

The Herald

Upward mobility for cellular phone users

About 5 million wireless phones are retired from service each month as consumers pick up new models with glitzy features such as built-in video cameras and personal organizers.



What happens to those discarded phones?

Two Florida companies urge recycling — with a profit on the side. They also keep

the old phones out of landfills, where they can pose an environmental hazard.

GRC, based in Miramar, has two programs for recovering cellular phones. It buys phones from wireless dealers, distributors and repair centers. It takes in between 75,000 to 80,000 phones per month.

It also works with Shelter Alliance, a nonprofit group that coordinates cell phone programs for some 1,200 social service organizations in the United States, Canada and Puerto Rico.

GRC pays anywhere from 25 cents to \$40 maximum -- depending on the model and the condition of the phones -- for the phones collected through this group. A check goes directly to the organizations that collected the phones.

GRC pays dealers, wholesalers, and distributors \$1 per pound for phones, plus the postage for the cellphones it collects. The company pays \$2 per pound for boards, which are the brains of the phones. **Henry Garcia**, GRC's co-founder and chief executive, says the company has paid out \$1.3 million over the past two years to charities. Right now, the company is averaging close to \$100,000 a month for this program.

If the phones can be refurbished, Garcia says GRC will sell them to a company that specializes in that field. Such phones often wind up with carriers and resellers in Latin America.

About 50 percent of the phones that GRC collects can be recycled. Otherwise, the older-model phones become scrap and GRC recovers the precious metals, such as gold, palladium, silver and copper used to build them. The recovered metals, in turn, are sold for a profit by GRC.

GRC, which expects to take in about 1 million used cell phones this year, has a staff of 15. The privately held company, which was founded 2½ years ago, has been profitable.

Garcia and his business partner, **Marc Leff**, funded GRC. Both are veterans of the wireless industry, having previously worked for **CellStar**, a major cellular phone distributor.

With more than 170 million cell phones in circulation and consumers getting the urge to upgrade their phones every 12 to 18 months, Garcia has no qualms about the supply of old



BOB EIGHMIE/HERALD STAFF

WHO YOU GONNA CALL?: GRC COO Marc Leff, left, and CEO Henry Garcia show some of 3,000 discarded cellphones their company has collected in order to save the phones from ending up in a landfill.

cellphones drying up any time soon.

He also isn't too worried about the competition. Though it exists, the cellphone recycling business is a fragmented industry, so he sees room for several recyclers.

His biggest competitor is **ReCellular**, based in Dexter, Mich., which collects about 250,000 phones each month. Some phones are sold to prepaid wireless providers in the United States; the rest are sold for parts.

GRC also has a closer competitor, **RMS Communications**, in Ocala. The company, founded in 1985 to recycle pagers, changed its game plan to wireless phones nine years ago.

RMS Communications works with retailers like **Best Buy** and **Circuit City**, as well as service providers like **AT&T Wireless** and **Cingular**, and also distributors. It buys about 50,000 phones a month to refurbish or sell to other firms that specialize in refurbishing.

Through a website, **www.cellforcash.com**, RMS also works with consumers. It will pay \$5 to \$65 for discarded cell phones, depending on the model. It will even send out a postage-

paid envelope for consumers to mail their phones.

James Mosieur, RMS's chief executive, says scratches and even dings are acceptable, but the phones need to be working.

The refurbished phones are sold to distributors in Latin America as well as some in Europe and the Far East.

Mosieur says the privately held company has been profitable from day one. It has two facilities, one in Dallas with 60 employees and another in Ocala with 75 staffers.

Last month, after Hurricane Charley ravaged Florida's Southwest coast, RMS teamed up with Tampa-based **Choice Cellular** to collect unused cellphones. The proceeds from these phones would be donated to help out the hurricane victims.

"We'll probably do something for victims of Hurricane Frances," Mosieur says.

FLIRTING TO GO

Webdate.com, a Miami-based online dating service, is making its service available to wireless phone users. The company's Webdate Mobile

service, which offers member profiles, photos, search capabilities and anonymous e-mail messaging to other members, is available on wireless phones via **Handango.com**.

Most customers of **AT&T Wireless**, **Cingular** and **T-Mobile** in the United States, as well as customers of **Bell Mobility**, **Fido**, **Rogers AT&T** and **Telus Mobility** in Canada, that can access **Handango.com** could download the Webdate Mobile service.

The cost is \$2.99. Webdate shares in the revenue for every download.

Abe Smilowitz, Webdate's COO, says the mobile service is an extension of all the features members find online. "Combine that with the security and privacy of mobile flirting and you have the hottest dating opportunity on the planet," he says.

The company points out that Webdate members can continue their personal searches for a soul mate on their wireless phones, rather than the company PC — a fact that employers may, or may not, like.

According to **Alexa.com**, an Amazon.com-owned company which tracks Internet traffic, Webdate.com's reach per million Internet surfers rose 62 percent in the last three months.

YELLOW PAGES

If you haven't looked lately, check out the **www.realpages.com**.

The look and feel is somewhat familiar -- after all, it comes from the same folks that publish the fat volumes that are dropped on your doorstep each fall -- the **Real Yellow Pages** from **BellSouth**.

But on the web, the phone directories are full of far more information, and searching them can provide better results faster.

Consumers have to download a small application, which is free, that allows them to search for directories in the entire nine-state territory served by BellSouth. If you click on Florida, you can get directories — white or yellow pages — for any area of the state.

The October 2004 edition of the Miami-Dade and Broward directories, including both residential and business listings, are already available online.

The site, first launched in 1997, has been picking up steam in the past two years, says **Ed Patterson**, a spokesman for **BellSouth Advertising and Publishing**, the BellSouth division which publishes the books and handles the website.

This year, the company expected to see more than 200 million searches on the website, up from 160 million last year and 140 million in 2002.

Patterson says sales staff now carries laptops to demonstrate the website to potential advertisers.

Companies can buy ads for the hardcover edition or for the website. But BellSouth gives advertisers incentives when they buy ads in both.