



HOW TO MANAGE E-WASTE

A Practical Guide for Small & Mid-Sized Businesses on Dealing with Technology's Dirty Little Secret: e-Waste

www.progressivecomputing.com/eWaste

**REDUCE
REUSE
RECYCLE**



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WHAT IS E-WASTE?

E-waste is electronic waste. It is all those unwanted, unused or discarded electronic devices and equipment that business no longer need. Many small and mid-sized businesses like yours are unsure of what to do with it. Paralyzed by fear of data leakage and environmental concerns, much of it becomes stockpiled in basements or storage closets. At Progressive Computing, we call this The Boneyard.

WHY IS E-WASTE A PROBLEM?

For many decades E-waste has become a major environmental problem because no one really thought about how to process it properly. Unlike traditional waste, you simply cannot burn or bury it. Electronics are chock full of caustic and dangerous chemicals including arsenic, mercury, lead and cadmium to name a few. When burned, the PVC plastic found in most computers emits a harmful compound known as Dioxin. All of these hazards are known to cause cancer, respiratory illnesses and reproductive problems. They are particularly dangerous because of their ability to traverse great distances through air and water systems, and are toxic even in small amounts. Burying them is also a problem because ground water will leach these harmful chemicals into soils and eventually will make their way into our drinking water.

WHAT CAN BE DONE WITH E-WASTE?

There are 2 primary ways to properly recycle e-waste. First, we can either refurbish them or re-use their parts. Second, the commodities such as the plastics, precious metals and other materials can be extracted from the electronics and processed as raw materials for future manufacturing. Both methods are costly and problematic as handling e-waste is difficult and dangerous. Despite these complexities, e-Waste processing can be profitable.

ISN'T THE GOVERNMENT DOING SOMETHING ABOUT IT?

The United State, European Union, and Japan are some of the largest producers of e-Waste. All 3 have passed stringent laws on the proper handling and disposal of electronics. But sadly, most of the monitoring systems and regulatory agencies are overwhelmed by the sheer volume of waste. It is also extremely easy to evade processing protocols and laws.

The Basel Convention (www.basel.int) is an international organization working with local governments and businesses to raise awareness about e-Waste, create laws, and help find ways for better management. In the US the Basel Action Network (www.ban.org) is following the same path. US States such as Maine and California now impose a Recycling Tax on electronics when they are sold to help pay for recycling efforts.

But is all this enough? Again, sadly, the answer is no. There is still a dearth of so-called “eWaste Recyclers” who ignore laws and fill containers bound for China, India and other poor countries where laws are often overlooked.

WHAT ABOUT GIVING IT TO CHARITY?

Most people are genuinely willing to help others less fortunate. Although their heart is in the right place, sometimes their head is not. The reason most electronics end up in the Boneyard is because they rightfully belong there. One obvious solution appears to be charity. But think about that notion for a moment. Here is an old PC that our office shoved into the bottom of a closet because it was super slow and was a few generations behind in terms of operating system and software. Perhaps even a few components were beginning to fail. Now I want to give this away to a church, a non-profit, an employee, a school, or some underprivileged kid. Are you really doing them a favor? Unfortunately, in order to participate in the globally interconnected digital society, you must have a vehicle that can at least keep up. The information superhighway has no speed limits but does impose minimum speed requirements. Standing still is hardly productive. Although some percentage of electronics can be refurbished and used by others, the overall percentage is relatively low.

DO I HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT SECURITY?

Always! A significant problem eWaste represents is the potential for data leakage. Every business needs to be concerned about corporate or personal data falling into the wrong hands. Your old computer and electronics are likely to contain very important or sensitive files on storage systems like hard drives. Most business executives and IT managers are focused on the day-to-day compliance for regulations such as HIPAA/HITECH and PCI. However, that tunnel vision can blind you from taking prudent steps once systems get powered off and disconnected. The data remaining behind still poses a threat. In addition to breaking the law, a sloppy error could mean the loss of business goodwill or reputation. For example, the recent hacker activity at Target and Home Depot has left some feeling nervous about continuing to transact with them.

