annual Report (Return & Earn NSW, 2024 & 2025)

Q9. GIVE CONTEXT TO BUDGET IN COMPARISON TO COMPETITORS.

Q10. GIVE CONTEXT TO THE BRAND'S OVERALL BUDGET.

Q11. MEDIA BUDGET ELABORATION

The media investment was largely in paid media and sponsorship. Creative costs made up [redacted]% of the total investment in the campaign.

Q12. DESCRIBE OWNED MEDIA ACTIVITY

Campaign assets were used to refresh the website and social channels, as well as collection points and materials.

Q13. OUTLINE ANY SPONSORSHIPS

The media investment includes the cost of sponsorship for sport (such as AFL Victoria, Carlton Football Club, Tennis Victoria, Cricket Victoria, and Melbourne Stars) as well as tourism partners (such as Moomba, Royal Melbourne Show, and Zoos Victoria).

Q14. OUTLINE COMMUNICATION TOUCHPOINTS

TV
Online video
Catch up TV
Outdoor
Cinema
Print
Radio/audio
Digital
Social
Search
Influencers

© 2026 Advertising Council Australia