

Don Lancaster's

RESOURCE BIN

number seventy three

Insider secrets of surplus and auctions.

Our usual reminder here that the *Resource Bin* is now a two-way column. You can get tech help, consultant referrals and off-the-wall networking on nearly any electronic, *tinaja* questing, personal publishing, money machine, or computer topic by calling me at (520) 428-4073 weekdays 8-5 Mountain Standard Time.

I'm now in the process of setting up my new *Guru's Lair* web site you will find at (where else?) www.tinaja.com This is the place you'll go for instant tech answers. Among the many files in our library, you will find complete reprint sets for all of the *Resource Bin* and other columns. Plus a brand new *Research InfoPack Service*.

You will get the best results if you have both *Netscape Communicator* and *Acrobat Reader 3.0* installed.

Auctions & Surplus

With cold war meltdown, industry downsizing, research reductions, and revolutionary new electronics, there's literally tons of vintage electronic test equipment and used computers now going begging. Even at a tiny fraction of their original costs.

There is clearly a glut on the used electronics market. Fewer and fewer people seem willing to spend the time and effort to learn how to solder. Let alone learning, using, and profiting from personal electronic research.

Opporknockity tunes but once.

On the one hand, surplus *is* surplus because somebody does not want it anymore or there is something wrong with it. Old test gear does tend to be bulky and heavy, and some key parts might no longer exist. Manuals and schematics can get hard to find and might even end up costing more than the gear itself.

Then again, surplus is a great way to build up a lab or even start up your own tech venture.

For pennies on the dollar.

And a buck might be made buying low and selling high...

- *If you are in the right place at the right time.*
- *If you know your product.*
- *If you have low cost storage.*
- *If you never pay more than six cents on the dollar.*
- *If you can locate online storefront, or direct mail buyers with minimal ad costs.*
- *If you deal in just the right quantities.*
- *If you stay lean and mean.*
- *If nobody else tries exactly the same stunt at the same time.*

And most especially...

- *If the shipping charges and repairs don't eat you alive.*

The obvious starting point for most anything involving electronic surplus is right here in *Nuts & Volts*. Beyond these pages, though, you might find what follows to be of interest...

Hamfests

The real gold mine for all electronic bargains is right where it always was: at a local *hamfest*. These are simply electronic flea market and tailgating parties put on by some local amateur

NEXT MONTH: Don shakes down some resources about seismography & earthquakes.

radio club. There are many hundreds of these yearly, ranging from a few locals getting together up to the huge yearly blowout in Dayton, Ohio.

Here in Arizona, there's hamfests in Yuma, Tucson, Sierra Vista, Mesa, East Phoenix, Apache Junction, and Glendale locations. Along with the big regional July 4th weekend blast up in the Flagstaff high country.

The admission as a buyer is free to nominal, while sellers typically pay a ten dollar or so fee. Show times are typically from before the sun goes up to just after noon. You'll get the best genuine bargains at 5 am before any of the others spot the goodies. You also might pick up lots of junk for a song just before closing from sellers that have been issued an ultimatum to return alone and empty.

Or don't bother coming back.

One complete listing of upcoming hamfests shows up right here every month in *Nuts & Volts*.

Your master directory is the *ARRL Hamfest and Convention Calendar* at www.arrl.org/hamfests.html Another useful hamfest calendar appears on the *virtual hamfest* website you'll find at www.vhamfest.com They also offer commissioned online sales.

Alternatives to hamfests include computer swap meets or flea markets. Check your local surplus stores, clubs, shoppers, or bulletin boards to find out what is in your area.

Government & Military

At one time, the government and military sources offered outstanding surplus and auction bargains. These days, what remains isn't all that great, and they are only the tiniest shadow of what they used to be. For years now, commercial gear has been far cheaper and better than military.

Two long term resellers of military electronic surplus are my favorite *Fair Radio Sales* for the smaller stuff, and *Radio Research Instruments* for whole radars and giant dishes.

The feds have dramatically cleaned up and improved their surplus web site. You can even place bids online. Find this one at www.drms.com or use the link on my *Guru's Lair* website at www.tinaja.com/dntkwb01.html

Military surplus has recently gone storefront. Many of the army or air

force bases now have their own retail stores, and much is now sold direct, rather than by spot bids or auctions. Access hours may be limited. Details on the web site, or call your local base for specific details.

