IFIXIT

2014 Nominet Trust 100 Winner

2014

A 'MAKE DO AND MEND' MOVEMENT FOR THE AGE OF BUILT-IN OBSOLESCENCE

Project URL: ifixit.com
Project Twitter: @ifixit

- Economic Empowerment
- Open Source
- Physical Computing
- Social Software

iFixit is a wiki-style community that writes free online repair guides to prolong the life expectancy of consumer electronics that would otherwise end up in landfill, such as Macs, iPods, iPhones, iPads.

Doing this is not just thrifty and practical, but overtly political: it challenges a key, and very profitable, plank of the computer age's industrial design policy – that of 'built-in obsolescence'.

Our consumer electronics have incredibly short lifespans: the average desktop computer lasts just three years, laptops less. Gadgets are being designed to be increasingly hard to fix when they break and to adapt hardware to keep pace with software. As the Guardian puts it: 'IT's planned obsolescence is turbocharged by must-have software which is only upwardly compatible. Want better software? You'll need a better machine.'

Good news for hardware companies' balance sheets. Not so good for planet Earth: one metric tonne of electronic scrap from personal computers contains more gold than that recovered from 17 tonnes of gold ore. The glass in a typical CRT contains 10 pounds of lead. Flat panels: mercury. Plastic cases: polybrominated flame retardants. And inside the 2bn cellphones sold last year are conflict minerals, gold, tin, tungsten. Meaning our gadgets are using up non-renewable resources and leading to environmental degradation on a massive scale, dangerous mining and conflict.

iFixit, which began with two engineering students sat in their college dorm

trying to fix an old iBook without instructions in 2003, now helps thousands take apart and repair devices because, as the founders say, 'repair, reuse and remanufacturing are better than recycling.'

As well as free repair guides, they sell toolkits and spare parts: combing through the inventories of third party resellers to find the replacement parts and spare components that Apple and others fail to offer consumers direct.

Their next step is to join up with Fairphone, an NT100 2013 winner, to produce repair guides for their ethically-manufactured phone. 'I'm not entirely convinced that our addiction to new tech will ever come without the price of environmental and human suffering. But wouldn't it be great if it didn't?' says cofounder Kyle Wiens. Amen to that.

Image 'iFixit Pentalobe Screwdriver Set' courtesy of macappsaddict

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