

Where do old computers go to die?



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1. Introduction

At some point, the "modern PC" you bought a few years ago gets pushed aside when a shiny new replacement is bought. The question is what do you do with your old PC? In this briefing we highlight a few options for dealing with your old PC and what you should consider before sending it off the computer graveyard.

2. What are your options?

- Throw it away
- Trade it in
- Give it to a friend or relative
- Give it to charity
- Sell it
- Hide it somewhere

3. Throwing your old PC away

A very bad idea unless done the right way. Throwing old equipment into a skip is more than likely to result in it becoming land-fill - harmful to the environment unless properly dealt with. Your local council should be able to dispose of your old PC for you. Their Web Site will provide you with details of disposal sites that will take computer equipment.

4. Trade in the old PC when you buy a new one

Before buying a new PC, it is worth checking with the supplier to see if they can help you dispose of your computer. The major manufacturers such as Dell, HP and IBM all have schemes to help home users recycle their computer equipment and make the earth that little bit greener.

5. Giving a PC to a friend

Giving your old PC to a friend or relative is a good way to ensure that any useful life left in the machine isn't lost. Be sure that the PC is free of problems before you hand it over otherwise you may feel responsible for issues which are not of your making.

6. Giving a PC to charity

There are a variety of charities that will be delighted to accept your PC as a donation but be realistic when offering your PC. Their technology needs are not hugely different to your own and so don't be surprised if they decline your offer of a 10 year old PC. Most charities will pick up the equipment from your home for a small charge.

7. Selling an old PC

If the PC is less than 4 years old you should be able to sell it reasonably easily. The question is how much should you sell it for? A quick check of sites such as ebay.co.uk for PCs of a similar specification will give you an idea of what to ask for.

8. Hiding your old PC somewhere

By far the easiest thing to do is simply find a dark corner and shove the PC in there. Don't - all that does is put off the unfortunate day when you have to do something about it. When that day does finally come, you will find the PC will have lost any value or usefulness it may have had.

9. Your old PC is more valuable than you think

Having found somewhere for your PC to go (other than the dark corner) you now need to deal with the important issue of the information it contains. Increasingly criminals are actively seeking out old PC equipment and extracting the information they contain. In particular they are looking for personal details about you and your finances. To them your PC is very valuable indeed.

You may think that simply deleting files and then emptying the recycling bin is enough - it isn't. Fragments of the information from deleted files can be retained and retrieved long after you thought they had been deleted.

Barristers are also obliged under their Data Protection Act registration to ensure that information they hold on others does not fall into the wrong hands and so removing information before disposing of a PC is something that you must take very seriously.

10. "Cleaning" your PC

There are a variety of ways you can "clean" your PC before sending it packing:

	Security?	Our thoughts
Empty the recycle bin.	Worst	Bad idea! Choose another option.
Use a data erasing utility.	Fair	Quick but may miss items tucked away.
Reformat the hard disk and re-install the software.	Good	Time consuming and you may need help as it gets a bit technical.
Use a data destruction utility and re-install the software.	Excellent	Best done by a professional or those recycling the PC.
Physically destroy the Hard Disk.	Best	Fun! PC isn't much use without it though.

11. Need a hand?

We are happy to handle the secure and safe disposal of old computer equipment including toner and inkjet cartridges. Check with us beforehand and then bring the equipment (and any associated CD's etc.) into Chambers - we will do the rest.

Useful Web Sites

<http://www.computer-aid.org> - Not-for-profit supplier of refurbished PCs to schools and community organisations in developing countries. Offers drop-off or collection (£9 charge) services for your old PC.

<http://www.wasteonline.org.uk> - General waste disposal & recycling information with links to organisations around the UK that will take computer equipment.

<http://www.heidi.ie/eraser/> - Eraser is a free secure data erase tool to wipe information from your PC.

<http://tinyurl.com/7n64c> - 10 Things to Do With Old PCs from learning networking to making your own aquarium.