An obvious rule: *Never buy military surplus sight unseen!*

An interesting military surplus web site is the *Hot Sheets Worldwide* you'll find at personalwebs.myriad.net/gspub/home/html There's also a *Commerce Business Daily* magazine which lists surplus property sales by both civil and military agencies.

Electronic Surplus

There's two obvious classifications for electronic surplus, namely retail and wholesale. On the retail side, the all time grand champion numero uno is *American Science & Surplus*. You'll find many hundreds of ads for other suppliers right here in *Nuts & Volts*. Several I find personally interesting do include *C&H Sales*, *Marlin P. Jones*, *Herbach and Rademan*, *Timeline*, and *Halted Specialties*.

Wholesale electronic surplus outfits advertise in *Electronic Buyer's News*. The once superb listings in *Electronic News* seem to be long gone.

My own favorite industrial surplus mag is *Industrial Marketplace*. This one has lots of wholesale electronic and mechanical stuff in it. But note that there's *zero* handholding or any lot splitting, and deals are almost always done "right now" by FAX. Their idea of long term is "outta here by lunch".

More on distress and remarketed items appears in a trio of Texas pubs. *CompU-Mart* for computers and some electronics, *The Mart* for printshop stuff, and *Telecom Gear* for phones.

Web Sites

Your best starting web site for these wholesale sources is *xcess.com* My favorite wholesale surplus dealer is *Surplus Traders* at www.73.com

There are bunches of surplus and auction sites on the web, electronic and otherwise. Start with the *NETIS Auctions on the Web* site at www2.auctionweb.com/otherauc.htm for dozens of banners and hundreds of hot links.

There's a *Trans Network Associates* site at www.t-na.com who claim to be your gateway to surplus, liquidation and closeout merchandise.

Lerner Enterprises is supposedly a high profile site that specializes in closeouts and overstocks. Their web site is www.salvage.net. One obvious

competitor is *Merchandise USA* at, of all places, merchandiseusa.com

Closeout salvage merchandise info is offered by www.freeyellow.com/members/captainbli/index.htm The *TraderNet* site up at idss.com/tradernet gives you buy-sell listings and hot sheets.

Schools

A lot of schools and community colleges are stupidly dropping their electronics programs. Several others are sharply scaling back on them. Or shifting into computer science from "hard" electronics. Some others are dumping early and ultimately highly collectible Apple and Commodore computers for as little as one dollar.

As a result, you should find some incredible auction bargains around. If you dig deeply enough into remote enough locations. I've seen a \$25,000 theater lighting system sell for \$19. What is ideal is if you are the only technical bidder remaining at the end of a lousy weather day at a remote and largely unpromoted auction site.

But do not get sucked into older printers and monitors. These largely have negative cash value due to their weight, storage bulk, repair, and the outrageous shipping costs.

Do watch out for inane locals who don't have the faintest clue what an older computer is worth. And never bid a price beyond a genuine bargain. Ferinstance, the current street price on a Mac LC II is around \$60 or so. I saw dozens of these systems get bid up to an astounding \$270 with monitor. But I grabbed a entire monitorless *pile* of them for \$6 each.

With Ethernet cards, even.

Never pay more than fifty cents for a 286 computer. But do grab any and all "Black Apples" you can find.

The first method to find out about remote school auctions is to call them and ask. The second is through your regional auction directories.

Larger universities do tend to use both auctions and storefronts for their surplus property disposal. Unwanted items are initially offered to internal departments, then to nearby schools and nonprofit orgs, and finally to the general public.

I've found www.dist.maricopa.edu/surplus/index.html useful for access to Phoenix area community colleges.

This same site has links to surplus property disposal pages on our three universities, U of A, Tempe Normal, and NAU. Plus several links to local publications and auctioneers.

