

## **Donating or Giving Away a Computer? Follow These 5 Steps First.**

Is your laptop or desktop computer running slowly and not handling tasks or games well enough for your current needs? Do the latest and greatest applications slow your system to a crawl? If so, it may be time to purchase a new computer - but what can you do with your old machine besides dumping it into the trash?

Many charities and schools can put older computers to good use as teaching aids or to provide to the less-fortunate.

A friend or family member might be able to use your older computer.

Is the computer many years old and no longer generally useful? After removing any usable parts, you may wish to recycle the computer, which is better for the environment than sending it to the dump.

Unfortunately, donating or giving away an old computer should not be treated like giving away a simple kitchen appliance, television, DVD player, or other piece of equipment. Computers have important files you should back up as well as information you would not want the general public to see. Thus, before you give away or donate an older machine, be sure to follow these five steps first:

### **1) Backup and Remove All Important Information**

Backup and remove all needed data from your computer including documents, spreadsheets, music, photos, and videos. Archive electronic mail stored on the machine. Do you have any important bookmarks to websites? Export or copy them for later use. Have you stored any passwords on the machine such as website accounts? Back them up and remove them as well.

### **2) Leave Nothing attached or Inside**

Check your CD/DVD drive(s) to ensure you haven't left music, a DVD, a system restore disk, an application setup disk, or other media inside your machine. Ensure no USB flash drives or other devices are attached.

### **3) Tax Deduction? Record Specs First**

Depending on your local area's tax rules and filing status, you may be able to deduct a portion of the fair market value of your computer if it is to be donated to an approved charity. If so, make sure you record your computer's specifications so a fair market value can be determined. This includes, but is not limited to:

- CPU type and speed
- RAM
- Graphics card
- Sound card
- Hard drive(s) space and speed

This article is not providing tax advice, so be sure to contact your tax advisor, accountant, or attorney for local deduction rules.

### **4) Wipe the Hard Drive Clean**

No matter how well you scour your hard drive for personal or business files, traces may remain on your machine. Plus, normal file deletion does not actually immediately remove files from the hard drive but hides them so the operating system does not see the files; space used by the deleted files is reclaimed as needed. Therefore, to help prevent others from reading your files either by accident or with file-undeletion software, you should wipe your drive clean before donating it or giving it away.

- For businesses or medical professionals, this step is absolutely vital, as a business may be held responsible if private customer information is found and distributed to the wrong hands.
- If you are not using your laptop for business, it still could contain information you do not want others to see such as medical records, finances, tax information, etc.

Unfortunately, wiping a drive clean will remove the operating system such as Windows, so if you plan on donating the machine, be sure to include recovery disks as well (as long as they do not contain private information) so the recipient can reinstall the operating system. Without them, the recipient may have to purchase a new operating system in order to actually use the machine.

Formatting a hard drive alone will not do - a hard drive needs to be completely wiped, and multiple passes are recommended to help prevent file recovery. While the article author does not recommend any particular hard drive wiping software, several exist including [CMRR - Secure Erase](#), [Darik's Boot And Nuke](#), and [DriveScrubber\(r\)](#).

- Make sure before you perform a drive wipe that all files and information have been previously backed up, as using these tools makes it very difficult, if not impossible, to recover your information!

## 5) Reinstallation

If you are donating the machine and have system recovery disks, you may wish to go ahead and reinstall the operating system. If you're **really** nice, go ahead and install all patches for the o/s and important software.

There are many ways one may give away an old computer including recycling and donation to charity. However, you should not get rid of your machine without first performing a few basic housekeeping tips. Backup and remove all important information because once you give your computer away, you won't have access to your data. Check for inserted media and devices. Record pertinent information if your goal is to get a tax deduction for your donation. Wipe the hard drive(s) clean so personal or business information does not escape into the wild. And if you plan on donating your machine, go ahead and reinstall the operating system from recovery disks. With these steps you can feel good donating your machine or helping the environment via recycling, and you can feel even better knowing that you have helped safeguard your or your business's privacy.