

Black Friday: Why not save money with a refurbished Samsung Galaxy smartphone, Apple iPhone or laptop?

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iPhone 8 and iPhone 8 Plus. Credit: Apple

Sure, you can buy the latest iPhone 12 starting at \$699, but doesn't a classic iPhone for \$200 sound more up your alley?

Or why not just \$849 on a 21-inch Apple iMac, instead of \$1,099 for a new one?

In other words, instead of spending big money on Black Friday/Cyber Monday sales, why not save money on a refurb?

With a refurbished product, you won't get the latest technology, but you will get a workable device that didn't need to be thrown away—one that's been cleaned, inspected and re-packaged to continue serving customers.

"Like-new devices. Second-hand prices," is how Back Market, one of the many websites that re-sells used products describes its inventory.

True, you won't get the latest technology. That \$200 iPhone 8 is from 2017, and Apple's processor wasn't as fast then, nor were the cameras as advanced.

But we're in a pandemic where many people have lost their jobs or been furloughed. They don't need to spend on the latest and greatest.

"The number one reason people come to us is for the price," says Serge Verdoux, managing director for Back Market. "Some customers only want what's new." Others are skeptical that the newer phone is actually that much better than the older one, he adds. Is it really that much faster?

Is the camera that much better?

Beyond the obvious candidates like eBay, Craigslist and Facebook's Marketplace section, several websites like Back Market have popped up to serve the used demand. Others include Swappa, Gazelle and TradeMore.

Swappa, for instance, has a full selection of iPhones, Samsung Galaxy smartphones and laptops. An iPhone 11, from 2019, is \$415. Apple sells the same phone new on its website for \$599.

A better deal would be for the Galaxy S10, also from 2019, for \$310. Samsung doesn't sell the model anymore, but the successor, the S20, starts at \$999.

Laptops became hard-to-get items this year, as so many of us left offices and classrooms to work and learn from home. Scott Johnson, a computer repair technician who sells refurbs to clients in the Tampa Bay area of Florida, says consumers can get a better computer for half the price by going refurb.

"When I get them in, they won't last but a few days," he says. He replaces the old slow and often unreliable hard drive with a faster solid state drive, "and there is quite a noticeable difference in performance," he says.

Most of his used laptops are two years old, and sell for about \$400.

J.T. Ippolito, a YouTuber from Las Vegas, says he regularly buys refurbished tech items to save money. "You still get the latest products," and likes that refurbs are put through "rigorous testing."

Andrew Funderburg, the founder of Fundy Software in Beaverton,

Oregon, says he regularly buys refurbished Mac laptops for his office, to save money. "Most Apple refurbis are just open box returns," he says. "We'll buy the newest one and save \$300. When you're buying 5-10 machines a year, it really adds up."

He buys from the Certified Refurbished section of Apple's website, where consumers still get a one-year warranty.

The non-profit Advocate for the Public Interest notes that environmentally, "If Americans used our smartphones for one year longer, we would reduce manufacturing material demand by 42.5 million pounds per day—which would be like cutting a jumbo-jet's weight in raw material use every 17 minutes," AFPI says.

The Back Market site says it checks everything on devices before re-selling them, cleaning the units, checks to make sure the device wasn't stolen, monitors the battery strength and wipes customers data.

Back Market doesn't buy back devices from consumers, but is planning on offering the service in 2021. Swappa and Gazelle buy them directly from consumers, while Apple and the phone carriers offer trade-in deals.

To qualify for a sale, phones need to be in good working condition, without dents, cracked screens, water damage and the like.

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