



Member Spotlight

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Michael Abensour
Executive Director
Kramden Institute

Kramden Institute is a nonprofit organization that provides technology tools and training to bridge the digital divide. We collect donated computer equipment from individuals and organizations from across the state, refurbish it, and distribute it to students, families and community members who lack access to computers. Our education programs cover topics ranging from computer basics to game design and digital creativity software. Kramden is based in Durham, NC. We collect computers from organizations across the state, including businesses and public-sector entities.

What do you love most about doing business in NC? Kramden was founded in North Carolina and we're not sure we would find the same support from the community anywhere else for our efforts to bridge the digital divide and to promote STEM education programming. As a state with a large number of technology companies, we have access to a large pool of volunteers with technical backgrounds. Companies large and small across the state donate their used computer equipment in recognition of both the need for computer access by the community and the environmental benefits of computer recycling. Since our inception in 2003, we have

been fortunate to only used NC-based R2 recyclers for any item we do not reuse in our programs.

Can you share some unique or fun facts about your company? What makes your business stand out? We are the only non-profit in North Carolina that simultaneously refurbishes computer equipment, teaches basic digital literacy, and provides full-fledged asset recovery services to organizations seeking to donate their used IT assets. This three-pronged approach ensures that we reach as many North Carolinians as we can. To date, we have refurbished and awarded over 28,000 computers across 80 of the state's 100 counties while providing education services to over 1,500 community members. All of this is made possible by computer donations and our donor partners. Any/all material that cannot be reused goes directly to our certified, downstream e-waste recyclers.

What kind of technology trends have affected your company, and how has your company dealt with those trends? Three key trends have impacted our operations over the last few years. First, we have seen a large growth in both the number of laptops donated to Kramden and requests for them by our clients. To meet the demand, we created a dedicated laptop refurbishing workspace in our office in 2013. Since then we have trained additional staff and volunteers to work on laptops.

The second trend is the increased recognition of the importance of proper electronics recycling procedures and data sanitization procedures, from the original owner through to the final piece of the recycling chain. Kramden built a dedicated data sanitization room in our warehouse, instituted strict disk wiping procedures, and created the ability to provide our donors with certificates of destruction. All downstream recyclers we work with must be vetted by Kramden and hold the industry standard R2 certification.

Finally, the growth in open source software, especially in operating systems, has allowed us to provide a better product for our student recipients. For computers given to students in grades 3-12, Kramden takes advantage of Ubermix, a Linux-based, operating system, and more than 60 software applications to provide a product that is fast, resilient, and user-friendly.

What are the greatest obstacles and/or challenges that your business has faced? How have you and your business overcome them? As with any company, Kramden faces certain challenges. The number of computers we can provide to the community is limited by the number we receive from our donors. To maximize the number of computers being donated, we partner with companies to act as their recycler. Not only does this benefit Kramden, but allows our donor partners to take by-product of doing business, disposing of old computers, and turning it into an investment in the community. We operate a small fleet of vehicles that allow us to pick up donated equipment from companies and created the infrastructure required to do data sanitization in-house.

Has your business won any recent awards or other achievements you'd like to share? In 2016, Kramden received a STEMmy award for Youth Serving Organization of the Year from US2020 RTP. The STEMmy awards recognize those students, educators, mentors, and organizations leading the way in STEM education.



High School PC Build Camp

What do you see for the future of your business? Kramden's future lies in forming partnerships with larger entities across the state. Working with school districts in addition to individual schools will allow us to reach more students in need of a home computer and to take advantage of district-level resources to make the award process and technical support more efficient. Partnerships with local governments allow us to provide digital literacy training to disconnected populations such as seniors and families in public housing.

Additionally, there is a current effort at the state level to change state surplus regulations so that surplus state computers can go to nonprofits like Kramden to help ensure that all North Carolinians in need can benefit.

Kramden provides computer equipment pickup and recycling services for companies across North Carolina. Learn more at <https://kramden.org/corporate/>.

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