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GREEN BUSINESS

## GDPR may force businesses to recycle e-waste

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It always comes down to money. While recent e-waste figures suggest there is a lack of will among enterprises to manage the problem – total waste is expected to rise annually to **52.2 million metric tons** by 2021 globally – the impending launch of new data protection regulations GDPR in Europe could change all that. GDPR for one has teeth. Severe financial penalties (up to €20m or 4 percent of turnover) will be imposed on non-complying businesses and that also means businesses that suffer data breaches.

When you consider that UK telecoms and broadband provider TalkTalk was fined £400,000 and £100,000 for two separate data loss incidents, that puts it into perspective. As NCC Group pointed out last year, under GDPR, this could rise to over £50m. Given the amount of data swimming around on smartphones, tablets, laptops and hard drives, this is only going to get more difficult to manage, especially as these products reach the end of their lives.

*Still not sure what GDPR is, whether it applies to you, and what you need to do about it? Here's [Everything you need to know about... GDPR](#)*

So this becomes an e-waste issue as much as it becomes a GDPR issue. According to research, **only 20 percent of e-waste** is 'documented to be collected and properly recycled' which means that 80 percent of waste could in theory be open to abuse.

"By 2020, it is estimated that every individual will have a formidable digital shadow of about 2.5GB of personal data – the result of an ongoing 'data exhaust' pumped out from myriad sources," says Nick Taylor, head of Accenture Security UK.

Accenture, like many consultants, has been leaned on heavily by industry as the GDPR deadline approaches. It has worked with businesses across a range of industries, so are businesses ready? Can they cope with the challenges around managing personal data?

"Businesses across the board are finding it almost impossible to delete data," says Taylor. "This is largely due to nervousness about losing something that could later be required for further regulation, including GDPR, or querying from clients. This is particularly prevalent in the financial sector. Further barriers to data deletion include the mammoth infrastructural challenge. Data is often stored in complex, multi-layered legacy systems."

It is this complication and fear of error that could help to reduce e-waste, or at least force businesses into managing it more effectively.

"GDPR will certainly be a catalyst for enterprises tackling e-waste," says Charles Stewardson, president EMEA at FutureDial. "A lot of enterprises are looking to comply and that means a knock-on effect in terms of managing devices and ensuring data is erased to an international standard."

While stuffing old mobiles and portable hard drives in filing cabinet drawers may become a thing of the past, getting businesses to erase data correctly and to a standard is clearly still a challenge. Stewardson says that the problem is largely historical and harks back to a time when there was less personal data around and certainly less devices.

For enterprises, it's also been complicated by an increase in leasing. Stewardson says that enterprises need to work with leasing companies to form policies with strict rules.

"Leasing firms need to know the value of the equipment for re-sell and need an efficient regulatory process in handling data," he says. "No one wants a convoluted supply chain for e-waste because it can get very expensive."

Of course, for many enterprises, handling legacy IT and telephony equipment is generally a cost. It takes time and resources to manage, which is probably why to date the recycling rates have been so low, despite regulations, such as the EU's WEEE directive. Without efficient device processing, most devices end up in landfill, something which is harmful to the environment - just one cadmium phone battery is enough to **pollute 60,000 litres of water**.

Stewardson says the process needs automating and that there is money in old IT equipment and efficiency gains too. He talks about using robotics to determine the quality and therefore value of old mobile phones (it takes about three minutes a phone). He says that FutureDial is also now using robotics to erase phones of personal data. It means that old phones can be processed more efficiently and to a standard and that means reduced costs and better re-sell returns.

The recycled phone industry is growing. Sales of recycled phones were worth **\$19.7bn** last year and this is expected to grow to a **\$30bn global market** by 2020. Buoyed-on by rising smartphone costs, it's understandable that businesses in particular are looking at the recycled market to equip staff with devices.

Ultimately it will be the carrot of reduced costs and the stick of hefty GDPR fines that will drive organizations to taking the e-waste issue more seriously.

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