Consider These Uses For a Retired Computer

IN MAY, WE CONSIDERED BUYING A NEW COMPUTER. IF YOU'VE DONE THAT, YOU MAY BE WONDERING WHAT TO DO WITH THE OLD COMPUTER. FIRST AND FOREMOST: KEEP IT OUT OF A LANDFILL.

Several possibilities exist, but four primary options came to mind. These include donating it to a charitable organization, installing Linux on the old computer, turning it into a Chromebook, or giving it to a friend or family member. Just because the computer is too old to run the latest version of Windows well doesn't mean that it's worthless, and putting it out for trash collectors to carry away is the worst possible option.

Sell, Recycle, or Donate

THE OLD COMPUTER MAY LOOK LIKE JUNK TO YOU, BUT SOMEBODY MIGHT BE WILLING TO BUY IT. IF NOT, YOU CAN DONATE IT TO AN ORGANIZATION THAT WILL BE ABLE TO USE IT, OR YOU CAN GIVE IT TO A RECYCLER WHO WILL KEEP IT OUT OF A LANDFILL.

Bible Money Matters offers a list of ten places where you may be able to sell or trade old equipment.

SellBroke is a company I dealt with in 2019 when my wife's old computer finally broke down for the last time. The company buys Windows and MacOS laptop computers, various kinds of phones, desktop computers, cameras, tablets, and other miscellaneous gear. They paid $44 for a computer that was useless to me.

THE WORST POSSIBLE PLACE FOR ANY OUTDATED ELECTRONIC DEVICE IS A LANDFILL. VALUABLE, AND SOMETIMES DANGEROUS, MATERIALS SHOULD BE RECOVERED AND REUSED.

If the computer is still in working order and relatively new, five or six years old, there are organizations that will accept it and make it ready for others who need a computer. A *Microsoft service* will help you find a computer refurbisher. Another good source to locate organizations that accept computer equipment is provided by *TechSoup*.

For devices that are older or no longer work, check out *Earth 911's recycling search service*.

Why not just put it in the trash? Computers contain valuable and sometimes dangerous materials. Chromium, lead, and other heavy metals are all used in manufacturing computers along with toxic substances that reduce flammability.

If you donate a computer to someone who will reuse it, you'll want to remove licensed software that you've moved to the new computer and any personal information that's on the old computer.

The best way to strip personal information and licensed software from the computer is to use a utility that deletes all data and then writes several layers of nonsense data to the disk. Just deleting files, and even formatting the disk, won't remove all traces of data. Several common utilities have functions to perform this task and, if one is not installed on your computer, there are free open-source utilities.

The old computer will contain email addresses, bank account information, and documents that you'd prefer that the entire world not have access to. This isn't as important if you're planning to install Linux or convert the computer to a Chromebook, but

it is important if you'll be doing anything that involves giving someone else access to the hardware.

Deleting folders and files isn't enough because nothing is actually deleted; files and folders are just marked as deleted. You won't see them in the file explorer or any application that displays files and folders, but they're still there and recovering them is trivial.

You might think that formatting the disk drive would destroy all the files and folders on the drive. This does make it a bit harder for criminals to recover data, but not impossible. What you need is an application that securely deletes files and folders. These aren't difficult to find and many of them are free, open-source applications.

