

INTERVIEW



Gary Griffiths

Environmental & quality systems manager for RDC

Recycling end-of-life IT equipment is a nightmare, right? EBNB speaks with Gary Griffiths of RDC to discover the truth about IT waste

interview

Can you explain in simple terms what RDC does?

RDC helps organisations manage the risks associated with IT equipment disposals, enabling clients to generate value from recycling, remarketing and reuse of redundant equipment. Our services ensure clients meet all current UK/EU legislative requirements and that all equipment is treated legally and securely.

Who are your clients? Can you give us some examples?

RDC provides end of life IT asset management services to both private and public sector organisations. Organisations with large IT estates can often turn disposal from an overhead into a revenue stream. Our current client base includes blue chip companies, banking and finance firms, retailers, public sector organisations and many local authorities.

The EU WEEE directive will soon require 65% of end-of-life IT equipment (by weight) to be physically recycled and another 10% to be recovered. Rumour has it that RDC already exceeds these targets. Is this true?

Yes, we already exceed the WEEE targets by a long way. We've proved it can be done. In 2003 we achieved a 100% recycling and recovery rate for the end of life IT waste we received from our customers. (We landfilled only 0.02% of all the total waste we received but none of it was IT waste. The small amount of waste we landfilled was packaging and office waste.) Key to our 100% recycling and

recovery rate was remarketing and/or redeployment of 70% of the equipment. We think of ourselves as paramedics not gravediggers. For instance, Royal Mail saved over £1 million using RDC to refurbish computers for internal reuse and remarketing. The Environment Agency highlighted its 100% computer reuse and recycling track record – using our services – in its 2003 environmental report. To meet WEEE directive reporting requirements, RDC has developed systems that track individual items and produce mass balance reports on recycled materials.

Why don't you use UK firms for all your material recycling?

RDC uses British recycling companies to treat hazardous items such as batteries and to recycle over 80% of our packaging waste. But to recycle plastics and monitor glass to WEEE standards we use British companies who then pass most IT material for processing to European recyclers. Firms in Germany, the Netherlands and Belgium have invested in recycling systems and technology not yet available in the UK.

If you were magically placed in charge of the government's WEEE implementation team what changes would you make?

I would introduce minimum performance standards for recycling and recovery, as required by the WEEE directive, instead of prescribing specific industrial processes as the DTI is currently focusing its energies on. The DTI's reluctance to introduce minimum performance standards could mean that the UK will fail to comply with all aspects of the directive. The absence of standards also means that it will continue to be possible to export WEEE to other countries where recycling operations are often dangerous to workers' health and the environment. Another reason why minimum performance standards are essential is that they assist buyers of WEEE services in specifying their requirements. Finally, if standards were introduced then UK recyclers would be able to plan which processes and technologies to invest in. Without standards UK recyclers run the risk of continuing to trail behind their European counterparts.