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Thatcher, AZ 85552
(520) 428-4073

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A FEW SURPLUS AND AUCTION RESOURCES

Am Radio Relay League
225 Main St
Newington CT 06111
(203) 666-1541

American Sci & Surplus
3605 Howard St
Skokie IL 60076
(847) 982-0874

Army/Navy Mercandiser
445 Broadhollow Rd #21
Melville NY 11747
(516) 845-2700

ASD/AMD Trade News
2525 Ocean Pk Blvd
Santa Monica CA 90405
(800) 421-4511

Auction Hunter
2465 Grand Ave
Baldwin NY 11510
(888) 321-7653

Auction World
417 W Stanton Ave
Fergus Falls, MN 56537
(218) 739-4408

Auctioneer
8880 Ballentine St
Overland Park KS 66214
(913) 541-8084

B&B Auctions
3211 S 43rd Avenue
Phoenix AZ 85009
(602) 353-0016

Bentley Auctioneers
3801 Academy PN NE
Albuquerque NM 87109
(505) 344-1812

C&H Sales
PO Box 5356
Pasadena CA 91107
(800) 325-9465

Closeout News
728 E 8th St
Holland MI 49423
(800) 600-7040

Commerce Business Daily
US Dept of Commerce
Washington DC 20230
(202) 482-0632

Compu-Mart
899 Presidential #110
Richardson TX 75081
(972) 238-1133

Const Equip Monthly
1300 Central Ave
Ft Dodge IA 50501
(800) 247-2000

Contractors Equip Guide
50 Central Ave
Needham Heights MA 02194
(800) 225-8445

Electronic Buyers News
600 Community Dr
Manhasset NY 11030
(516) 562-5000

Factory Outlet News
11 Tory Lane
Newtown CT 06470
(800) 384-2500

Fair Radio Sales
PO Box 1105
Lima OH 45802
(419) 227-6573

Halted Specialties Co
3500 Ryder St
Santa Clara CA 95051
(800) 442-5833

Herbach & Rademan
16 Roland Ave
Mt Laurel NJ 08054
(800) 848-8001

Industrial Marketplace
7842 N Lincoln Ave
Skokie IL 60077
(800) 323-1818

Intl Closeout Dir
520 Fellowship Rd
Mt Laurel NJ 08054
(800) 326-8811

Marlin P Jones
Box 12685
Lake Park FL 33403
(407) 848-8236

Merchandise USA
2221 S Michigan Ave
Chicago IL 60616
(312) 791-0070

Missouri Val Shopper
329 Broadway St
Yankton SD 57078
(605) 665-5884

Nuts & Volts
430 Princeland Ct
Corona CA 91719
(909) 371-8497

Radio Research Insts
584 N Main St
Waterbury CT 06704
(203) 753-5840

Surplus Record
20 N Wacker Dr
Chicago IL 60606
(312) 372-9077

Surplus Traders
PO Box 276
Alburt VT 05440
(514) 739-9328

SW Auction Weekly
PO Box 61104
Phoenix AZ 85082
(602)994-4512

Synergetics
Box 809
Thatcher AZ 85552
(520) 428-4073

Time Line
1490 W Artesia Blvd
Gardena CA 90248
(800) 872-8878

Trans-Network Assoc
1870 E Beltway 8 #216
Padadena TX77503
(281) 479-7848

USA Closeout Directory
383 E Maine St
Centerport NY 11721
(516) 754-5000

Used Equip Dir
611 US Hwy Rt 46 W
Hasbrouck NJ 07604
(800) 526-6052

Chances are there's a web page for each of your nearby schools that does pretty much the same thing.

"Closeout" Merchandise

Here's the way those closeout drills usually work: Larger stores have all sorts of stuff left over they cannot sell, combined with customer returns, odd lots, shopworns, seasonals, damaged, remainders, and whatever. The stores and chains *pay* lean and mean salvage companies so much per truckload to haul all this junk off.

These salvage outfits remove the dregs, then categorize and repalletize all the remains. These skids are then resold, usually by the semi load.

It is super easy to let that salvage outfit's better customers pick over the skids, leaving you with utter and total trash. Scams also abound, especially among low quality foreign imports.

And most especially online.

My nearest distress remerchandise picks up a trailer or two of this stuff every six weeks or so. Although their storefront enterprise is more or less working, they are clearly not getting filthy rich in the process.

They do get some electronics, but much of it is marginal or specialized. Every once in a while, though, a real gem or two pops up.

You might want to ask your local distress remerchandise when and if they get any electronics and how they dispose of it. Often, somebody else grabs it right off their truck. And, if they don't have the foggiest notion what it is and if it is big enough and heavy enough, they just may offer it for a "name your price" song.

Needless to say, you *always* carefully inspect the merchandise to be sure exactly what you are getting! And *always* make sure you have some reselling edge.

One of the big problems with the "greater fool" theory of marketing is that you may be it.

At any rate, a rather useful tabloid magazine here is *Closeout News*.