If you are disposing of, or donating old equipment, you should take great care in making sure the data is either properly removed or destroyed before it leaves the building. This includes items like hard drives, flash drives, cell phones, backup tapes, copiers, printers, etc. Components such as these should be mechanically shredded to physically and permanently destroy the data. If a device is donated, make sure your gift does not include more than you anticipated.

SO, HOW DO WE RECYCLE RESPONSIBLY?

Finding a responsible recycler has been a challenge. But, thankfully, there are more and more entering the market. However, like any other vendor, you must properly vet your candidates to ensure you are working with someone legitimate.

First, look for recyclers who have achieved either R2 or e-Stewards certification. Ask for proof of this – don't just accept what they say.

Second, be sure the vendor offers premium services such as data destruction. This can either be done onsite or offsite. But in either case, a Certificate of Data Destruction is an absolute must especially for regulated industries such as Healthcare and Retail. Be sure they can help you achieve compliance.

Third, be sure to ask for and follow up with references. The bigger the reference is the better. Large corporations are under tremendous scrutiny by state, federal and international laws. They also have a vested interest in protecting their own assets including their reputation. Not that you should blindly trust references, but large corporate references can help add to your peace of mind.

Finally, your IT staff or IT Service Provider needs to be extremely involved in the process. They can help make sense of all the facts and figures, as well as help sort through your Boneyard to determine what goes and what stays, and how they should be processed.

WHAT SHOULD WE RECYCLE?

Not all electronics can be recycled so it is important to consider which ones can be. Here are 3 major categories with the most common types of electronics to recycle.

MOBILE	DESKTOP	DATACENTER
Tablets	Desktop PCs	Servers
SmartPhones	Printers	Firewalls/Routers/Switches
PDAs	Monitors & Projectors	Media (CDs, Tapes, etc)
GPS Devices	Office Phone	Rack Cabinets
Laptops	Point-of-Sale Terminals	

WHAT CAN'T WE RECYCLE?

There are some items that cannot be recycled or must be handled by certain processors. Most e-Waste recyclers will not take loose batteries, loose ink cartridges, or any dangerous chemicals. This is not to say these items cannot be recycled. But some items must be handled in a special way.

HOW DO I START?

Here is an action plan to get you on your way for cleaning up your Boneyard.

- 1. ASSEMBLE YOUR TEAM.** As mentioned previously, it is CRITICAL to involve your IT staff or IT Service Provider in this process. In fact, they should be directed with managing the process, but a business owner or manager should be overseeing the process. It may also make sense to involve or educate your entire staff in the process. The handling and management of eWaste is something everyone should know about. Be sure everyone knows who is doing what.
- 2. VET YOUR VENDOR.** Once you have your Team ready for action, the next step is to find a local vendor who can help you dispose of your derelict devices. Disqualify any that do not have R2 or e-Stewards certifications (ask for proof!). Make sure they can handle your compliance needs (if any). Ask for and call references. Meet with them beforehand to see if they are a proper fit (is this a company you see yourself doing business with?).
- 3. START SMALL.** Unless you have only a small quantity you may want to consider a trial run to test the relationship. You want to be sure the pickup process is seamless, their people are professional, and their documentation is satisfactory. If they pass the test then now you have a reliable vendor who can service your e-waste disposal needs for the long haul.

I'M STUCK OR I SIMPLY NEED HELP!

We understand that as a small or mid-sized business you have a lot on your plate already. Perhaps your current IT Service Provider is not the strategic business partner you need. Progressive Computing can help you manage your entire network lifecycle from start to finish. In this report, we've demonstrated that we're very thorough in all of that by concentrating on the end of life for electronics. By working with us you will get a skilled business partner who brings this same level of passion to all of your IT.

Give us a call today at **914.375.3009** or **212.681.1212** and press 1 to speak with one of business managers. Or visit us on the web at www.progressivecomputing.com

WHO WE ARE

Started in 1993, Progressive Computing is a complete technology solution provider. We are 100% committed to making sure business owners have the most reliable and professional IT service in Westchester County, Manhattan and surrounding areas. Our team of talented IT professionals can solve your IT nightmares once and for all.

