



Mobile Phone Recycling Find A Reputable Electronics Recycler

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With more enterprises providing Black-Berrys, iPhones, and other mobile phones and devices to enterprise employees, disposal of those phones becomes an issue. Data center and IT managers need to ensure their enterprise is disposing of mobile devices in the most environmentally friendly manner possible, not only because it's the right thing to do, but because 23 states and several cities have enacted electronics waste laws that dictate electronics disposal methods, says Ken Beyer, CEO at e-waste disposal company Cloudblue (www.cloudblue.com).

In July, for example, New York passed an e-waste recycling law that requires electronics manufacturers to recycle electronics amounts proportional to what they produce, based on a three-year sales average. Like many e-waste laws, it also makes it illegal for New Yorkers to dispose of electronics in landfills. IT managers need to ensure their disposal and recycling methods adhere to the letter of the law for all states in which the devices are disposed, Beyer says.

Data is an equally important consideration for IT managers when it comes to mobile device disposal. They'll need to make sure they're not disposing of secure information along with the device, says John Shegerian, chairman and CEO at Electronic Recyclers International (www.electronicrecyclers.com).

■ Look For Certified Recyclers

The easiest and most oft-used way for IT managers to safely dispose of mobile devices is to hire an electronics recycler that devotes its business to this form of recycling, sources say. Such recyclers are getting easier to find. But that doesn't mean IT managers should sign a contract with just any recycler.

IT managers should look for a recycler certified by the e-Stewards Initiative, Cloudblue's Beyer says. This is a project from BAN (Basel Action Network) of Seattle, which has created a certification program to assure electronics recycler conformance to a host of e-recycling best practices.

The e-Stewards Certification for electronics recyclers began in 2008, with the first certified e-Steward recyclers announced in early 2010, according to a BAN statement. The initiative's Web site, www.e-stewards.org, includes a list of certified recyclers. "This is the most comprehensive audit in e-waste industry," Beyer says. "We need a standard in this industry and this is an emerging one."

■ Verify Insurance & Audit

Shegerian also recommends asking whether a prospective electronics recycler carries liability insurance and, if so, how much. Recyclers should carry, at minimum, \$5 million in liability insurance. “Insurance is a sign they’re economically viable and will be here tomorrow to back up claims made today,” Shegerian says. “Some have no insurance or not enough insurance. But if any kind of security information is breached and somebody is going to get sued, most likely it’s going to be the recycler.”

He also recommends IT managers audit prospective recyclers if possible. A large enterprise might have the budget to hire a third-party auditor; a smaller enterprise can generally make a personal audit, Shegerian says. “It’s nice to read about somebody online, but when you send someone to a facility, you can tell if they’re doing things the right way or the wrong way,” Shegerian says.

Ask an electronics recycler for its own audit information for its downstream vendors. “Once recyclers break down electronics into plastic, glass, and metals, they have to be selling those to legitimate smelters,” he says. “The audit package will show where they’re sending their materials.” He adds, “If people don’t want to give access to that information, it means they’re not doing the right thing.”

■ Security Counts

In addition to being environmentally responsible, IT managers need to ensure their recyclers keep secure any data that remains on the mobile device. Many recyclers issue reports that show, by serial number, that each device has been properly wiped and recycled.

“This is an audit trail that shows when and where the wipe happened. And if the wipe failed—sometimes they’re not successful, which means data is still on that device—the device should be shredded, and that also should be documented.” Beyer says. “Without this kind of evidence, a company could simply pull a SIM card and resell the phone.” Some recyclers also provide video backup that depicts the device being properly wiped.

After the wipe, electronics recyclers then usually demanufacture the phone, separating it into commodities such as the circuit board, plastic housing, and glass, which are then sent to refiners or smelters to be recycled into new products.

■ Recycled Or Refurbished?

Sometimes newer devices will be wiped, refurbished, and resold, Beyer says. A reputable recycler will share profits from these ventures with the enterprise that sent its devices for recycling, he adds.

A recycler that does refurbish cell phones or other devices is not an automatic security risk, says Hans Chung, co-founder of PlantMyPhone (www.plantmyphone.com), which recycles cell phones to fund the

planting of trees. “People get freaked out that the cell phone might get refurbished, but the truth is that recyclers want the cell phone data wiped clean more than the consumer does,” Chung says. “If the future owner buys a refurbished phone and it has someone else’s data on it, they won’t feel like they have a ‘like new’ phone, which is the whole point of buying refurbished. If a customer complaint like this gets to the carrier, they will easily drop that supplier.

“And most people’s data is not worth anything,” he adds. “It’s easier to steal someone’s bank passwords by using phishing tactics. People’s photos are worth nothing on the black market. And those phone numbers are worth as much as the free phonebook that gets dropped off at your door every year.”

■ Pain-Free Delivery

Enterprises needn’t worry too much about the costs or hassles of getting their devices to the recycler, says Andrea Bebirian, president and founder of Take My Mac (www.takemymac.com). Most recyclers will pay postage to have smaller enterprises send used devices directly to that recycler. At larger enterprises, an electronic recycler will usually pick up a truckload of used devices and haul it to that recycler’s nearest facility, Beyer says.

So with a few simple rules in mind, signing on with a reputable electronics recycler can mean some cash back for the enterprise and valuable peace of mind. ■

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