

Sell, trade, recycle: Plenty of ways to dispose of old phones

October 16 2013, by Claudia Buck

Standing in a mall food court, Marcellus Lang slipped a used cellphone into an ecoATM kiosk. Instantly, the machine scanned his phone, assessing its condition. Separately, it also snapped his photo, scanned his driver's license and recorded his electronic fingerprint.

For Lang's old Evo phone, he was offered \$4. Repeating the process with an iPod Touch, he landed a \$55 offer. Without pausing, the 25-year-old punched in his acceptance.

Within minutes, the machine spit out \$59 in [cash](#), which Lang folded into his jeans pocket.

"It's cool. You dump your old phone for quick cash," said Lang, a security guard who said he has used the sell-your-electronics kiosk at Sacramento's Downtown Plaza Mall several times and likes the walk-up convenience.

For consumers, using an ecoATM is just one of a growing number of options for getting rid of old digital devices, particularly cellphones.

With the average consumer getting a new smartphone every 18 months, Americans are sitting on an ever-growing heap of digital discards. And many of those abandoned phones - by some estimates, 800 million in the United States alone - still hold some value, either as recycled donations or cold, hard cash.

Here's a look at some of the options for trading, selling or recycling:

TRADE UP, TRADE-IN? Plenty of major retailers, such as Amazon, Best Buy, Target, Radio Shack and Wal-Mart, will take your old cellphones - and in some cases, computers, tablets, video game players and other devices - and give you gift cards toward a store purchase.

"If you have a phone in good condition, this could go toward a substantial dent in the cost. (The trade-in payments) are worth more than ever before because every store wants to get your business," said Jeanette Pavini, consumer savings expert with Coupons.com, based in Mountain View, Calif.

With so many big-box retailers dangling trade-in incentives, "there's this great competitive environment that consumers can take advantage of. I've never seen it at this dollar amount, up to \$200 to \$300," Pavini said.

Apple announced its own swapping program last month, letting consumers trade in their older iPhones for a discounted price on the new iPhone 5 models.

Not to be outdone, Microsoft also jumped into the trade-in game, trying to woo customers away from Apple. Under two deals running through late October or early November, Microsoft will pay owners of "gently used" newer iPhones or iPads up to \$200 - to be used toward a new Windows phone or tablet.

CASH FOR PHONES: Companies such as Gazelle.com and USell.com enable consumers to sell their old electronics from their computer. In most cases, you look up your device, answer questions about its wear-and-tear condition, get a price, then receive a prepaid mail-in envelope for shipping the phone. You're paid once they receive the device.

Business booms every time Apple debuts a new phone, said Anthony Scarsella, chief gadget officer at Boston-based Gazelle.com. "This year alone, we've seen four times the number of trade-ins, compared with (Apple's) launch day last year."

In the first hour after Apple CEO Tim Cook debuted the new iPhone 5S and 5C models on Sept. 10, Gazelle was getting "600 offers a second," Scarsella said.

Customers can lock in a selling price early, then take 30 days to hand over their old phone, so they aren't left smartphone-free until their new iPhone arrives.

While new iPhones and Androids fetch the highest prices, the company also buys phones from other manufacturers, including the troubled BlackBerry. "We still take them but, in all honesty, the trading volume has gone down in the last two to three years," said Scarsella. "There's still demand in some emerging markets for older BlackBerry devices, but I'm not sure what will happen ahead."

Companies such as Gazelle either recycle the phones for scrap metal or sell them to wholesale refurbishers, who fix them up for overseas markets such as Africa, India and Southeast Asia, where demand is high for cheaper, used phones.

Walk-up sites such as ecoATM are another option, offering on-the-spot cash for used cellphones, tablets and MP3 players. Since 2009, the San Diego-based company has installed more than 650 kiosks in major retail locations. In April, it announced it had recycled its first 1 million devices.

DONATE TO GOOD CAUSES: A number of organizations accept used cellphones as donations for various charitable causes. Among the better-

known: CellPhonesForSoldiers.com, a nonprofit that recycles donated phones and uses the proceeds to supply U.S. soldiers overseas with free international phone-calling cards and other services. Donors, who can drop off their phones or ship them directly, get a tax donation receipt based on the phone's value.

The Ohio-based company, started by two teenage siblings in 2004, recently launched an iPhone buy-back program, with prices ranging from \$14 for an older-model iPhone 4 to \$326 for an iPhone 5.

Another is Phones4Charity.org, which acts as a fundraising tool for charitable groups such as the Red Cross or the National Wildlife Foundation. Individuals can get a tax receipt for donating phones, or a charity group can collect phones and be reimbursed in cash.

SHOP AROUND: Particularly if you're selling or trading in your old phone, "make sure you get the best deal for you. Compare the offers. You may have better luck going to a brick-and-mortar store (than online)," said Pavini, whose Coupons.com site lists iPhone trade-in offers by different retailers.

Another comparison site is SellCell.com, which shows price offers and shipping details on all types of phones from various phone-recycling companies.

"It's a big sandbox with room for a lot of different players," said Gazelle's Scarsella. With so many digital discards cluttering up our homes and offices, Scarsella figures the more information out there, the better. "All these options bring more awareness to [consumers](#) that your old [phone](#) has value."

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