



Business Spotlight

Q Center

Conference Center
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qcenter.com

The Basics

One of the world's largest meeting facilities, Q Center offers a secluded, distraction-free environment with 1,042 guest rooms and 150,000+ square feet of IACC-certified meeting space, all situated on 95 acres of tranquility. Q Center is an undisputed leader in conference center technology with a full-service, on-site events and media team. At Q Center, groups of 10 to 2,000 receive the same high level of personal attention.

The Facts

- ✓ Opened: 2003
- ✓ Began composting: 2012
- ✓ What is composted: pre- and post-consumer food scraps
- ✓ Size: 890,000 square feet
- ✓ Serves: 45,000 customers per month
- ✓ Hauler: Advanced Disposal



*"Our office windows overlook the compost compactor, and we **cannot smell anything.**"*

- Deborah French, Senior Sales & Marketing Communications Manager



The Launch

Q Center has a long history of environmental excellence. Currently, 80% of the waste generated is diverted from the landfill via recycling and composting, and they are looking for ways to reach a **90% diversion rate**. In 2011, Q Center's food service provider, Aramark, began exploring ways to reduce food waste in its operations.

Brian Holt, Aramark's Facility Director, brought together the waste hauler, Aramark's Director of Food & Beverage, and Q Center management in order to discuss the feasibility and logistics of a compost program. To Holt, it was imperative that all stakeholders worked together to come up with a solution. *"Everyone had to have some skin in the game," Holt stated.*

Through these meetings, the waste hauler realized that composting would be beneficial to the business as it would help to eliminate food from the single stream recycling containers. This would create a **cleaner stream for both compost and recycling**. They were on board. With the buy-in from Aramark's kitchen staff and the financial support of Q Center, the conference center started composting in 2012. The program has been **cost neutral** to operate.

The Program

Ten 32-gallon compost totes, each lined with a biodegradable bag, are placed throughout the food prep and bussing areas. Staff members place all food scraps in the bins. Once the bin is about $\frac{3}{4}$ full, the bin is wheeled to and dumped into a 30 yard compactor, located off the loading dock. Each tote is brought to the rinse station to be rinsed before it is put in use again. The compactor is picked up one to two times a week, and the food scraps are processed at Compost Supply in Glen Ellyn, IL.



Quick Tip

Q Center uses binder clips on all four sides of the compost toter to keep the bag from falling in from the weight of food scraps.



The Marketing Benefit

“Do not underestimate the marketing potential of a composting program. Consider the marketing benefits as a way to offset the cost. It gets you a lot of mileage.

Most corporations have a waste program, and people are always asking about what environmental things you do, so anything you do that others do not gives you a leg up.”

- Deborah French, Senior Sales & Marketing Communications Manager

The publicity can be done through blogs, social media, certifications and even white pages. French believes that the more avenues a company promotes its environmental initiatives the better.



The Training

Setting up a system that is easy for employees to use is critical to a successful compost program. New employees tend to adapt to composting faster than longer-term employees, who need to create new habits. There was contamination of gloves and plastic wrap initially, but as the employees got into a routine, the process became second nature.

The biggest challenge with composting is sourcing products to **ensure that disposable food service ware is compostable.** *“We go through over 1,000 foam cups a day, and it’s been difficult to find a compostable cup that is cost effective,”* says Holt.



The Next Steps

The next area of expansion for Q Center’s compost program is in the meeting rooms. **Signage is key** in this effort as conference attendees may not be accustomed to putting their food scraps in a compost bin.

Q Center offers compostable to-go containers and utensils, so the next step is to replace the foam cups with compostable cups.

The Results

Since beginning the program in November of 2012, Q Center has composted over **250 tons** of food scraps.



The Advice

*“Make sure that you get a waste audit if you are a large institution because it is beneficial to know **how much you are actually wasting.**”*

- Yannick Le Boulch, Director of Food & Beverage