Caution before donating or discarding old computers

Recent post on a neighborhood-based social media platform:
I am a local disabled businessman who needs to stay busy. I'm looking for computer parts such as memory, hard drives and solid-state drives. I'm trying to start a small nonprofit refurbished computer company. I've been on medical leave, so all help is wanted. —Andrew C.

Responses came quickly: This was an easy request to meet by donating old computer gear that had been collecting dust—and as a bonus, people would be helping a nonprofit get started.

Some of the comments:
"Are you interested in an old laptop?"
"Andrew, can you use an older PC? Probably from 2011."
"Please call me—I have two nonworking laptops."
"Andrew, you can have this one (photo), but I have some old pictures on it and would like to get them."

Then there was this post:
I'm not making judgments, but I would think that people would want to ensure that any equipment being given, donated or tossed should have the memory wiped clean on it, so as not to provide personal information that could allow accounts to be accessed.

This is a fair warning, as scammers are regularly stealing personal data like account numbers and passwords from secondhand computers.

Here are some steps that the Federal Trade Commission recommends before selling, donating or disposing of any computer:

Back Up Your Information
Transfer your files to another computer. Most operating systems include the capability to directly transfer files. Save your files to an external storage device like a USB flash drive or an external hard drive. Or save your files using a cloud storage service like iCloud, Google Drive, Dropbox or Evernote.

Sign Out Of Accounts
After saving your personal information, sign out of all your online accounts.

Disconnect Devices
Unpair your computer from Bluetooth devices like a mouse, keyboard and wireless display.

Erase Your Hard Drive
Look for a program or function on your computer that will let you erase all your files from the hard drive and reset it to factory settings. If it doesn't have one, look for expert advice online to see what programs are compatible with the type of computer and hard drive that you have.

Taking these steps will help ensure that your personal information doesn't end up in the wrong hands.

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