

A greener future for IT Asset Disposal

By 2050, the amount of e-waste will more than double to 120 million metric tons a year if nothing is done to tackle this massive problem. Data erasure could be the answer, but only if processes are implemented as part of its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) policy.



Xperien ITAD expert Bridgette Vermaak

The abundance of e-waste is a growing problem because a large number of these IT assets are improperly recycled annually, exposing the environment to toxic waste. Data erasure provides a secure and more eco-friendly solution than physically destroying equipment or informal recycling. More importantly, data erasure enables devices to be refurbished and sold in a circular economy.

Physical destruction of IT assets could do more harm than good. If companies are to resolve these growing environmental challenges, they will have to implement and communicate CSR policies across the company and also address responsible e-waste disposal. They need to be specific about how IT hardware is processed when it reaches the end of its lifecycle, from mobile phones to servers and flash drives.

Many companies dispose of decommissioned hardware by shredding it to ensure stored data is irretrievable. This is done largely to comply with data protection mandates such as the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA) and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Shredding is mostly used due to a lack of understanding of other alternatives and a lack of understanding about the environmental impact of physical destruction.

A changed approach to IT disposal

In a recent Blancco study titled 'Poor Sustainability Practices: Enterprises are Overlooking the E-waste Problem', they explore organisations' approach to data sanitisation. They found that surveyed companies collectively destroy hundreds of thousands of data storage items per year. Additionally, over a third of organisations physically destroy non-functional or end-of-life equipment because they believe it is "better for the environment".

However, if sanitised correctly, end-of-life drives and computers can often have their life extended. Obsolete equipment can also be used to responsibly harvest rare earth elements, precious metals and other natural resources for use in other electronics.

Xperien ITAD expert Bridgette Vermaak says by changing their approach to IT disposal, business leaders can not only benefit the environment, but they can unlock the immense business value of e-waste. "The study also found that only 25% of end-of-life equipment is being recycled."

"This is astounding considering that the value of e-waste is about \$62.5 billion per year. It states that there is more gold in a metric ton of mobile phones than there is in a metric ton of gold ore, according to the World Economic Forum (WEF) and the UN E-waste Coalition," she explains.

Erasing and then reallocating devices within the company maximises value from IT purchases. They can even enter out-of-use hardware into the circular economy, older electronics can be erased, refurbished and reused without carrying forward any residual data. They can be sold, reused internally or donated to charities.

"In addition, components can be recaptured for use in future electronics and will simultaneously reduce the amount of e-waste produced. This could also provide affordable options for second-hand buyers or create sustainable jobs in the refurbishment of electrical components," she says.

Whatever option one considers, ongoing use or outright asset disposal, it's critical to ensure data is erased properly so that data security and privacy is never compromised. Complete and verifiable data erasure complies with data protection and privacy regulations and ensures that company data is never exposed to unauthorised users.

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