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Are there extra smartphones sitting around your office? How about the pills? As we move multiple generations into mobile technologies, more and more of us are building up collections of old, dated devices from both our work and our personal lives. And more often than not, these devices do little more than take a seat and collect dust. Here's a little secret though: Your abandoned Android gadgets are actually virtual gold mines. You just have to find the right way to use their potential and give them a new lease of life. So take the nearest DustBuster and get ready: Here are 20 ways to make your old phone or tablet useful again.1 Use it as a wireless trackpad and controller for your computer With the right software and a couple of minutes configuration, your old Android device can act as an on-demand controller for your Windows, Mac or Linux computer. An app called Unified Remote and Wi-Fi or Bluetooth connection is all you need to make the magic happen. The free version of the app gives you basic mouse and keyboard control along with specialized remotes to play media and power-related commands, while the full \$5 version adds specific remotes to the program along with other advanced features. JR Raphael/IDG Unified Remote provides basic mouse and keyboard control along with a variety of specialized remotes. Grab whatever version you prefer and download the server side of the software for your computer - then toss an old device into a desk drawer or computer bag and rest easily knowing that it will be ready and waiting the next time you need to go wireless. 2. Turn it into a remote computer terminalVant easy access to your home computer from the office - or vice versa? Your old Android phone or tablet can be a great desktop screen to keep the remote system within hand reach. The new version of Google's Chrome Remote Desktop program does not support Android, oddly enough, but a third-party version of the app called TeamViewer conveniently fills the void. To get started with it, download and install the appropriate app for your desktop computer. Windows, Mac, Linux and Chrome OS have support. Once the program is in place, open it and you should see the access code and password for the remote login. All that's left is to install a companion app on your Android device, tap in the same credentials - and within seconds, you have to look at your desktop computer from the screen of your Android device. Teams for advanced forms of interaction (including or reboot the remote system) can be found in the toolbar at the bottom of the screen. You can pull up the virtual keyboard by tapping the keyboard icon in the same area in the meantime, and if you need to use your computer mouse, you can click once to press, click and hold the right button, double-click to drag and fall, and drag with two fingers to scroll. You can also pinch to enlarge any Area. TeamViewer is free for personal use (so be sure to choose a personal/non-commercial use option during the initial installation of the program, provided that the classification makes sense to you). If you use it in a commercial context, plans start at \$49 a month for a year of business license.3 Use it as a universal smart remote control if the old Android device has enough power to serve as an intelligent remote control for your home or office. This can be a useful way for you and everyone else around to control various smart devices and multimedia components without the need for any special access (or your own current personal phone in hand). First, the simple part: Download your old phone or tablet with all the relevant apps to customize your smart device - things like the socket, shade, and everything else is suitable for managing your home or office technology. Next, consider adding some tools that will allow your device to handle any audio and video system in your area. There are several ways to make this work: Connect your phone or tablet to one of Google's ultra-affordable Chromecast streaming sticks. You can then keep your old Android device on your desk or coffee table and use it as a hub for wireless casting content - everything from Netflix and YouTube to TED Talks, CNBC and Google Slides - on your TV. Install an app to make your old android device a dedicated remote control for components such as TVs, cable boxes and DVD players. If the device has a built-in IR blaster, it most likely comes with its own built-in app that can be configured to work with the entertainment installation. If it doesn't have an IR blaster, try finding certain component management apps in the Google Play Store. Such programs are available from brands such as Panasonic, Comcast Xfinity, ATT U-verse, DirecTV, Roku, and Android TV. Build a full-fledged media server using Plex and then use the old device as a special remote to stream your own local content to your TV. (Plex media server software is free; a premium subscription with additional features runs \$5 a month, \$40 a year, or \$120 for a lifetime license.) 