

Beyond Personal Computing



Old Floppies Never Die

By Louise Julig

Top 10 uses for old floppies and CD-ROMs (with apologies to David Letterman):

- 10) Use as drink coasters at your next party.
- 9) Start your own small business making and selling CD-ROM clocks.
- 8) Donate all your old double-density disks to that unfortunate friend still limping along on a Mac SE without a high-density drive.
- 7) Bind stacks of floppies together

with strapping tape to make building blocks for your own private fort.

- 6) Glue magnets to the back and use them to hold your child's masterpiece to the fridge.
- 5) Techno-geek chic—fashion your own CD pendant or diskette tie tack.
- 4) Make a mobile out of CD-ROMs for your office or youngster's room.
- 3) Set up a CD-ROM ring toss carnival game at the fair.
- 2) Create a pop art montage from all

the different America Online disks.

1) Cut a slot through CDs from edge to center. Slide two CDs together, tie a string through the middle, making colorful decorations for the holidays.

A software publisher with a warehouse full of outdated products is unlikely to use any of these suggestions. The tightly competitive nature of the business drives software companies to continually release updated versions. This quick turnover creates a disposal problem of unsold inventory that becomes obsolete.

Each year, companies must dispose of software that was eclipsed by newer versions. Dumping them in landfills is not only environmentally unsound, but commercially unwise. The products may be outdated, but that won't deter a "Dumpster diver" from looking for freebies, or an unscrupulous waste disposal contractor from selling the software illegally.

David Beschen saw a niche market for a company that could serve the software industry's need to securely dispose of its intellectual property with minimal impact on the environment. GreenDisk was founded in a small town outside of Seattle on April 22, 1993 (Earth Day), and

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since then has diverted more than 25 million pounds of software materials from the waste stream.

Beschen sees GreenDisk primarily as an intellectual property disposal service for software companies, with reused and recycled materials a natural byproduct of the process. To the software industry, he says, "An audit trail is the most important thing." His company uses a detailed tracking system that accounts for every piece of software delivered to guarantee

that all data is completely erased."

When GreenDisk receives a shipment of outdated or returned software packages, the materials are separated, and as much of the packaging and manuals as possible is recycled. The disks themselves are then magnetically erased and reformatted. At this point, if the software company wishes, the disks are returned. "It's about 50-50 percentage of companies that want the disks returned," says Beschen.

The other half of the diskettes is relabeled, repackaged, and sold under the GreenDisk brand of recycled blank disks. Since these disks

were initially of the higher grade that software houses buy to use in their high-speed duplicating machines, they are actually better quality than the consumer-grade blank disks normally available to end users.

GreenDisk also has corporate programs in place with companies such as Boeing and the University of Washington, both in nearby Seattle. Their motivation is similar to the software publishers, in that they have sensitive data they need to dispose of, or old versions of software that must be destroyed to abide by licensing agreements. For quality reasons,

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these diskettes are not reused, but are dismantled and the materials recycled for use in new disks. Similarly CD-ROMs, which are not reusable, are processed into recyclable plastic and used in other products.

When he founded the company, Beschen wanted to provide an environmentally responsible option that

also made good business sense to the software industry. Now grown to 96 employees in four locations, they recycle more than a million pounds of material a month. While the software industry is reducing packaging and moving into new areas such as distribution over the Internet, Beschen still sees a continuing need for environmentally sound services such as his as companies integrate recycling and reuse into their manufacturing processes from the beginning. □

What You Can Do

GreenDisk will accept storage media for recycling directly from end users. Use a padded envelope or box to ship the materials postpaid. Different items can be shipped together, but keep them separated from each other inside the package. Diskettes, CD-ROMs, jewel cases, magnetic tape, VHS tapes, and cartridges can be shipped to: GreenDisk, 8124 30th Ave. SE, Preston, WA 98050.

You can find more information at <http://www.greendisk.com>.