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**CRANKY CONSUMER**

**Hauling Away Your Household Junk**

We Sample Free And Paid Services; A Taker for Tools

By **JANE HODGES**  
January 31, 2008

Many Americans make it a New Year's resolution, or a spring rite, to declutter their homes and get rid of accumulated junk. Usually such efforts require trips to the municipal dump or heated arguments between family members the night before garbage day. To sidestep such difficulties and get the job done swiftly, we hired residential junk-hauling companies that make house calls and enlisted free local services that could link us with junk-seeking charities and individuals willing to haul our items away.

Ridding our home of unwanted junk in less than 24 hours was easy. We paid two services -- 1-800-Rid-Of-It and 1-800-Got-Junk -- to remove some of our load. We then posted digital photographs and a classified ad on the well-known local bulletin board Craig's List to find locals willing to take our discards. We also used the Web site of national thrift-store chain Value Village to locate a local charity willing to remove some of our goods and transport them to a local Value Village store for resale.

There are thousands of residential junk haulers in the U.S., and they compete within the \$46 billion to \$47 billion solid-waste-hauling industry where larger haulers pulling container-loads worth of junk pull in the lion's share of revenue, says Brian Butler, an analyst at FBR Capital Markets in Arlington, Va.

Of course, the term "junk" is subjective, defined both by items we no longer happen to use (but that are nonetheless still usable -- like clothes and books) and items no one is likely to use (scrap wood, yard waste, broken appliances, half-filled cans of paint) unless they run a recycling center. We learned that our choice of hauler was contingent upon our junk load's content.

For true, never-again-usable junk, we could enlist the pay haulers, 1-800-Rid-Of-It and 1-800-Got-Junk, as both will remove items destined for the dump such as old appliances, construction debris and yard waste. These services do charge environmental fees for some appliances and materials. Value Village will take small appliances (less than 18 inches in height and width), clothes, household items, books, and the like, but not auto parts, large appliances, hazardous or construction materials, and mattresses. Craig's List prohibits classifieds for a lengthy list of controversial items (alcohol, tobacco, firearms, weapons, batteries, pets, prescription drugs). There's also no guarantee you'll find someone who wants your detritus.

Pay haulers had abundant pick-up options within 24 hours. 1-800-Got-Junk's lowest-price pick-up was \$127 in our market (Seattle), and our small volume of yard-related discards qualified for that pricing. 1-800-Got-Junk haulers showed up in a large truck as promised on a cold, rainy day. They made quick work of our scraps, presented us with a receipt, and vanished.

The lowest price pick-up from 1-800-Rid-Of-It was \$149 in our area, a customer-service rep told us. The company uses one-ton trucks with a capacity of four pick-up beds, she said, and charges based on how many theoretical pick-ups our stuff would fill. We used 800-Rid-Of-It to haul an old console style stereo, lamps, and clothes. Haulers called an hour and a half before pick-up time to say they were running early, but they

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were accommodating when we weren't ready for them, leaving for breakfast and returning at the originally chosen time.

The free services were more complicated to use, but since items taken by free haulers are re-used by individuals, our sense of altruism outweighed the inconvenience. Value Village, which operates stores in 21 states, uses a network of local charities for pick-ups. We had trouble using the Northwest Services for the Blind Web site to arrange a Value Village pick-up (the site did not recognize our street), but a call to the charity revealed that trucks would sweep our area the next day and we could leave items outside for hauling. This was a stroke of luck, however: Northwest Services for the Blind trucks visit neighborhoods just once a month, and had we waited just one more day to call we'd have had to wait another four weeks for the next pick-up.

Using Craig's List to get rid of junk has been hit-or-miss for us in the past. However, after uploading a classified with digital photos to the Seattle site on a Saturday morning we were pleasantly surprised to get multiple responses within an hour; one item, a push lawnmower, was removed by a Craigslist-er less than two hours after our posting.

When we couldn't arrange a pick-up with the local interested in our old garden tools (he hadn't provided a phone number and didn't write back to our email within four hours), we contacted the second respondent, who fetched the tools the next day. If we use Craig's List again in the future, we would make sure our ad asks respondents for phone numbers so we can arrange pick-up plans quickly.

In retrospect, we'd use the pay haulers again for bigger and messier projects -- for construction or particularly dirty yard debris or if we were eliminating an entire room's worth of contents -- but we liked that we could use alternative free services for items such as clothes, books, and small tools and appliances. Using any of these services, however, assured that our home shed some winter clutter -- without any drives to the dump.

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COMPANY/WEB SITE	ITEMS HAULED/COST	PICK-UP AVAILABILITY	WHERE STUFF GOES	COMMENT
<b>1-800-Got-Junk</b> <a href="http://www.1800gotjunk.com">www.1800gotjunk.com</a>	Yard waste and wood debris; \$127 (base price)	Within 24 hours	The company says that 60% of all junk is recycled or donated.	Online booking was easy; calling customer service to tweak the pick-up time was also straightforward. The job was speedy.
<b>1-800-Rid-Of-It</b> <a href="http://www.800ridofit.com">www.800ridofit.com</a>	Old console stereo, lamp, trash cans, clothes; \$149 (base price)	Within 24 hours	60% of materials are recycled or donated.	We couldn't book pick-up online, but could request a call from the company to set an appointment. Company refers some customers elsewhere if their load is too small or has chemicals/paints.
<b>Craig's List</b> <a href="http://www.craigslist.org">www.craigslist.org</a>	Push mower and assorted yard tools; free	4 hours for push mower; 24 hours for yard tools	Other local consumers	Responses to postings vary widely. The push mower was gone within four hours, while yard tools took a full day. We left items outside for pick-up.
<b>Value Village/Savers Inc.</b> <a href="http://www.valuevillage.com">www.valuevillage.com</a>	Boxes of old clothes, books and small working appliances; free	Within 24 hours (a lucky coincidence for us since pick-up is once monthly)	Value Village thrift store in our local area	The charity hauler's online scheduling system didn't recognize our street, so we arranged pick-up by phone. Marked boxes were retrieved from our front steps.

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