4. Let this power scientific researchHere something: Your hulking old Android device can actually help scientists seek out extraterrestrial life, detect earthquakes, or improve cancer treatment. All of this is part of a series of programs that use the computing power of your device to conduct Research. Some of the most worthwhile options: HTC Power To Give connects your phone or tablet with the efforts of the University of California, Berkeley, known as BOINC - Berkeley's open infrastructure for network computing. BOINC conducts research in a variety of fields, including physics, biomedicine and astronomy (hence the aforementioned extraterrestrial experiment, which is actually a study you can choose to support). BOINC has its own Android app, by the way, but it's grown a little rusty over the years, and HTC HTC (although also not actively supported) is much easier to use. DreamLab is a joint effort between Vodafone and the Australian Institute of Medical Research Garvan. His current projects aim to get an idea of how cancer relates to a patient's DNA profile, which in turn could allow the development of more specific and effective drugs to fight cancer. MyShake, from the Seismological Laboratory at the University of California, Berkeley, uses your device's sensors to detect and analyze earthquakes. If you live in an area where earthquakes occur, leaving the device connected and on a stable surface will provide scientists with valuable real-time data about any seismic activity. All apps work essentially the same way: after downloading and installing (and sometimes through a short setup or registration procedure), you simply plug in the device and turn off its screen. As long as it remains connected to an active Wi-Fi network, researchers will be able to use its computing power. IDG Apps such as HTC Power To Give, left, and DreamLab, right, can turn a tablet or phone into a research machine. 5. Turn it into a free security cameraWho needs a fancy-schmanzy connected camera when you have an old Android phone sitting around? Using a third-party app, a camera on a dated device can allow you to monitor your home, office or top secret crime lair from anywhere - and even perform advanced functions such as video recording and motion detection. Just download the free IP webcam app or get a full featured \$4 pro version and follow its instructions. In a few moments, you'll be able to peer into your device's lens from any compatible web browser and choke on glorious glee.6 Reformulate it as a full-time video conferencing stationSet your old Android device with the app for video chat platform of choice - Skype, Hangouts Meet, Google Duo, or in any way can be - then drop it into the dock at your desk or conference room table. Say hocus pocus for good measure, and ta-da. You've just created a permanent access point for virtual face-to-face communication. Just think: with enough old phones and tablets, you can create an entire house or office of the entire video conferencing system. Sign each device into your unique account, with the name of the room as a username, and seeing someone through the building will never be more than a couple of quick taps away.7. Turn it into the kitchen command center Ard believe, but my ancient 2011 Motorola Xoom tablet was one of the most used devices in my house until it finally kicked the bucket for about six years of his life. That's because I its in a multipurpose command center for our kitchen - the role of my 2012 Nexus 10 tablet then took over a couple more years after that. So, how do you make a kitchen command center yourself? Easy: First, use a third-party launcher Action Launcher or Nova Launcher simplify the home screen of your old tablet and add in some easy-to-perform gestures - like double-tapping anywhere on the screen to run Android voice search feature for on-the-fly information gathering and other hands-free commands. (Later devices can also support voice-activated hands-free communication and an even wider variety of commands through Google Assistant.) Second, fill the home screen with the right apps for that purpose. Netflix and other video streaming services will effectively transform your old tablet into a cooking TV. Recipe apps can also be useful, as can cloud-based note services such as Google Keep, Evernote, or OneNote, for quickly viewing personal recipes or editing always synchronized family shopping lists. Do this based on data extension of your current phone serviceIf you use Google Fi (formerly known as Project Fi) for your current phone's wireless service, take advantage of a little-known bonus feature: the ability to get an additional SIM card that is connected to your account and is able to provide data on any other device - without any extra fees. All you have to do is order a map from the Google Fi website, pop it into an old phone (or tablet if you happen to have one with a SIM slot) - and bam: This device is instantly online and connected. You will only pay for any mobile data that the device uses in any given month, at the same fixed rate associated with your regular Fi plan, so it's essentially just an extension of your main phone. This opens up a lot of interesting