There are also national ASD/AMD conferences that are useful for lots of contacts in this field. Las Vegas and Atlantic City are two popular spots. They even have their own ASD/AMD Trade News. See the magazine for the exact show locations.

The *International Closeout Directory*, that *US Closeout Directory*, and that *Factory Outlet Newsletter* might also be of interest here.

There is a lot of closeout stuff on the web, but I don't know of any good way to determine exactly who is legit and who might not be.

Let me know what you find.

Auction Publications

You'll find a lot of magazines that tell you which auctions are going to take place where. My favorite local one is *Southwest Auction Weekley*. This is primarily for Arizona and Southern California, and it mentions just about every kind of auction imaginable.

The *Auction Hunter* is a midwest regional pub, while *National Auctions & Sales* targets those state and federal property auctions. Also try *Missouri Valley Shopper* for that locale.

There's also an *Auction World* from *Kiefer Publishing*. You might also want to check the *Directory of Repossed and Surplus Property Sources* or the *Army-Navy Store & Outdoor Merchandiser*.

The great *Weekly Auction Bulletin* is mostly on industrial machinery and contractor's equipment. Penton's *Used Equipment Directory* is one competitor, while the *Contractor's Equipment Guide* and a *Construction Equipment Monthly* are two others. *Industrial Machine and Supply Offers* covers overstocks, plant closings, and the related auctions. For really heavy stuff, check the *Surplus Record Machinery Directory*.

Lots of possibilities here.

And, for a view from the inside, do check into *Auctioneer* magazine, for and about NAA members.

Auction Houses

It also pays to get on the mailing and faxback lists of auction houses which either specialize in electronics and computers or at least sometimes get around to offering it.

The best bargains in test gear in the world appears to come from *Bentley Auctioneers* at www.bentleysauction.com. Seems they've got the inside dibs on Los Alamos Laboratories and similar New Mexico federal sites. One nearby auctioneer who seems to offer a lot of *Intel* plant gear on a monthly basis is *B & B Auctions* in Phoenix.

Naturally, you'll want to gather in a list of your own favorites.

Always be nice to any auctioneer and make life as easy as you can for them. In turn, they may watch out for you on stuff you are interested in, and sometimes might split out or combine lots for you or shift auction times, or whatever. Auctioneers can sometimes use a little input in identifying some strange piece of tech gear. But only do so very low key and when and where obviously appropriate.

Do remember that the auctioneer's goal is to maximize seller profits.

Hence the hype and fervor.

For More Help

I have got my own little *Synergetics Surplus* bargain operation running at www.tinaja.com/barg01.html. Some test gear, some telephone accessories, and lots of Apple collectibles mostly. Even some remote rural land.

Nearly all of the referenced url's in this *Resource Bin* are hot linked in the online version you should be able to find at www.tinaja.com/resbn01.html

More on creating your own tech venture in my *Incredible Secret Money Machine II*, per my nearby *Synergetics* ad. Some extra help on pretty near anything involving electronic surplus or test gear can be found by way of my www.tinaja.com/info01.html

This Month's Contests

For our contests this month, just tell me about any auction directory, any auction house, a school, or a military site providing useful electronics or any computer bargains that I do not already know about. I feel I might be missing a top secret insider wholesale electronic surplus directory or two. And there's bound to be dozens if not hundreds of local computer-oriented shoppers and such.

Or else tell me your favorite little known regional electronic reseller or computer swap meet.

There should be a largish pile of my new *Incredible Secret Money Machine II* books going to the dozen or so better entries, plus an all-expense-paid (FOB Thatcher, AZ) *tinaja quest* for two that will go to the very best of all.

Send all your *written* entries to me here at *Synergetics*, rather than to *Nuts & Volts* editorial.

Let's hear from you. ♦

Microcomputer pioneer and guru Don Lancaster is the author of 35 books and countless tech articles. Don maintains his no-charge US tech helpline found at (520) 428-4073, besides offering all of his own books, reprints, and consulting services. Don also offers a free catalog full of his unique products and resource secrets. The best calling times are 8-5 on weekdays, Mountain Standard Time.

Don is the sypop of his Guru's Lair you'll find at <http://www.tinaja.com>

Full reprints and preprints of all Don's columns and ongoing tech support appear here. You can reach Don at Synergetics, Box 809, Thatcher, AZ 85552. Or send any messages to his US Internet address of don@tinaja.com

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