



SWAP SHOPS, OR FREECYCLING

Originally published in CAT's Membership Magazine Clean Slate

Information Service, Centre for Alternative Technology, Machynlleth, Powys, SY20 9AZ.
Tel: 0845 3308373 or 01654 705989 e-mail: info@cat.org.uk
For more information sheets, see our web site: www.cat.org.uk/information

"There's no such thing as junk, only stuff that hasn't found the right person."

What is a swapshop?

A SwapShop or Freecycle is a network of people in a locality who are giving and getting stuff for free or by swapping goods. They provide an advertisement space from which to give or receive what you have and don't need or what you need and don't have, as a consequence this saves useful items from heading to the landfill.

How does it work?

Sadly for those who are computer shy, most SwapShops rely on the internet. The exact workings will depend on the group you belong to, ranging from a self running yahoo! group to a system regulated by co-ordinators who provide a web site and check item descriptions. Despite these differences all SwapShops tend to follow this process:

Register with a SwapShop group. Once you find something you would like to get rid of or something you need, send an e-mail to your group or group co-ordinator. You should then receive e-mails listing current items on offer and sought. If you're interested in any items you then contact the owner of the offered item to finalise the deal. Most moderators leave this part to the group members. You receive the item into or send it to its new home

What products are Swapped?

The kinds of items swapped in a SwapShop are incredibly diverse, from

excess onion sets to stereos, musical instruments to filing cabinets. Most organisations that promote and co-ordinate SwapShops have guidelines to ensure that the system is only used to swap sensible items, and they tend to focus on things with a low monetary value. The FreeCycle network uses the motto/slogan "free, legal and suitable for all ages".

What's the currency?

Different groups work on different systems and most involve goods swaps, however some systems use a swap currency or allow monetary transactions to be undertaken. The scheme local to CAT works on a pure swap system where items are offered in return for other goods - often bars of chocolate and bottles of wine are used in the negotiations!

Both www.studentswapshop.co.uk and www.swapz.co.uk promote the direct swapping of goods but also allow registered members to set certain prices for goods. The Swapitshop is based on the Swapit 'currency'; you earn 'Swapits' from the goods you sell and spend them on the goods you buy. The system is based on a similar principle to e-bay, whereby you set a minimum number of Swapits you are willing to accept for an item, then bidding commences.

Do I have to give?

All SwapShops rely on equal numbers giving and getting, so the direct answer to this is yes! However, each group is unique and some only involve swaps matched with requests by the swapper. The FreeCycle network is actually a giving

network where each item is given for free, but there is an expectation that your first item is offered.

Can I start one?

Most SwapShop style groups are run by local volunteer moderators who conform to several basic criteria; these are similar but do vary between groups. One of the main requirements is time, but this is pretty minimal once the infrastructure is set up. Further guidelines regarding who is eligible to become a group moderator are listed on most group web sites. It is important to ensure that new groups don't overlap with existing ones.

Where's my local Swapshop?

The best way to find your local SwapShop is to look through the listings on the web pages below. Several of the organisations cover the same area so you'll have to look at which system appeals most to you.

Picking up a swap?

Most SwapShops get the swappers to organise the transfer of items. The giver decides the deal and the person who will receive the item, and then sets up a pickup time and place for passing on the treasure.

The Swapitshop systems works slightly differently, by acting as a go-between. Once the deal is struck the seller sends the parcel to Swapitshop who check the swap before it is sent on to the receiver.

Can I trust a swapper?

It is worth highlighting that in the majority of cases swaps are undertaken without any glitches. The role of moderators is to keep the system running and deal with problems as they arise. This means that unsuitable swappers can be taken off lists, so maintaining a happy swapping environment.

Some advice when starting up a SwapShop is to keep it fairly small and discrete at first, allowing it to spread through word of mouth. This will help to ensure that only committed swappers are recruited. The Myswap organisation have a system of recording the reliability and swapping activity of members. This works by increasing peoples ratings based on each successful swap and ratings are reduced if swappers are reported as being dishonest or unreliable. This can also lead to their membership being revoked.

SwapShop style organisations provide a fantastic opportunity for everyone to reuse and recycle unwanted goods. So, to any spring cleaners out there: get involved and help limit our use of landfill while saving money, waste and the environment!

Further information

For more articles giving advice on greening your life, and to become part of a network of people sharing their ideas and experiences about sustainable living, you could become a CAT Member.

Tel: 01654 705988

Web: www.cat.org.uk/membership

For many more green living ideas see our publications: www.cat.org.uk/catpubs

You can also contact the CAT Information Service with any further questions.

Tel: 01654 705989; email: info@cat.org.uk

Contacts

www.freecycle.org

www.swapitshop.com

www.studentswapshop.co.uk

www.swapz.co.uk

www.myswap.co.uk

www.gumtree.com

"One persons trash can truly be another's treasure." (FreeCycle).