possibilities: You can use an old device as a ready-to-work backup phone in case your routine is ever missing, broken or low-battery; You can use it as a dedicated access point for a beam of mobile data access without draining the battery of your main phone; or you can use it as an always-connected on-the-go slate for your kids (hello, airport video streaming) without having to pay for an extra line of service. You can even use it to make and get phone calls - using either your regular phone number or alternative number - if you get a little creative with your thinking.9. Make it your living window into the world Don't have the greatest opinion from your desk? Let your old Android phone or tablet be your window into wild and exciting places. To get started, take the EarthCam webcam app from the Google Play Store. This will give you one-touch access to an impressive list of live streaming cameras around the world, from the hustle and bustle of the famous Bourbon Street to Orleans up to the swooshing tranquility of Niagara Falls. Lift any kind of you like and then tap the icon to go full screen and watch the day away. If you find yourself craving some variety, you may want to consider upgrading from a free app collection to a set of 175 live cameras for a one-time \$5 fee. JR Raphael / IDG EarthCam EarthCam You're looking down Niagara Falls - or a host of other webcams around the world - for a break from the mundane. You can find quite a few mobile friendly live cameras on the internet as well: Pull up your device's browser and try out San Diego zoo's various animal cams - including penguin cameras, koala cameras and tiger cameras, among other exotic species - or Monterey Bay Aquarium's extensive underwater cameras for even more au-inducing options.10. Transform it into a digital photo frame, memories. Hook up an inexpensive booth, connect the device to the charger and turn it into a cloud photo frame for your home or office. If you're using Google Photos, just open the app, click on any photo in your main library or as part of a specific album, then tap the three-point menu icon in the top right corner of the screen and select Slideshow. The app will cycle through your photos and give you lots of memories to think about while relaxing or taking care of business.11. Use it as a special e-reader Tot distraction-free reading environment for your next business trip or public transport commute? Download an old android device only with apps you need to read - Google Play Books, Amazon Kindle, Nook, or something else tickles your text fantasies. You can even take books from your local library: Check with the nearest affiliate for information on how to do it, or download the free OverDrive app, which is used by various libraries, schools and institutions. Be sure to turn off notifications from Gmail and other noisy apps - heck, even switch your device to airplane mode once you've downloaded the content you need - and you have the equivalent of a dedicated e-reader without all the usual phones or tablet temptations. Turn it into a special desktop dow calendar that has your old device on your desk and put it to work as a personal calendar. Google's own Calendar app can get the job done with lots of performance oriented items, or the free DigiCal Calendar Agenda app will give you an even more graphic and customizable interface that is perfect for this purpose. Jr Raphael/IDG DigiCal app looks particularly sharp in its landscape (horizontal) orientation. DigiCal is free with an additional \$5 upgrade for additional themes and customization options.13. Make it a set command center for your carSave yourself hassle futzng around with your current phone in your car, turning an old device into an ever-available in-car command center. Find a decent car dock and mount the device in a safe place. Be sure to connect it to the power port car and connect it to the stereo (via Bluetooth or 3.5mm headphone jack). Then, either use your main phone as an access point to keep it online or go down an economical route and download any necessary music and directions before you hit the road while you're still connected to Wi-Fi.Grab Wi-Fi.Grab Android Auto is an app for a simplified interface with big buttons and extra voice commands, and all: your newly repurposed satellite is ready to roll. (Note that Google plans to replace the standalone Android Auto app experience with a new Google Assistant driving mode at some point in the foreseeable future, but it's not currently clear exactly when exactly that transition will happen. Page 2 Your old tablet may seem tired to you, but it's still top-notch technology by kid standards - so why not turn it into a fun and educational gadget for your child? On tablets with Android 4.3 or above, you can find a native limited profile feature right in the operating system: Just head to the settings of the system, click users (or users and accounts, and then users, depending on your os version), and then add a user or profile. Choose an option to add a limited profile. You will be asked to turn on or off access to each application installed on your