

How to Sell or Recycle Old Electronics

By [BRIAN X. CHEN](#) DEC. 2, 2015

PEOPLE give all sorts of electronics as gifts around the holidays: phone chargers, e-book readers, video games, drones and more. But what should we do with the devices they are replacing?

Most of our gadgets end up in landfills, others stuffed away in a closet, never to be played with again. In the tech industry, hoarding or disposing of used electronics this way is known as e-waste, and can leave [toxic materials and pollutants](#) in the environment. The amount of e-waste is growing every year — by some estimates, consumers threw away 92 billion pounds of used electronics last year, up from 87.7 billion pounds the previous year, according to a report by the [United Nations University, the academic and research arm of the United Nations](#).

Efforts are underway to dispose of electronics more responsibly. Electronics resellers, for one, have existed for years and purchase old tech products. More recently, large tech companies including Apple and phone carriers like Verizon Wireless, T-Mobile USA and AT&T have begun trade-in programs [for cellphones](#), offering consumers credit toward buying new phones. The companies then often resell the old cellphones internationally.

Yet the e-waste issue persists. Many people shove their old computers and tablets into junk drawers or closets, said Chris Sullivan, the chief executive of [Gazelle](#), a company that buys and sells used electronics. “They’re unaware of the options,” he said, on how to responsibly dispose of many electronics. “I think people aren’t necessarily inherently lazy.”

To make way for tech presents this holiday season, I recently tried out three programs for getting rid of used electronics. The programs, [Amazon](#), Gazelle and [Best Buy](#), are available nationwide. Each one was simple to use and headache-free, and I even managed to get a decent amount of money for my old electronics, like my outdated video game controller and a used smartphone, to spend on holiday gifts.

[Amazon’s trade-in program](#) was my favorite of the three because it accepts such a wide variety of products, from old DVDs to Wi-Fi routers, in exchange for [Amazon](#) gift cards. The process starts on the program’s website, [amazon.com/trade-in](#), where you can find out which items the retailer will buy. The process took me a while, but I eventually learned that the company would buy a good amount of junk in my drawer: a PlayStation 3 controller, three used video games and two cable modems from past living situations. (Nontech items can be sold, too. I even managed to get rid of a gluten-free cookbook I bought two years ago when my girlfriend was hooked on that trendy diet.)

Once I knew which items Amazon would take, the company supplied me with a free shipping label. All I had to do was pack everything up and drop the packages off at a U.P.S. mailbox. About two weeks later, after Amazon inspected each item, I received about \$60 worth of Amazon store credit. Not shabby at all.

Stacey Keller, an Amazon spokeswoman, said the company's trade-in program allowed people to declutter by selling an array of eligible items "and in return, receive an Amazon gift card which can be spent on millions of items that they actually want."

I also used Gazelle, which buys and sells used electronics, to sell a used iPhone. The company gave me a quote of \$70 based on the "good" condition and age of the phone. Then it gave me the option to receive a free box with packing materials for the phone or to print out a free shipping label so I could pack and ship the phone myself. I chose the second option, erased the contents of the phone, removed the SIM card and shipped the phone in a used Amazon box. Two weeks later, after Gazelle inspected the phone, I got my \$70 via PayPal, the popular payment service.

Gazelle sells other types of products, too. In years past, I have sold used Apple laptops and an iPad to the service and got a reasonable amount of money in return.

"We purchase a lot more than just phones, and we get that message out as best we can," said Mr. Sullivan of Gazelle. "We'll take those devices." In the event that a product is unusable and Gazelle declines the purchase, the company offers to recycle it responsibly free through its [partner CloudBlue](#), he added.

After selling items to both Amazon and Gazelle, I was still left with plenty of e-junk. I turned to [Best Buy](#), which has a [nationwide recycling program](#) that it started about six years ago. The stores invite shoppers to drop off electronics, including televisions, batteries, ink cartridges and power cables, at kiosks or the customer service desk. Best Buy says it teams up with responsible recycling companies like [Electronics Recyclers International](#) and [Regency Technologies](#). Most gadgets can be dropped off for recycling free at Best Buy, though some states require consumers to [pay a small fee](#) to recycle certain items, like old TVs.

I decided to put the Best Buy program to the test by gathering the least desirable electronics in my home, along with some unsolicited items that have been mailed to the New York Times office in San Francisco over the last three years.

I packed up a DVD collection of all five "Home Alone" movies (who even knew there were five?), two Motorola phone cases, two styluses and a cup holder that attaches to laptops. At a Best Buy store, I laid the items on the customer service desk and described them one by one: "Here's a collection of 'Home Alone' DVDs that nobody will ever want, a useless cup holder, some lame styluses and some Motorola cases," I said.

The Best Buy employee laughed and thanked me before placing the items in a pile. I was surprised she didn't ask me to pay the store to take the junk away from me. Now I'm e-waste-free and ready for some new gear.