



AN E-XCITING OPPORTUNITY!

Waste management software provider ISB Global is calling for smarter reuse and recycling schemes to tackle e-waste, and says manufacturers and retailers need to play a bigger role in electronic device recycling and disposal. This is a real opportunity for forward thinking companies.

To address the mountain of electronic waste created by the prevalence of devices and technology in people's day to day lives, electronics manufacturers and retailers should adopt more sustainable processes that prioritise reuse and recycling. By doing so, they can reduce its impact on the environment and also position themselves for ongoing, long term success as part of a low waste circular economy.

That is according to Chris Williams, founder and CEO of ISB Global, the UK based software and solutions provider for the global waste management and recycling sector, who highlights the unexploited potential of old or broken devices that would otherwise be thrown away as a source for the base metals that are integral to the production of new hardware.

'Every electronic device you own contains a range of precious and base metals such as nickel, gallium, arsenic, silver and indium that have been extracted from the earth,' explained Chris. 'These metals are a finite resource. Their extraction and refinement is dangerous for workers, expensive, damages the environment, and generates a large carbon footprint as well.'

'In an ideal world, we would reuse material from old or unwanted devices and appliances to build new ones. But at the moment, that is easier said than done.'

VALUABLE RESOURCE

A 2021 study by international e-waste industry body the WEEE estimated that the world's combined discarded electronics for that year weighed more 57 million tonnes. But rather than see this e-waste mountain as an unassailable problem, Chris sees it as a valuable resource to be exploited.

'In every country around the world, there are millions of old, unwanted electronic gadgets hiding in drawers, boxes, lofts or garages whose components could be recycled and reused to make the next generation of new devices and appliances,' he said. The current situation opens up a significant commercial opportunity for forward thinking waste and recycling companies to collect and then recycle this old technology at scale. They can take it apart, and sort and remove the valuable elements to return back into the market for reuse.'

But, he also emphasises the significant contribution of governments and consumers themselves in solving the e-waste problem. 'Each of us should actively pursue a less wasteful, more productive end of life for all of our devices. National governments must hold manufacturers and retailers to account if they don't provide the means for consumers to do so,' he said.

'We are already seeing national governments intervene on the issue of old batteries,' Chris explained. 'In July of this year,

the Council of the European Union adopted a new regulation that strengthens sustainability rules for old waste batteries. The new regulation aims to promote a circular economy by regulating batteries of all sizes and types throughout their lifecycle. It establishes end of life requirements, including targets for the collection and recovery of chemical materials within batteries and extended responsibility by battery manufacturers. Governments should apply a similar approach to old electronic devices.

'What is needed are clear, easy to use schemes for people to send their devices for reuse or recycling once they are finished with them. In fairness, some manufacturers and retailers are already taking responsibility for the entire lifecycle of their own appliances and devices – for example, offering trade in deals for old devices when you buy a new one.'

TIME TO CHANGE

There are also charitable schemes that accept donated old devices, recondition them and then send them on to people who need and can use them. And if the device is broken beyond repair, it can be recycled to provide materials for new devices.

'But all of these schemes and companies must be transparent in their plans for how they reuse or recycle the products they receive. People hold onto their old devices because they don't know how best to dispose of it and also because they are concerned about the security of sending their old mobile phone, tablet device or laptop to a recycling scheme,' said Chris.

'What we absolutely don't want is for old technology to end up in landfill,' he added. 'E-waste takes hundreds of years to break down because of the materials it is made from. It also

leaks toxic chemicals into the ground that pollute the earth and groundwater supplies. Unfortunately, this still happens far too frequently in the UK and around the world.

'It is time to change entirely the way we dispose of our old technology. By investing in and devising new ways for consumers and businesses to reuse and recycle old and unwanted technology safely and sustainably, we can reduce the damage done to the environment and halt the depletion of the earth's natural resources. In doing so, we can create a fairer, more sustainable circular economy that benefits people and the planet alike.'

Founded in 1999, ISB Global designs and delivers innovative software that allows environmental, waste management and recycling businesses to automatically track, measure, report and analyse their waste and recyclable materials.

ISB Global's flagship product is Waste and Recycling One (WRI), which enables businesses to plan, track and control their waste management and recycling operations via a single integrated software solution.

WRI provides instant visibility of where materials are, how much businesses have in their inventory and what those materials are worth. Delivered through real time analytics, reporting and insights on all aspects of the collection and material recycling operations, WRI offer an insight into the future of how the world deals with waste and recyclable materials.