tablet, allowing you to control what processes your offspring will be able to use. If your old device has Android 7.0 or higher (or Android 6.0, on a small number of models), Google Family Link can give you even more robust controls - including the ability to set screen time limits and receive weekly activity reports. You can find out more and register on Family Link.15. Let it serve as a high-tech electronictime watch for something new? An old phone with a dock can make a smart customizable watch for your desk or nightstand. Google's own watch app is a great place to start, especially if you want to use your watch to alarm. Look for the Screensaver option in the System Settings Display section to make it automatically activate anytime your device is connected. For an even more visual flair, take a look at Lucid DayDream Screensaver - a fully customizable screensaver that allows you to have a watch along with the calendar, weather and notification information floating around the screen whenever your device is idle. The app is free to try, but requires \$1.50 in-app purchases to remain fully functional.16. Transform it into a gaming device for your idle down portfolio and summon your inner Pac-Man: Stupid as it may seem, your old Android mini arcade device is just waiting to be triggered into action. (Hey, we all need a casual break from work, don't we?) To complete your game-boy like conversion, just surfing the Play Store for some games - you can even find emulators for console level systems if (agram) you know where to look - and then level up by capturing one of the universal Moga Android game controllers, available for \$25 and above.17. Keep it handy for emergenciesFrice mobile phone can make emergency calls even if it is not connected to active service. Hold Hold The old phone is also charged in your car or travel bag: if something bad happens and your active phone is either dead or unavailable, you'll still have a way to reach 911.18. Turn it into your personal polygonAndroid dream master. It usually doesn't take too much witchcraft to eradicate, or access the level system, Android device - and once you've done that, you open up a whole new world of possibilities. You can install powerful root-only apps and even replace your device's entire operating system with custom ROM, full of fresh features and enhanced customization capacity. Anytime you start poking under the hood though, you run the risk of messing up something. And when the device in question is your main phone or tablet, it can be a tricky gamble (especially since rooting the device usually violates its warranty). That's where an old phone or tablet can get into the game. Put the hacker's hat on and do a Google search for root (your device name) and then (your device name) ROM. There's a huge community of Android enthusiasts out there and you'll almost certainly find some helpful custom guides to get yourself started. It's easy to sell it, isn't it? After all, what's old for you is new to someone else. You can go the regular route and list the device on Craigslist or eBay - or you can check with more niche services like Swappa, Gazelle, or Glyde to get an instant estimated price for your device. Amazon and Best Buy also offer buyout programs that may be worth exploring. Whatever you do, make sure you head into the settings of the device system and perform a full reset plant before you pass anything together. You probably also want to remove any memory cards that you might add if your old phone or tablet has an external storage slot.20 Donate it to a charity? Rest assured: There's no shortage of organizations willing to put their old Android device in the hands of those who can actually use it. A few opportunities worth considering: Medic Mobile: This nonprofit recycles old phones and tablets and then uses the proceeds to buy new phones for health workers in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Workers use these phones for things like tracking disease outbreaks and communicating in emergencies. You can print a prepaid delivery label on the Medic Mobile website. Cell phones for soldiers: This nonprofit sends old phones along with a free international call service to troops serving overseas from all branches of the U.S. military. You can donate the device by finding drop-off point or by requesting a mailing list. Rainforest Connection: This non-profit organization uses old phones to protect rainforests in Indonesia, Africa and the Amazon. As? The devices are equipped with solar panels to generate energy, as well as specialized software, software. Monitor the sound of an illegal chainsaw and then alert nearby rangers to activity (yes, really!). You can donate the device by mailing it to the organization's headquarters in California. So you have: 20 intriguing options for giving new life on your old device. Find out which one best suits you - and send these gadgets housing dust bunnies packing. This story was originally published in August 2014 and was recently updated in September 2019. By © 2019 IDG Communications, Inc.

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