

THE MOSSBERG SOLUTION

AUGUST 13, 2008

Where Old Gadgets Go To Breathe New Life

Some Web Sites Offer Cash for Your Items, Might Also Recycle

By KATHERINE BOEHRET



It's a fact of life and one of the reasons I have a job: digital electronics will eventually break or get replaced. But it's hard to know just what to do with the gadgets that get left behind. Some people stuff them in junk drawers. Others want to donate or recycle their old electronics, but worry about compromising private data. And plenty of people want some monetary compensation.



Stephen Munday

This week I took a look at some options for people who want to get rid of old electronics, one way or another. The good news is that there are a handful of Web sites that make it easy to do this -- and some of them may even pay you for your old products. The bad news is that you'll likely receive only a fraction of what you originally paid, especially if you waited a while to get rid of it.

Some sites, like Gazelle.com and VenJuvo.com, offer cash for your items and/or will recycle products. Another site, TechForward.com, lets people pay a fee to "lock in" a value for how much the site promises to pay for the product in the future. MyBoneYard.com accepts only laptops, desktop PCs, cellphones and flat-panel monitors, and gives Visa gift cards rather than cash.

I was surprised to receive significantly different value offers from Gazelle and VenJuvo when trying to sell the exact same products on each site. In one instance, VenJuvo offered me \$30 more than Gazelle

for a digital camera; another time, I got \$15 more from Gazelle for an old Apple iPod. It's worth the extra step to shop around at more than one of these sites before getting rid of something.

Both ask a few questions about the item, including its condition and whether or not it still has the accessories that originally came with it. Gazelle determines a product's value using retail (think Amazon and eBay) and wholesale channels; VenJuvo uses similar criteria and also looks at competitors' prices.

If you worry about someone stealing your digital data, you'll likely not feel comfortable dropping something in the mail that's chock full of personal information, especially if it no longer powers on to allow the owner to wipe this information.

Both Gazelle and VenJuvo accept at least some types of digital cameras, laptops, MP3 players, GPS devices, camcorders and gaming consoles. Gazelle also accepts cellphones. But they don't take everything. Gazelle doesn't take LCD TVs and VenJuvo doesn't accept satellite radios and portable hard drives or any smartphones or cellphones other than the iPhone; neither accepts desktop PCs.

I took the closest look at newly released Gazelle, owned by Second Rotation Inc., and walked through the simple start-to-finish process of selling a gadget and receiving money from the site. After pulling up the site, people can find their product and its value by choosing from a list of nine categories or by typing some part of the product's name into a search box.

I sold Gazelle a first-generation iPod Mini with four gigabytes of memory for which my boss paid \$249 in 2004. I answered a few questions about the product: Yes, it still powered on; no, I didn't have the original AC adapter, manuals or software installation CD, and it was in "excellent" condition, according to my assessment. Gazelle placed its value at \$25.

At this step, I opted to add the iPod to my box and check out, but users can also add other items to a box, including electronics for recycling. Gazelle's policy is that it pays 100% of shipping costs for any box shipped to the company, so long as there's at least one item in the box worth \$1. Eighty percent of transactions qualify for a free box; the rest can be sent with printed-out prepaid shipping labels, but you must find packaging.

Gazelle lets users receive payments via a mailed, paper check or using PayPal; money is received either way within five business days. People can also donate their money to one of 23 causes, including the American Red Cross and World Vision. I opted for PayPal, and the \$25 amount was deposited shortly after Gazelle received the iPod.

I sent the old iPod to Gazelle in a brightly colored, empty box that arrives at a customer's door a few days after he or she sells the device to Gazelle. I secured the old iPod in the box using balled up paper, and sealed it with packing tape. A prepaid shipping label was already stuck to it, and I needed only drop it off at UPS.

If Gazelle receives a product and decides that it isn't worth what you said it was -- either more or less -- and you'd rather not sell, the company will ship the product back, free of charge. But while Gazelle's site

guarantees users that they'll receive their money, and that personal data are safe with the company, no money-back guarantee is offered.

Gazelle hopes to calm nerves by posting detailed instructions on the site about how to wipe a device of all private information. But the company hasn't yet done this, and numerous users will remain skeptical even with such instructions.

I also poked around on VenJuvo Inc.'s Web site of the same name, [www.VenJuvo.com](http://www.VenJuvo.com), which is derived from two Greek words meaning "support, assist and delight sellers," according to the company. This site, too, buys products back from people, though it pays via check, PayPal or Kmart gift card. Users fill out similarly simple questionnaires on each product to help assess value. Unlike Gazelle's style of mailing boxes to users, VenJuvo gives users only prepaid shipping labels to print out and stick on a box that the customer must supply.

One notable difference between the sites is Gazelle's broader range of products. In the case of digital cameras, for example, Gazelle accepts 80 brands while VenJuvo takes only Canon, Sony, Olympus and Kodak. Unlike with Gazelle, if you send VenJuvo a product that isn't worth what you said it was, the company won't return the product free-of-charge; instead, it will charge you for shipping.

If users choose to receive a gift card, they get a 10% added value. While VenJuvo doesn't let people donate a product's value to a cause, it will add this feature next week and will include different causes (like Ronald McDonald House and Big Brothers Big Sisters) than those found on Gazelle.

Unlike Gazelle, VenJuvo will always take items for recycling and will pay for the shipping, regardless of whether you traded something in for a value.

A useful resource for general electronics recycling is the Consumer Electronics Association Web site, [www.MyGreenElectronics.org](http://www.MyGreenElectronics.org), which locates nearby electronics-recycling centers according to ZIP Code. And almost every computer manufacturer has a recycling program in place; some will even recycle computers that aren't their own brand.

One way or another, it's time to clean out the old junk drawer. Just be sure to do some comparison shopping if you want money for your old products.

—Edited by Walter S. Mossberg

Write to Katherine Boehret at [katie.boehret@wsj.com](mailto:katie.boehret@wsj.com)