

## Computer refurbishers were green before it was cool

By MASON LERNER For the Chronicle  
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Clive Hess, left, and his father, John Hess of CompuCycle, have 10 years of experience in the rapidly growing field of e-waste disposal.

Father and son entrepreneurs John and Clive Hess are in an enviable position.

Their company, Compucycle, has been refurbishing computers acquired from major corporations for resale.

But not only have they managed to exploit the rapid growth of the personal computer market by selling refurbished products from companies such as Dell and Hewlett-Packard Co., they were a part of the going green movement before the term gained widespread popularity.

At a time when e-waste is becoming more and more of an issue, the Hesses have more than 10 years of experience in disposing of obsolete electronics in an ecofriendly matter.

According to the Environmental Protection Agency, electronic waste makes up almost 2 percent of the nation's municipal solid waste, and only about 18 percent of that waste is recycled.

### Discarding what could be saved

John Hess has been in the electronic recycling business for years. In the early 1990s, he began to notice that a growing number of people were throwing away equipment that had some mileage left.

"Initially it started with cherry-picking a few PCs and refurbishing and selling them," he said. "But it quickly became apparent that there was a bigger market."

As more people discarded their old computers, how to handle the growing amount of e-waste became a significant concern.



"If we can repair it, we repair it and resell it," he said. "If not, we break them down for reusable parts. But those components that are too damaged are recycled."

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Compucycle has a full staff of 35 employees. It also has staff to pick up used equipment and house it, a sales and customer service team and technicians.

Although the Hesses did not divulge the company's revenue, they said business is swift and growing rapidly.

"We also provide data erasure services," John Hess said. "That is how we attract the waste material and used products."

### Keeping costs low

Clive Hess said recycling is not only good for the environment, it also helps keep consumer costs low.

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One way to combat the less scrupulous is to get and trumpet certification as an accredited recycler, said Linda Ramirez, the director of the University of Texas at San Antonio's Technology Center, a division of the Institute for Economic Development. “For a company that is trying to position itself, the certification says, ‘OK, we're the real deal’ she said.

Compucycle has an Environmental Protection Agency permit and is a member of the International Association of Electronic Recyclers and the Recycling Alliance of Texas.

Ramirez recommended that the Hesses not be shy about letting the world know their credentials.

“I'd put it on the business cards, the Web sites, everything you've got,” she said.

### **Third-party testimony**

Beyond that, she said, they should deal with competition as any other small business does.

“I think if they could get testimony from clients to the effect that they have solved a problem for them or they are very aware of how they run their business. Third-party testimony is always more moving to a consumer,” she said.

“You have to be positioned in the consumer's mind. If you keep that foremost in your marketing plan, you'll get there.”