



Cascade Asset Management offers its customers a revenue-sharing model for recycling electronics, while keeping dangerous elements out of the waste stream.

# CASCADE ASSET MANAGEMENT

**Address:** 5125 Decatur Blvd., Suite F, Indianapolis, IN 46241  
**Telephone:** (608) 222-4800  
**Web site:** [www.cascade-assets.com](http://www.cascade-assets.com)  
**Management:** Neil Peters-Michaud, CEO

## Takin' Care of Business (Assets)

**By Charlee Beasor**

An enormous box of shredded hard drives sits under specialized equipment, ready for the next deposit.

An employee runs data sanitization programs on a selection of computers, surrounded by rows upon rows of computer towers ready to be wiped of potentially sensitive information.

Other employees take apart laptops, televisions, desktop monitors and electronic equipment, separating materials that can be recycled or resold from hazardous substances that will be disposed of safely.

That's the scene in Cascade Asset Management's Indianapolis processing facility.

With 14 employees in Indianapolis and 65 at the company's headquarters in Madison, Wisconsin, Cascade helps its clients ensure their highly sensitive data, software licenses and more is securely cleaned from old devices.

The equipment is then recycled or resold when possible – often with money coming back to the clients through a revenue-sharing model. The company has turned a previous business expense into a revenue generator for its customers.

CEO Neil Peters-Michaud founded Cascade Asset Management in 1999 and opened a facility in Plainfield in 2006 (the processing facility is now located just south of the Indianapolis International Airport).

Since its founding, the company has recycled over 7 million cubic feet of electronics – roughly the same amount as filling up Spaceship Earth at Disney's EPCOT Center more than three times.

"Back in 2006, this was just treated as a waste product and businesses would deal with a scrap company. They'd treat it like scrap and pay pennies on the pound to get rid of the equipment," Peters-Michaud offers. "Now, recycling IT equipment has become a profit center for them and they have much better tracking and accountability for their disposal. These are assets that have value and can also be a liability."

## Security is No. 1

An information technology team takes unique measures and special care to keep hardware, software, computer equipment and other electronic devices secure while in use.

But what happens when those pieces of equipment or programs handling extremely sensitive information are past the point of usability? Is that special care continued for the life cycle of the machine?

That's one of the considerations Peters-Michaud urges business owners and technology professionals to keep in mind when it's time to dispose of outdated electronics and other assets.

And that's where Cascade Asset Management comes in: assisting its customers with ensuring their data is sanitized before the equipment is recycled or resold.

Peters-Michaud notes that he has observed more involvement from information security departments due to the heightened attention

to be a critical part of demonstrating compliance with GDPR," he explains.

## Go green or go home

CBS News ran a 2008 story on *60 Minutes* about the dumping of electronic waste or "e-waste" from America to China. The practice of dumping "e-waste" overseas, which is both illegal and a scourge to the environment, was common enough that the Government Accountability Office found 43 U.S. companies were involved in the practice, according to the *60 Minutes* piece.

That is often one of the first things potential clients ask of Peters-Michaud: "Are you dumping electronics in China?"

"We're not just shipping stuff overseas, which is what was happening 20 years ago (in the industry). Those are lost resources; resources we want to use here. It's aluminum and steel and it's staying in the Midwest."

materials. Old CRT (cathode ray tubes), lead was embedded in the glass. Once that gets crushed or put into a landfill, it's just like a lead pipe contaminating the water supply," he describes. "But it is very recyclable . . . Recycling is a way to meet the law, in a safe and effective manner, that exempts everybody from these hazardous waste laws."

Cascade Asset Management separates assets into 50 commodities; 86% of all equipment collected is reused or converted into raw materials. In 2017, the company generated over 3.34 million pounds of disassembled commodities and 1.2 million pounds of steel for recycling.

"The refurbishing economy for IT is a big job creator. We keep this material in the local market and it's a whole ecosystem that's been created too. We partner and sell products at the local stores and it's something that has a cascading (pun intended) effect," Peters-Michaud says.

However, there is no one industry standard for recycling, he acknowledges.

"It's a challenge in the industry to help consumers be aware of companies trying to do the right thing. Once it leaves your door, it's hard to trace. There are industry certifications that have been developed over the years. One standard is called e-Stewards; that's the one we're involved with," he reveals.

"We say to people – the standards are really important as an initial review to see if they have programs in place and see that they're processing the equipment."

## ROI of asset management

What other advice does Peters-Michaud offer for companies to consider? Start with the life cycle of electronics before making the purchase.

"Make sure they're buying computers that last and are good quality and (they) have a plan for disposing of (them) three or four years later," he suggests. "IT asset management is a great way to avoid the security risk, to reduce cost through the total cost of ownership of that product."

Cascade Asset Management primarily sells on eBay, through bulk wholesale and to its own customers' employees. In 2017, the company sold 88,197 assets overall. Revenue sharing with its clients encourages them to keep electronics in the best shape possible, so when they're ready to buy new, the old assets are worth as much as possible.

"We do a report every year for our clients. . . . They continue to find their net returns have increased the last three or four years," he states.



Cybersecurity and data protection issues are top of mind for the company, headquartered in Madison, Wisconsin, with a processing facility in Indianapolis.

to cybersecurity and data protection issues, including the European Union's new General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which went into effect May 25. The regulation impacts anyone who does business with a member of the European Union.

"GDPR is having an impact on our industry. Companies are responsible for data as long as it exists. It still exists on these computers. They have to prove they've destroyed a person's record. The reporting we provide . . . is going

Cascade Asset Management recycles and resells commodities, ensuring businesses that electronics are disposed of in accordance with state and federal laws and with an emphasis on environmental stewardship.

What are some of the hazardous substances involved with electronics? Lead, cadmium and mercury, to name a few of the toxic materials, Peters-Michaud confirms.

"The laws are in place because these computers contain a number of hazardous