

Mobile phone refurbishment. How it works and what to look for

The market for refurbished smartphones is growing in the Netherlands, especially those with an accredited quality seal of approval.

Many used devices are checked and refurbished at “Forza Refurbished” in Breda, The Netherlands.

How does that work and what should you pay attention to when purchasing a refurbished smartphone?

It looks a bit like a torture tool. A white covered machine, in which the iPhone is located with many protrusions that turn, press and maneuver, the phone helpless in the middle.

This machine however is not intended to destroy smartphones, but rather to check them: whether the camera quality is good, whether the phone reacts smoothly when a button is pressed or whether the battery has more than 85 percent of the original charging capacity.

The tester is standing with five others at Forza Refurbished, a company that is located in a white office building on the southern edge of Breda, where the buildings change into the green of the Mastbos. Forza is involved in screening and repairing of used phones then refurbishing - and reselling them.

Relatively cheap

The popularity of refurbished phones is increasing, although the share in the total market is still small. According to studies by both Telecompaper and BigSpark, roughly 2 percent of the Dutch population had such a refurbished telephone in 2018. The devices are relatively inexpensive, moreover, the reuse of electronic parts and devices saves resources and reduces CO2 emissions. On the other hand, recycled devices can have scratches and stains, sometimes have non optimal batteries and can suffer water damage faster.

If the machine light shows green, then the phone may be passed on to a customer. If the light is red then an employee replaces the faltering parts, after which the telephone is put in the tester again. When it is not possible to repair the device, the phone is returned to where it came from – often an American wholesaler.

Sixteen hours a day the robots check used phones. Without those machines, Forza would no longer have existed, says Jan-Willem van Dijk, CEO. When he started in the summer of 2016, one in eight phones came back. That was unacceptable. “Back then we checked telephones manually, we blew into the microphone and then listened back to see if it worked well. Measurements of the robots are much more objective and precise”. According to him, only 2.8 percent are coming back now.



Loose parts

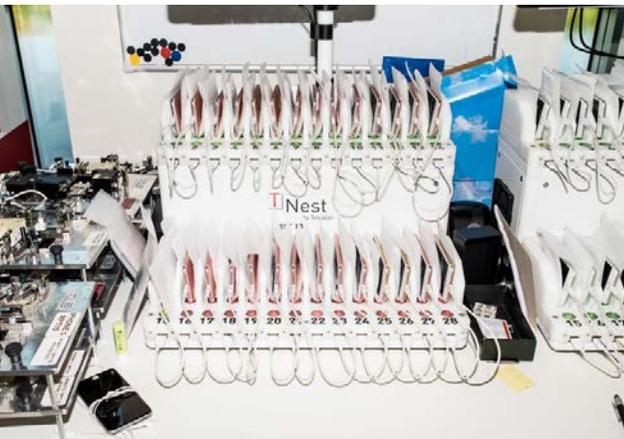
The workbenches have black boxes full of parts of telephone, such as screens and back covers: parts that can be replaced. Forza has harvested what can be reused for later repairs. The rest goes to a waste processor or to companies that repair individual parts. For example, screens whose glass has cracked, but the underlying touch technology works.

New parts are not from Apple, for whom the refurbished market is a competitor. Much comes from China, mostly from the city of Shenzhen, where Apple factories are located, says Marijn Schouw, Operational Manager at Forza. He went to China himself, looking for suppliers. "At five o'clock the light goes out in the factory, at half past five they turn it on again. Then they make exactly the same parts as during the day, just not for Apple. Apple has no control over that. "

Things are going quite well for Forza. Certainly since they attained a quality mark for refurbished telephones in March 2019. Companies with that quality seal, which includes Leapp and Renewd in addition to Forza, immediately saw an average increase in turnover of 22 percent, the industry association Techniek Nederland (previously Uneto-VNI) reported.

These companies promise, among other things, to perform 50 different objective checks and offer a two-year warranty. The TÜV verification inspection checks whether companies are complying with this. The

quality mark is currently only for iPhones, as the vast majority of the refurbished market consists of these. This is partly because Apple provides its phones with updates for years longer than Samsung says Jan-Willem van Dijk.



'Cowboy market'

He is in any case happy with the quality mark, which he expects to help increase confidence in refurbished telephones. "It was really a cowboy market. People even offer devices at the marketplace under the heading "refurbished," while it is simply a second-hand device that has not been dealt with. "

Consumentenbond, a Consumer Association in the Netherlands, is also happy with the label. Although it remains to be seen whether it has a positive effect on the telephone buyer, says a spokesperson. After all, the union is critical of the refurbished market, including large parties that now have the label. Among the eighteen devices tested by the Consumers' Association in 2018, there were, among other things, a copy with a loose-fitting screen, undersized batteries and - in the opinion of the Association - unacceptable signs of use such as scratches and pits.

For the record, the panel of the same Consumer Association, of which five hundred members have a refurbished telephone, was predominantly positive. The vast majority were satisfied with the store where they had purchased their refurbished telephone.

When telephones return, the reason is in some cases that customers disagree with the "grading", says Van Dijk. That are the grades "as good as new", "lightly used" or "visibly used". But it has to be noted, "as good as new" or refurbished without any visible trace, is not possible.

So be careful with providers who claim otherwise, is his advice. "We took over used phones from Chinese traders in our first months, but we have had bad experiences with that. They had no damage on the outside, but on the inside, it seemed as if a truck had driven over them. "

5 Tips for the purchase of a refurbished telephone

1. Pay attention to the price. Sometimes web shops compare the price of a refurbished phone with the price when the model was new rather than the current market value. A year or two later, the new price can be as much as 200 euros cheaper. Keep this in mind when determining whether a refurbished phone is worth it. Comparison between providers also pays off. "
2. Check whether the seller is reliable. Pay attention to any official quality mark and see if a web shop is easily accessible by telephone. A large number of (positive) online reviews - at least a few hundred - is also an indication.
3. Note the condition of the phone. Check if a store reports whether a phone is "as good as new" or contains "clear traces of use". If the store does not do this, ignore it. Remember that refurbished phones almost always show signs of usage.
4. Check whether the supplier also supplies cable and plug. They should normally be included in the price.
5. Pay attention to the warranty. This varies from 6 months to 2 years. If all is well, a store also offers a 14-day money-back guarantee. This then gives the customer a cooling-off period, should the telephone disappoint.