

Giving Back Through Old Gadgets

Don't Let Your Last Cell Phone Collect Dust on a Bookshelf

by lola akinmade-åkerström

You've finally bought that sleek ultra-thin laptop, instantly making your loyal desktop computer obsolete. Before trashing that old computer, consider recycling or donating it. The same principle applies to old flip-open cell phones, boombox stereos, film cameras and (yikes!) cassette tapes.

According to Yahoo! Web Life Editor Heather Cabot, recycling "keeps reusable materials out of landfills, helps others who need phones and saves energy. The Environmental Protection Agency says energy saved by recycling even one cell phone is enough to power a laptop for 44 hours!"

Beyond just recycling through Earth 911 (earth911.com), selling old gadgets on eBay, or returning them to manufacturer exchange programs to get discounts, here are a few more creative ways of giving back to your community and directly impacting lives.

● Computers, Cameras and Electronics

Organizations such as the Freecycle Network (freecycle.org) spanning over 85 countries with more than 8 million members can help you locate groups near you where you can exchange old CDs, DVDs, TVs, adapters, phones, MP3 players, digital cameras and related items with others.

Computers With Causes (computerswithcauses.org) runs programs in all 50 states where you can drop off old working computers (three to five years old),

which are then upgraded with essential software, more processing power and stronger hard drives. Refurbished computers go to various charities and schools and may be sold for commercial purposes.

● Cell Phones and Pagers

Started in 2004 by preteen siblings, Britnany & Robbie Bergquist, Cell Phones for Soldiers (cellphonesforsoldiers.com) collects old phones and prepaid calling cards. These are then shipped overseas to help soldiers keep in touch with family.

Many police departments will also gladly take those mobile phones. "It is my understanding that even when there is no related cell phone service, all cell phones can connect to 911," says attorney Elizabeth Cohee of Oakland, California. "These phones are given to domestic violence victims with no other means of contacting the police for protection."

You can also donate phones to shelters for battered women through the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (ncadv.org), which will ship packing materials and instructions to you.

"Don't forget to terminate subscription plans, take out SIM cards and clear out phone memory before donating," Cabot advises.

● Kitchen and Home Appliances

Those old toasters and coffee machines can be put to good use at local homeless shelters and food kitchens. Habitat for Humanity also runs ReStore outlets (habitat.org/restores), where you can donate washers, dryers, ovens, cook tops, refrigerators, microwave ovens and other working appliances, which are sold to the general public to help fund building projects.

And when donating or trading in electronics, remember to donate accessories such as headsets, cables, batteries, adaptors and other extras that keep your gadgets usable. ♥

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