How to Get Rid of Old Computer Data

Selling your computer or device to somebody else, donating it, or sending it to a recycle center, for the sake of security, you should get rid of old data from the computer. It is important to get rid of confidential, personal and work related data. Here is a list of options you can try. Each of these methods features their own benefits and drawbacks.

1. **Formatting the hard drive**
   This is one of the basic options to get rid of data. Internal hard drives, external hard drives, USB pen drives and memory cards can be formatted to get rid of existing data. However, regular formatting is not a fully secured way to delete your data permanently considering the amount of data recovery software programs available in the market. But, as a solution for that, you may use a data overwrite software / a file shredder to make your old data unrecoverable.

2. **Restoring to factory settings**
   "Resetting to Factory Default Setting" is one of the most common ways of getting rid of old data, especially with portable computing devices. Data stored in portable computers such as Tablet PCs, Smart Phones and tablets are easily erasable with this particular method. Most of the people find this method very easy because portable devices come with non-removable hard disks. However, the effectiveness of this method can be vary from manufacturer to manufacturer.

3. **Using a secure deletion software**
   There are various secure deletion software programs available in the market to delete data permanently from the hard drive. These programs help you to delete data as individual files, folders or even the entire drive. The main advantage of these programs is that they are extremely easy to use and affordable. Therefore, even a novice can use this option to get rid of data permanently. When it comes to erasing data of an entire drive it might take several hours, but rest assured it will be securely and irrevocably erased.

4. **Physical destroying the hard drive**
   This option is best left to a professional. This is the method where you completely destroy the hard drive physically instead of deleting data from it. After the process, the hard drive will no longer be available to use by any means. Although this seems to be a very harsh method, it is effective! Best methods include grinding, pulverizing or incineration. A basic method that isn't as good, but can still be effective, is to drill holes into the platters (the round disks inside the hard drive enclosure). When destroying a hard disk, be cautious as it can be very hazardous. Also, take the necessary actions to dispose of the remains properly to prevent environmental consequences.

Before removing data using any of the above-mentioned methods, make sure you have a solid backup or have already transferred your data (pictures, files in My Documents, videos, etc.) to another computer or storage device (like a USB drive) since, very likely, you will not be able to undo this action.

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