When you donate a computer to a library or charity, include all the peripherals if you got replacements with the new computer. The keyboard, mouse, any packaged software, and other accessories that came with the computer will help a school, nonprofit, or charity put the computer to use quickly.
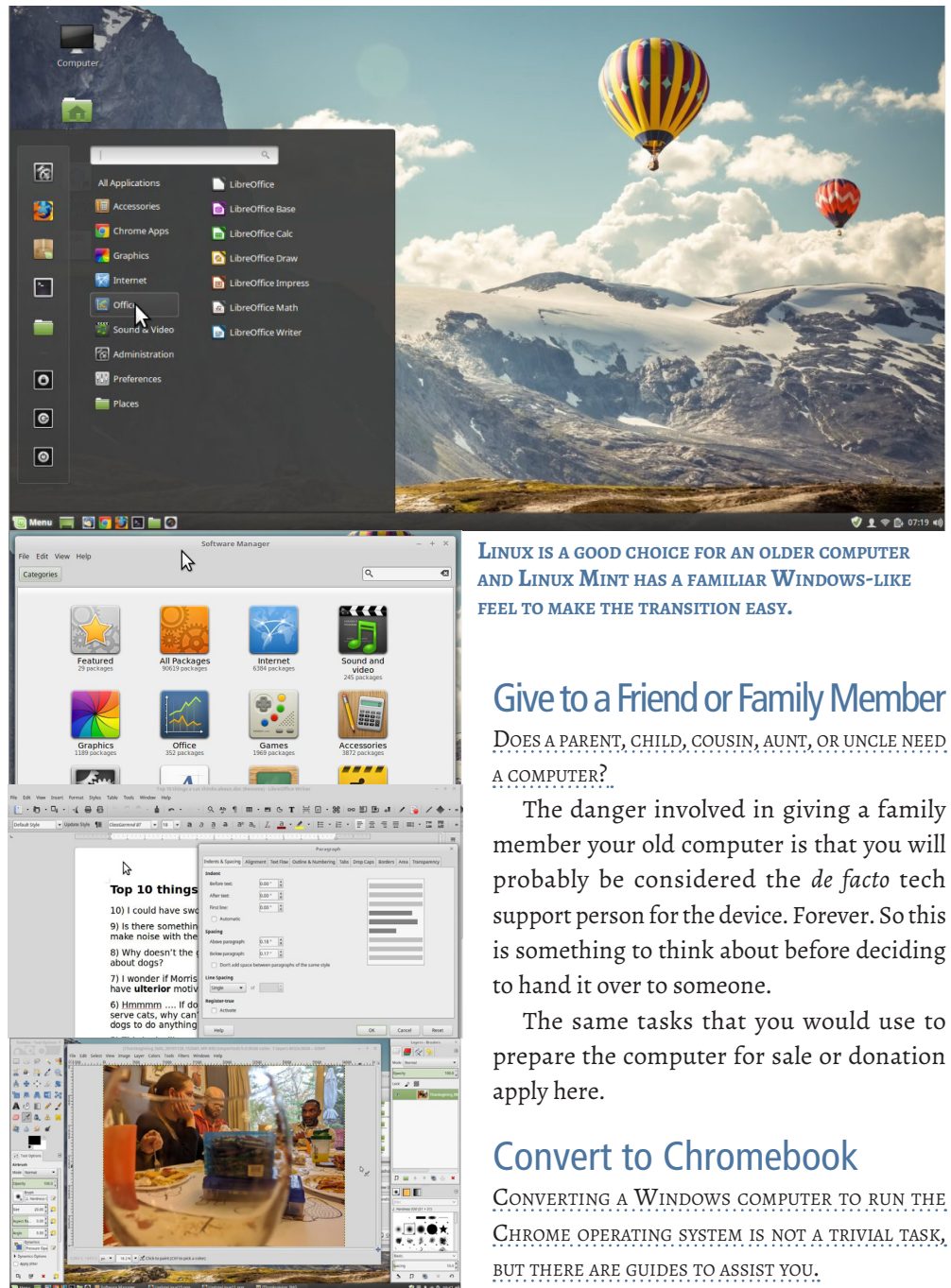
Keep It and Install Linux

If you've been wondering about Linux, it's easy to replace Windows.

Most Linux distros have two installation options: One for those who understand disk partitioning and the multiple partitions a Linux installation needs, and another for those who don't know and don't care to know. Choose the second option, accept all the defaults that the installer presents, and you'll have a Linux computer in less than half an hour. Usually quite a bit less than half an hour.

One of the best Linux distros for Windows users is Linux Mint, which is based on Ubuntu. There are literally hundreds of Linux distros, but they're all based on just a handful of primary distros. Mint and Ubuntu are the most recommended choices for new users.

Linux Mint looks a lot like Windows. You'll find a Menu button that serves the same purpose as the Windows Start button. A Files function looks like the Windows File Explorer and the Settings panel bears more than a passing resemblance to the Windows Settings panel.

An old Toshiba computer on my desk started with Windows 7, meaning that it would have been manufactured in 2009 or 2010. It's not very powerful by today's standards, doesn't have a lot of RAM, and the mechanical hard drive is both slow and small. It's running Linux Mint, and it serves as a good way for me to keep an eye on what's happening in the world of Linux even if I don't use the computer a lot.

Whenever the topic of Linux comes up, I have admit that it would do everything I need if I didn't depend on Microsoft and Adobe applications.

Give to a Friend or Family Member

Does a parent, child, cousin, aunt, or uncle need a computer?

The danger involved in giving a family member your old computer is that you will probably be considered the _de facto_ tech support person for the device. Forever. So this is something to think about before deciding to hand it over to someone.

The same tasks that you would use to prepare the computer for sale or donation apply here.

Convert to Chromebook

Converting a Windows computer to run the Chrome operating system is not a trivial task, but there are guides to assist you.

PC World has an excellent article that describes how to perform the conversion of a Windows computer to a Chromebook-like computer, and what to expect. It uses Neverware's CloudReady operating system that is based on Chromium OS. There are limitations: You won't have access to the Google Play Store and that may be a deal breaker. If not, the result will be a computer that's nearly identical to a Chromebook.

Keeping an old computer out of a landfill does take some time and a bit of effort, but it's the right thing to do. You'll feel better and the planet will appreciate your efforts. Ω