

Hot Stuff Yesterday, Junk Today

A growing landfill issue

PC/Mac Donations are always welcome, but as the equipment gets older, the welcome mat sometimes gets pulled. Many communities recycle electronics, but not all items are accepted. With toxic materials regulations and other hassles, it may pay to contact an e-waste removal service to solve the problem.

What to do with the old PCs?

So you just finished upgrading all of the computers in your company. Congratulations, that's usually a pretty tough job but it's always well worth the effort. Now, what are you going to do with all those old computers? Whether you have two, 200 or 2000 you could really have a situation on your hands considering toxic materials regulations.

There is good news though. As a school donation, depending on how old the computers are, they could be a very good tool for kids just getting started. Your own employees might be interested in acquiring one. Or you could contract with an electronics recycler and avoid the possible hassle. Let's look at the choices.

Who wants them and why

As a donation, they don't need to be top-of-the-line models and anything in the three to four year old range is usually acceptable. As long as the equipment is in decent shape and you have all the parts, these folks are usually interested:

- Local private schools
- Government-sponsored charities
- After school/police department sponsored learning centers
- Community/private trades retraining programs

If you think that donating the computers works for you, there are a few things you should do to make the donation complete and hassle free to all involved.

- Make sure to wipe the hard drives of any company information.
- Once you have the drive completely wiped, reinstall the original operating system.
- Depending on the organization, you could install an open source software like OpenOffice if they don't have the resources for a paid suite, but check first. They may prefer to use Google Docs or some other solution.
- Finally, gather up all of the original CDs, the keyboard, mouse, monitor and power cords.

All packaged together, this makes a nice little setup for someone to get started working with computers.

Who wants them and why (cont.)

Don't forget your own employees. Some of them may be interested in purchasing an inexpensive setup like this for a child. If you don't want to be on the hook for support, make sure that the employee is clear on that before you take the check or cash. Use the same 2 steps above for prep and you're good to go.

What if they're older or no one wants them?

If the computers are five years or older, they're starting to get a little too long in the tooth to be of much use. Additionally, many of the materials in a PC are toxic and might be regulated by your community as to how they're disposed of. So in other words, the trash can is a no go.

A simple solution at this point is to talk to an electronics waste recycler who can easily take care of the problem for you. Some will charge a fee to take the waste but don't take the first one, look around. You may find a company that does the materials reclamation themselves and will take the waste for free.

Make sure you talk to them about taking your monitors, especially if you have any old CRT monitors. The lead in them is a big problem and many states have fairly large fines for improper disposal. Check with your local city trash collection department and Goodwill Industries. Also, since many organizations use recycling as a fund raiser, they may also take electronics.

Sidenote

There's a fair amount of silver and gold in the components of a computer. Estimates from Science Daily put the amounts at 320 tons of gold and more than 7,500 tons of silver that are used in electronics production per year. Of this amount, less than 15% a year is recovered. Recycling keeps this out of the landfills of the world and reuses expensive resources.