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In this day and age, concerns about the ways in which our society tends to create, use and dispose of technology are becoming increasingly prevalent. Electrical goods often include hazardous materials, and these can make recycling impossible or cost inefficient whilst also making disposal problematic. Even when they do not contain toxic materials, electrical products such as Netgear routers often incorporate materials such as plastics which are both important to preserve and difficult to manage in the waste stream.

As part of our responsibility as modern citizens, we should be thinking about alternative avenues for both the sourcing of electrical goods and their disposal once replaced. In a perfect world, everyone would use electrical products until the very end of their working lives, but in practice this is not always possible (or even desirable). Nonetheless, it is important to ensure that electrical products are handled intelligently at every stage of their working lives.

One of the best things we can do is to start sourcing electrical goods, e.g. computer spares, through second-hand channels wherever possible. This serves two functions - first and foremost, it extends the working lifetime of a product and prevents it from entering the waste stream prematurely. As an added bonus, it usually results in savings for the consumer. There are a number of relevant initiatives in the UK.

Amongst the most useful of these are Freecycle and Gumtree. Gumtree is essentially an ads board for individuals - it is possible to find a number of things being bought and sold, including everything from services to server cases, as well as job opportunities and other miscellaneous adverts. Often environmentally-aware users of the service will offer other users the chance to take or purchase unwanted products before they are set aside for disposal.

Freecycle is a system designed specifically for the advertisement of freebies. Unlike Gumtree, where users are able to charge others for their services, a condition of posting an advert on Freecycle is that the product that is offered must be offered for nothing. This is an ingenious system and one that deserves widespread recognition as an initiative that promotes both sustainable, conscientious living and generosity. One of the greatest advantages common to both the Freecycle and Gumtree services is that they have a strong local focus, helping to reduce the carbon emissions that would otherwise be associated with long-distance travel or delivery.

In some cases it simply isn't possible to source something locally. In those cases it is still generally preferable to use a second-hand service rather than buying a new product. In this country at least, eBay is the second-hand auctioneer service of choice, and one of the most regular uses of eBay is to source electronic and electrical goods.

Before heading to your local electronics store, it is worth checking Gumtree, Freecycle and eBay for the item you need. It is also worth considering these services when the time has come for you to replace your product. By sourcing and disposing of products more responsibly, we can all do our bit for the environment.

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