

Recycling your mobile phone? Beware the empty price 'promise'

I'll admit it, I didn't read the small print. So I almost paid the price when a £26 offer was cut by more than two-thirds

I'm an idiot, I don't mind admitting it. In a fit of stupidity, and only seeing pounds signs, I was lured in by flashy marketing and failed to read the small print when looking to make some extra cash. I sent off an old mobile phone to a gadget recycling company without checking its credentials or terms of business – and it nearly cost me dear.

RapidRecycle.co.uk quoted me £26.75 for my old Samsung Galaxy S3 Mini. It was in full working order with only one or two scratches and chips. There were three options when describing it: new, working and faulty. I picked working. "Super prices! We pay what we quote," the website boasts. "Don't trust other recyclers with their overinflated prices. Rapid Recycle will only give you the best!"

Mobile phone recycling is big business. There are scores of online companies offering cash for old handsets. The phones are then recycled, which usually involves sending them to overseas markets such as the Middle East, Africa and South America, or used for parts.

Unfortunately, in my case RapidRecycle failed to live up to its marketing. It claimed the handset had too much damage, reduced its offer to £8.76 and pointed to its terms and conditions. I had the option to decline, but – and here's the real sting in the tail – I'd have to pay £7.99 to get my phone back. I felt I'd been had. Worse still, there was no opportunity for negotiation. I had three days to pay the postage or RapidRecycle would assume I had accepted the price. All this was in the small print which, yes, I had failed to read.

At the time, RapidRecycle didn't have a phone number on its website and only accepted complaints in writing – inevitably impossible within the three days. After a letter and numerous emails, all mentioning my job as a journalist, the company eventually returned my phone for free. I later sold it on eBay for £30.

Other RapidRecycle customers, who contacted Guardian Money via Twitter, weren't so fortunate. Bert Atherton was quoted £121 for his iPhone 5s, but RapidRecycle re-offered £24 after receiving it. Atherton declined and paid £3.99 to get it back, describing the company's customer service as non-existent.

Similarly, Jo Bardsley had a £50 quote reduced to £7.50. RapidRecycle simply deemed her as accepting the re-offer and kept her phone. "My issue is, 'working' doesn't mean 'factory perfect'," she says.

Unfortunately RapidRecycle isn't the only such site to reduce quotes after receiving mobiles and other gadgets...

Just days after being contacted by the Guardian, RapidRecycle managing director, Dexter Cardy, announced the site was about to go through a "significant internal change". He refuses to say what percentage of phones were re-quoted, but claims 75% of re-offers were accepted. "Recycle websites are all pricing higher to win traffic, but then have to be stricter regarding the condition once received," he says. "This is an untenable and impossible situation."

Cardy says RapidRecycle would soon be working with new comparison site OnRecycle, which would rank recyclers on reviews and not just price. He promises that from May 2nd it will offer free returns for all phones re-offered due to cosmetic issues, clearer messaging about the expected condition of an item, and an email system for better handling of complaints.

Emma Lunn/ Guardian journalist

Read again the first part of **source A**, lines **X to X**.

Choose **four** statements below which are TRUE.

- Shade the boxes of the ones that you think are true
- Choose a maximum of four statements.

A. The writer wanted to sell her iPhone 5s.

☐

B. The writer feels like she was deceived by Rapid Recycle.

☐

C. Customer complaints were made via Twitter.

☐

D. Rapid Recycle will be regulated in the future by an external company.

☐

E. Rapid Recycle failed to live up to its advertising.

☐

F. The writer sold her own phone for more than Rapid Recycle offered her.

☐

G. Cardy claims more than 75% of re-offers were accepted by clients.

☐

H. Rapid Recycle is a unique type of business.

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