



RETHINKING YOUR TRASH: WHAT WE CAN LEARN FROM RUBICON GLOBAL

BY KAREN WHITT | 18 AUGUST 2015



Disruptive technology is starting to seem like an end itself rather than a means. Everyone wants to be the next [insert revolutionary business here], but targeting existing models is often a misguided venture. Waste management leader [Rubicon Global](#) has a new idea that's making people ask if they will be "Uber for trash." The on-demand waste removal service that Rubicon plans to roll out is a lot more than just repackaging a popular idea, though. What can other industries learn from their approach?

Trash pickup is about as commoditized as services get. It isn't an area where anybody expects to see major innovation, and that's an important element in creating success. Rubicon has already raised \$80 million to breathe new life into the sector through a dynamic approach to pickup that allows users to signal when they need service. Instead of a one-size-fits-all model — a Greyhound bus to Uber's sleek personal driver — the firm offers refuse removal tailored to each client. Don't look to the App Store for ideas on new ways to break ground: focus on the sleepy corner of work that hasn't changed since before anyone can remember.

It's easy to become enchanted by the idea of new technology and the possibilities it creates. A shortly thereafter. Googling "Uber for" will result in a veritable Uber solution to everything. However, common sense dictates that some industries don't need new come-to-you players. Dominos, for example, probably already has the pizza delivery market pretty well under control. While click-to-call pickup is the headlining act, Rubicon is planning to leverage several different technologies to make its service a reality. Rubicon is automating refuse sorting and adding cameras and other sensors to bins to collect data, helping further refine the service. New York City sees the same set of solutions, as the municipality is reportedly considering connecting trash receptacles via Wi-Fi. Technology should be treated as an enabler rather than the reason itself for a new product or service.

Rubicon is committed to running the waste industry more efficiently than its competitors. To make innovation a reality, Rubicon hired Oscar Salazar, founding CTO of Uber. Rubicon CEO Nate Morris notes that the company brings in the best and brightest talent in each industry it serves, which is uncommon in waste management. Last year, the company hired Michael Jones, formerly the director of clinical education and sustainability at the Health Trust Purchasing Group, to help better apply its services to healthcare providers. New businesses, whether startup or a different direction for established players, require constant attention. Instead of letting them languish and die on the vine in the face of challenges, success means looking at problems from different angles and with fresh, informed eyes.

Success is not going to always mean a revolutionary idea. By focusing on creating a market or being different for the sake of it, many players will miss the mark. The most important lessons that we can learn from companies like Uber are often well below the surface. Technology is evolving and allowing for brand new approaches to processes that haven't changed in years — sometimes decades. To approach real estate, often the best question to ask is: "How can I make this a better experience?" Will Rubicon be the next Uber for trash? Probably not. But that's the wrong question. Will Rubicon succeed in turning waste management on its ear? Almost certainly.

A mentor, a real estate executive and a mom, Karen spends time all over the map. If she isn't traveling, Karen is busy with everything from IREM to Virginia Tech's Real Estate program. When she has a few minutes to spare, she considers it a personal mission to find new homes for all of Lucky Dog Animal Rescue's four-legged companions.