

A hard drive for recycling

“COMPUTERS do not go into landfill,” said avid recycler Keith Sorrell.

“If they do, I’d want to know where as I’d dig them up – there’s valuable materials in it.”

Keith, who has been known to trawl hedgerows for fly-tipped electricals, is behind social enterprise Airedale Computers located on the Airedale Estate, outside Castleford.

Set up almost nine years ago to help long-term unemployed people back into work, the initiative has proved that outdated computer equipment does not have to sit cluttering your cupboards or end up in a rubbish tip.

It has also shown that the repair, refurbishment and recycling of computers and accessories can be done for the benefit of the local community.

Airedale Computers, which has won a string of environmental and community awards, provides training, work placements and experience to local youths and adults in computer maintenance and repairs.

Free fully refurbished computers are donated to local charities and good causes such as the Yorkshire Swan Rescue Hospital.

Low cost reconditioned and new computers are sold at a retail outlet and warehouse in Castleford and online to businesses and individual households.

Computers that cannot be fixed or refurbished are stripped and 100 per cent recycled.

And every penny of profit made from the venture is pumped back into Chrysalis Youth and Community Project that trains the disengaged in a bid to get them in work.

Hard drives dropped off or collected by Airedale Computers for refurbishment or recycling are “sanitised” or crushed.

Having the hardware wiped involves information and data being overwritten with “zeros and ones” that, as Keith put it, “nobody but CSI Miami could possibly decipher”. Every customer that leaves

When it comes to getting rid of that old computer, printer, photocopier or laptop what do you do? **SOPHIE HAZAN** finds out in time for national Recycle Week



their computers with the scheme gets a written guarantee that all data is secure.

Keith spent 10 years teaching computer maintenance at Joseph Priestley and Thomas Danby Colleges, Leeds.

The 52-year-old, who was a technician repairing fruit machines on cruise ships before that, got fed up with the amount of paperwork in teaching so resigned.

He was approached by a government-backed scheme and asked to start a retraining project aimed at getting people back into work.

Learned

Trainees were sent his way, computers donated by his former employers and students learned to refurbish computers a “million times” over.

That was until this first batch was at a “nice standard” and put up for sale.

Word got around that low-cost computers were being sold and the business model took off.

Keith had to move to bigger premises at The Active Centre on the Airedale Estate, and he started buying unwanted computers from Dutch auctions.

Today he has a steady stream of donations from local businesses and schools, the emergency services and individuals.

Some want repairs, others are just happy to hand over the old and buy a new computer.

The basic aim is to keep computers “out of wheelite bins and hedge rows,” he said.

“People talk about millions of computers going into landfill, but they don’t,” said Keith.

“They are too valuable and there are too many outlets of people offering to recycle them.”

Every tonne of processors that Keith collects is worth £60,500.

HP Printers are particularly sought after as bought new they are expensive and second hand they are reliable work horses.

Second hand laptop chargers are also in great demand with people often reporting that the family dog has chewed through the old one, or a child has used it as a skipping rope.

Airedale Computers also takes in and sells photocopiers, printers and laptops.

With local authorities such as Leeds City Council, NHS Leeds, Yorkshire Ambulance Service and West Yorkshire Police, replacing their computer equipment every three to five years, there is always plenty of work.

Environmentalists might argue that it is a waste to replace equipment that is not broken.

Not according to Keith.

“It makes financial sense for a business to keep up with replacement rather than maintaining and repairing as they go along,” he said.

“The last thing a customer wants is a computer breaking down when they are trying to get a good service.”

And with enterprises such as Airedale Computers using the old to benefit commu-



SCREEN DREAM: Clockwise, from above, Ian Booth wipes computer memory; Boss Keith Sorrell; Maria Holroyd strips computers
PICTURES: JONATHAN GAWTHORPE



nities, it can be a win-win situation.

Individuals and small businesses with just a few computers are welcome to drop off unwanted equipment at Airedale estate site.

Businesses with large numbers of terminals and units are requested to arrange for collection.

Low-cost refurbished computers are on sale at Airedale Computers from as little as £50, or for new from £99.

Each sale includes a monitor screen, hardware system unit, keyboard, mouse, Open Office software and online internet security.

Airedale Computers is at The Active Centre, Stansfield Road, Castleford, WF10 3DS.

It also has a retail shop at 76a, Carlton Street, Castleford. Call 01977 736283.

● **COMPUTER** equipment dropped at a Leeds City Council household waste site

is crushed and recycled.

Owners are advised to wipe hard drives first to make sure that sensitive information does not go missing.

Monitors are recycled separately as they can contain poisons such as lead.

Otherwise everything is broken down and sorted into different components for recycling.

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