

GETTING GREEN WITH GADGETS

by Joe Hutsko

By now that being-green mantra known as the 3Rs is probably burned in your brain. Reduce. Reuse. Recycle. You notch the thermostat up or down and layer or shed garments to get comfortable. Hop aboard public transportation when feasible. Reuse your grocery bags, and refill your commuter mug with sustainable coffees and teas. And you pride yourself at sorting your paper, plastics and aluminum recyclables more thoughtfully than your whites, darks and colors. Mother Nature thanks you. And she thinks you're ready to embrace the secret, all-empowering 4th R: Rethink. The one you apply to the gadgets and gizmos in your life. Rethinking how you acquire, use, and dispose of your electronics stuff. Which in turn helps to minimize your impact on the planet. While maximizing the green that stays in your wallet.

Watching Annie Leonard's brilliant animated short "The Story of Electronics" (www.storyofelectronics.com) provides a crash-course snapshot on the damaging (and even deadly) impact electronics have on the environment.

Doing and getting greener with your gadgets begins with taking small, simple steps. For instance, pulling the plug on "energy vampires"—like cell phone chargers, computers, and TVs—can instantly lower your energy consumption—and save you around \$75 on your yearly energy bill. These power-hungry suckers keep sipping energy as long as they're plugged in, even when the gadgets are fully charged or turned off. Killing all of your energy vampire darlings at once with a flick of the switch is cinch when you plug your gear into an inexpensive power strip.

But if bending over or reaching behind your TV is a pain in the butt (and lower back), consider one of Belkin's Conserve power strips (www.belkin.com). The strips feature five to eight switchable sockets, and a pair of always-on sockets for gear you want to leave on, like your TiVo or DVR, or broadband modem and Wi-Fi router. The Conserve Switch models come with a handy remote control for cutting the juice, or use your own TV remote to turn the Control AV's switchable sockets on or off. Set your bedtime on the Conserve Surge with Timer and the strip will turn off the tube in case you fall asleep before the late show ends.



Tweaking your Mac or Window energy settings to put your computer to sleep after a few minutes of idle time

is an easy way to reduce consumption. A more immediate, hands-on option is ecobutton (www.ecobutton.com), which acts like a giant snooze button. LED lights beneath the button's surface go from steady to softly pulsing when you put the sleeper hold on your computer with a single press. Press again to wake your computer and see a report of how many kilowatts and greenbacks you've saved since you started smacking the ecobutton around.

Seeing exactly how much energy your gadgets are consuming individually and overall can be an eye-opening experience—and a real motivator to taking steps to reduce your consumption.



If you're wondering how much energy that space heater, PC or HDTV is costing you when it's turned on—and when it's turned off—plug it into the Kill A Watt (left). The gizmo

instantly displays how many watts the gadget is drawing—and how much it's costing you on your monthly energy bill.



Taking a bigger-picture approach is The Energy Detective (left), which taps directly into your home or apartment circuit breaker to display in real time the

total amount of energy you're using in kilowatts and dollars. Turning appliances and gadgets off and on reveal how much each one is adding to your load.

Gadgets that use less energy to operate and little or none when they're off are no-brainer choices when you're buying new gear.



Sony eco-friendlier Bravia big-screen HDTVs sip zero watts when the sets are turned off. Smarter still, sensors that detect body temperature and movement can tell if you leave the room, prompting the TV to shut off the picture after

30 minutes of playing to an audience of none.



If splurging on a new eco-friendlier HDTV isn't in the cards just yet, consider a less-costly investment: A universal remote

control. Ditching all of those remotes you juggle for Logitech's rechargeable Harmony Remote makes it easier to operate all of your entertainment gear with one remote—and no more burning through dozens of disposable batteries.



If you're not sold on an all-in-one remote, consider purchasing a rechargeable battery kit, like the Energizer Recharge

Universal Charger, which can charge up to 8 batteries at once that you can swap into your assorted remotes and other battery powered gadgets.

TIP: Getting rid of dead rechargeable batteries and other expired portable electronics? Visit call2recycle.org to find the nearest participating e-cycling partners that collect e-waste discards and sees that they're properly recycled.



When it comes to eco-savvier mobile phones, Nokia's focus on greener gadget designs and features repeatedly earns the company the top score

on Greenpeace's exhaustively researched Guide to Electronics (www.greenpeace.org/electronics). The Nokia N8 smartphone, for instance, features an "unplug charger" alert that nags you to do just that when the battery is fully recharged. It's also manufactured with recycled and environmentally friendly materials and free of toxic stuff like PVC and other scarier-sounding e-poisons (including brominated and chlorinated compounds, and antimony trioxide). Packaged with 100% recycled materials. And it's highly recyclable when it finally gives up the digital ghost.



TIP: Search on "Eco Charger" in the Android App Market, and "Battery Tune" in the Apple App Store, to

download free full-charge notification apps for those smartphones.

But if you're thinking of buying a greener phone like the N8, you may want to reconsider. Ditto if you've got your heart set on that light-as-a-paperback MacBook Air. Or you're eyeing the idea of curling up with a good e-book on a Kindle or Nook Color. Sure, the Air is more efficient than your aging laptop. And yes, using those e-readers reduces the number of trees felled, packaging materials squandered, and fuel burned to produce, print and ship "real" books to your local bookstore or doorstep.

As smart as those choices are, an even smarter choice is merely rethinking about a gadget you may already own: Your smartphone.

Armed with the right add-ons and apps, your smartphone can pull double, triple and even quadruple duty as pocket-sized computer or e-book reader, a GPS navigator, or a movies or TV player that streams Netflix movies and TV shows to the small screen for your personal viewing pleasure—or to an HDTV so the whole room can watch.

Prop your iPhone or Android phone on a portable stand. Pair with a full-size or compact Bluetooth wireless keyboard. Install Documents to Go. And presto:



a pocket-sized office for viewing, creating and editing Microsoft Office Word, Excel, and PowerPoint documents. Free or for-a-fee file storage and sync connectivity with DropBox, SugarSync or your Gmail account lets you access your files from your smartphone or from any computer.



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