

General Information

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Recycling Media

Make Environmentally Sound Decisions While Maintaining Security

The recycling or destruction of media is a security concern for small to medium-sized enterprises that want to ensure that their corporate data doesn't fall into the wrong hands. After deciding whether to recycle or destroy your media, the next step is to choose a reputable media recycling company and take steps to ensure that your media doesn't fall into the wrong hands after the hand-off to the provider.

■ Recycling vs. Destroying Media

Deciding to recycle vs. destroy your media is at the intersection of security and being environmentally conscious. However, many states and municipalities have strict laws regulating the disposal of magnetic media. Just throwing your media into the garbage can unleashes your unprotected data into the wild for anybody to pick up.

Jay Ellis with Media Mastr Computer Products says, "To start off with, the tapes have no value if they were not looked after environmentally. If the tapes are damaged goods . . . shred 'em and stuff 'em in a landfill. For example, if they were stored in a basement that only floods once a year . . . forget about the tapes having any value in the used market. It is moisture and heat that accelerates oxidation that kill the tapes."

Ellis continues, "On the other hand, if the tapes were kept cool and dry in the stacks, then they are a candidate for recycling. . . . It's plain to see that tapes are still useful long after the computer drives needed to restore them have worn out."

Jennifer Musil of RecycleYourMedia.com advises that the main issues that data center/IT managers need to keep in mind when choosing between recycling and destroying tapes is that there are secure processes for data destruction that keep data security in the forefront; it's possible to recoup IT costs by selling tapes; and environmental concerns should be a consideration, as e-waste is toxic waste.

"Destroying tape to get rid of data isn't the best choice. Get the residual value out of the tape," says Clay Teramo, president of The Data Media Source, who sees the destruction of tape media through either incineration or grinding as overkill and not the most secure or financially valuable option.

Ellis echoes a similar sentiment: "Destroying the tape inventory is literally throwing the company's resources down the tubes. It's the information that needs to be removed from the tapes. This is not rocket science." He further says, "It's been done for decades. It's called degaussing. By introducing a predetermined magnetic field for a specific kind of tape . . . the previous recorded computer signals are reset to a blank tape condition. Those tapes with servo tracks for alignment are not degaussed but erased with random encryption techniques via overwriting. The information that was on these tapes is unrecoverable. So now you have blank tapes with a couple decades' worth of use available to them."

■ Choose A Reputable Company

When selecting a reputable company for recycling or destroying your media, Tim Henning, technical services manager with Media Recovery, advises that you take the time to question its security and tour its facility. "If the vendor doesn't offer up details about their security or a tour of their facility, then you should be wary," says Ellis.

Terramo advises that you look for a vendor that offers a replicable and transparent process and full certification of the data destruction by the tape serial number on each cartridge. In addition, if the vendor has to transport your tape media offsite, it should transport it in a secured and sealed container.

■ Ensure Your Data's Safety

Perhaps the biggest fear, uncertainty, and doubt of sending your media out for recycling is ensuring that your data doesn't fall into the wrong hands once it leaves your data center.

Understanding and ensuring the chain of custody is important to the security of your data once tapes leave your facility. Moreover, the best way to secure the chain of custody is to look at the removal of tape media as moving individual tape, not a commodity. "You have to be concerned what happens from here to there," says Teramo, who also points to scenarios where state laws may require tapes to be destroyed in out-of-state facilities that may have a backlog of work.

Musil says, "We [RecycleYourMedia.com] can provide a volume serial number report for each data tape that has been degaussed." Her company offers further assurance by providing tracking numbers "so you know where your tapes are at all times."

Ellis says, "If you have degaussed your information . . . it really does not matter. No one will recover your data. If you are giving live tapes to a vendor, then you have to go with someone you trust. Call their references. You can [protect your company] with a certificate of destruction . . . but really, it's the vendor's ethics that matter."

Your vendor selection should balance on the vendor's transparent and replicable process, certifications, and the security it puts into place to ensure the security of your corporate data when it leaves your facility. ■

by Will Kelly

Media Recycling Companies

Company	Description	URL
Data Media Source	Performs full life cycle data destruction of data on tapes and resells tapes	www.Processor.com/DataMedia
Media Mastr	Degausses and recycles	www.Processor.com/MediaMastr

	media	
Computer Products Media Recovery	Focuses on critical day-to-day operations by providing comprehensive storage media services	www.Processor.com/MediaRecovery
RecycleYourMedia.com	Buys tape drives, tape libraries, and tape media; also recycles tapes that no longer have retail value	www.Processor.com/Recycle

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