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Ten Tips for Donating a Computer
How to donate your used equipment

By: Jim Lynch
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As more companies, organizations, and individuals find reasons to upgrade their computers, the problem of how to safely discard used equipment continues to amplify.

The ramifications of this phenomenon are widespread:

- According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Plug in to eCycling program, only 15% to 20% percent of retired personal computers, TVs, cell phones and other electronic devices are being recycled in the United States (latest statistics are from 2005).

- Every computer dumped into a landfill represents a missed opportunity to provide Information-Age tools to individuals and organizations across the digital divide.

- Well-meaning companies that donate out-of-date computer systems directly to schools and nonprofits -- rather than through a recycler or a refurbisher -- can end up passing on more of a burden than a blessing.

CompuMentor's Ten Tips for Donating a Computer

CompuMentor, a provider of technology assistance to other nonprofits and the home of TechSoup, is working with Microsoft Corporation and other organizations to improve the environment and bridge the digital divide by helping consumers properly donate or recycle computer equipment. Here are some guidelines you can use when passing along your machines.

1. **Determine if your old computer can be reused.** If you have a computer that is less then five years old, chances are that it can be put to good use by someone else. Rather than donate equipment directly to a charity or school, however, it is usually best for all involved if you can send it to a refurbisher, especially if you need to wipe your hard drive or are uncertain about the computer's condition. Refurbishers will ensure that equipment they send to nonprofits and schools works well and runs legal copies of software, and that any e-waste is disposed of properly. Remember that refurbishers work with newer equipment that can run current Internet programs, so if your computer is more than five years old, it's better to send it to a commercial recycler.

   For listings of refurbishers in your area, please visit the TechSoup 's Donate Hardware list.

2. **Recycle old and broken hardware.** Any equipment that is not working or is more than five years old should be tagged for recycling, i.e. *responsible destruction*. A computer recycler is a business or organization that salvages useful computer parts before breaking down what's left, safely removing hazardous materials in the process. Note that some recyclers will charge a fee to accept old computer equipment, especially monitors.

   For listings of recyclers in your area, visit:
   - The Electronics TakeBack Campaign
   - TechSoup 's Donate Hardware List
   - The National Center for Electronics Recycling

3. **Contact the refurbisher or recycler before donating.** Call the organization or check its Web site to ensure that it accepts the type of computer you plan to give away. Some refurbishing organizations, for

example, will refuse anything older than a Pentium II. While you may be tempted to donate equipment directly to a favorite local school or charity, remember that refurbishers are generally better equipped to repair and upgrade computers. They will then pass on ready-to-use equipment to those who need it, often at little or no cost.

4. **Remember the accessories.** If you can, include the keyboard, mouse, printer, modem, packaged software, or any other accessories you use with the computer. Schools and nonprofits can almost always put them to good use, and most organizations only accept complete systems.

5. **If possible, keep the operating system intact.** If you are donating hardware with a preinstalled Microsoft operating system, keep in mind that the license is only valid when used with the machine on which it was originally installed. Since charitable organizations usually cannot afford to purchase and license new operating systems, a legal transfer (whereby the computer and operating system stay together) is always preferable. While Linux and Macintosh operating systems have different requirements, as a general rule, try to include the operating system software with all donated computers whenever possible.

6. **Provide the original software media and documentation.** To ensure that the software transfer is legal, pass along the original disks, media, Certificate of Authenticity sticker (usually on the computer), user manual, and other documentation that came with the equipment.

7. **If you clear your computer of personal information yourself, it's best to use disk-cleaning software.** "Personal information" includes your Internet browser's cache, cookies, history; your email contacts and messages; your documents; your recycle or trash folder; and all nontransferable software. The best way to clear this is with a disk-cleaning utility that overwrites all the sectors of your hard drives, making your data unrecoverable. Listed below are examples of recommended disk-cleaning utilities.

   Commercial Windows Disk-Cleaning Software:

   - Blancco Data Cleaner
   - WipeDrive

   Freeware Windows Disk-Cleaning Software:

   (All available at Shareware.com)
   - Active@ Kill Disk Hard Drive Eraser
   - Darik's Boot and Nuke

   Macintosh Disk-Cleaning Software:

   - Norton Utilities (Wipe Info feature)
   - Shredit

   If the computer is still under a manufacturer's warranty, you can also call the company's technical services department and ask for specifics on how to delete personal files.

8. **Follow computer delivery instructions.** Many recycling and refurbishing organizations have specific locations where equipment can be donated, while others have delivery instructions they expect donors to follow.

9. **Keep a list of what you donated for your records.** Remember that tax season will always return -- and you are likely eligible for a deduction if you donate to a nonprofit refurbisher. Most school or nonprofit refurbishers can provide a tax receipt upon request. Business donors can deduct the un-depreciated value of the computer, and individuals can deduct the current market value of a computer. To determine the fair market value of a computer, go to the Computers for Schools Canada's free Used Computer Evaluator. (For more information on the tax laws pertaining to computer donation, see Section 170 of the Federal Income Tax Code.)

10. **Plan for future donations.** Rescue a box from the recycling bin and use it to store the documents that came with your new computer, so that when the time comes to donate it, you'll have everything in one place. For more information, visit Techsoup's <u>Recycled Hardware</u> page or post a question to TechSoup's <u>message boards</u>.

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About the Author:
Jim Lynch is Program Manager for CompuMentor's Computer Recycling & Reuse program.