

## **Where do old computers go?**

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Time and again I am asked what to do with old computers. There once was a time when people used a computer for more than a few years, upgrading it along its lifetime prolonging its eventual fate. Now with the personal computers a quarter of the price they once were 10 years ago people are purchasing new ones instead of upgrading their existing systems.

The question remains. What do people do with their old computer systems these days? Some end up given to other family members or friends. Some are donated to an organization for charity while others end up in basements, attics, or in the garage. A great majority of them, up until a few years ago, ended up on the sidewalk waiting for a ride to the local dump on garbage day.

These days, you cannot just throw out your computer with the trash. It has to be recycled. Most cities and towns have set up places where you can bring in your old computer system and pay a small fee to have it disposed of properly. Some computers are reused while most end up being stripped for their metal content and recycled.

What many people do not realize is that while donating your computer to a charitable organization, giving it to a friend, or bringing it in for recycling is a good thing, precautions should be taken. Think about the information still stored inside your computer such as pictures, documents, and music files. Some people do not back up their files or know how. Transferring your files from the old system to the new system can seem like a daunting task.

Now think about all the things you have used your computer for. The places you have been to, the usernames and passwords you have set to auto complete while visiting a web site. Do you want someone you do not know going through your personal information? With the threat of identity theft on the rise, computers have made it easier for your data to be stolen.

Computers have a way of remembering places on the Internet you have been to and even if you believe you have deleted everything on your computer it can be

easily retrieved by even the most novice user with the help from a Google search on data recovery.

The simplest way to prevent data theft is to contact your local computer expert, someone you trust, and ask them to wipe your machine. If done correctly the information will be gone for good. For people looking to save some money, you can do what is called a “full factory restore” bringing the machine back to its original settings and configuration from day one. This is provided you have access to the original software the computer came with.

Another way, more involved, is to open your computer tower and remove the hard drive. This is the component where your data is stored. Usually this silver and black device is an inch high by three and a half inches wide by six inches long. It is attached inside the computer by a couple of cables and some screws. For laptops, the hard drive is much smaller and extensive disassembly could be required to get at it. Once the hard drive has been removed, the computer can be disposed of through proper methods. Now you only have the hard drive to either store for safekeeping or destroy. Soaking it for a minute or so in water will usually make data recovery near impossible.

Regardless of how you recycle your computer, protect the information you have put on it. Because that information in the wrong hands could cost you much more than what you spent on your new computer.

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