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Discarded Apples Think different on computer waste

For Apple Computer, it's never been just about combining chips to make a device. It's been a about making a statement.

From the original Macintosh to the iPod music player, Apple has promoted non-conformity and individual expression. Apple has sold a lifestyle that is hip, sensitive and forward-thinking.

So Apple should feel a bit stung by the protesters at Macworld taking it to task for indifference to e-waste.

When it comes to worrying about what happens to its computers and iPods when owners replace them, Apple has not been so avant-garde. It's hardly an industrial outlaw. The company was occasionally helpful, and occasionally not, on e-waste legislation in Sacramento. It operates a take-back program, for a fee. It's a part of eBay's new "Rethink Initiative," which gives consumers all the information they should need to find a place to sell, donate or recycle a computer.

But on e-waste, Apple is what it says it never wants to be — just one of the crowd.

While Apple has only a tiny share of the personal-computer market, it continues to have a much larger share of the computer-world mindshare, which is one reason the protesters were where they were.

It has been a bold leader in many respects. Why not on e-waste?

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