Vodafone Germany & Closing the Loop
One for One: Bringing over 1 Million Scrap Phones Back into the Cycle Each Year.

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The telecom industry has driven global connectivity and economic growth for decades. However, it has struggled to address one of its biggest environmental challenges: electronic waste (e-waste). Every year, over 1.5 billion mobile phones become obsolete, with the majority ending up in landfills, particularly in regions lacking formal recycling infrastructure. Despite the growth of repair, trade-in, and compliance-driven initiatives, the industry has lacked a scalable, commercially viable business model to address the massive volume of discarded devices.

Vodafone Germany and Dutch social enterprise 'Closing the Loop' (CTL) use circular business model innovation to tackle this challenge. Their model is called 'One for One', an innovative business model that integrates sustainability into the consumer journey of buying a new phone.

In simple terms, the service means that for one new phone sold (by Vodafone), one scrap phone is collected and responsibly recycled in countries without proper recycling facilities (which is done by CTL). This initiative bridges the gap between high-tech consumption in Europe and e-waste challenges in Africa, proving that circularity can be scalable, actionable, inclusive and consumer-friendly.

Since its launch in 2022, One for One has prevented over 137.5 tons of e-waste from polluting landfills. The service has been applied to more than 2.5 million devices, which will result in the same number being collected in countries like Ghana. From this waste, valuable materials such as gold, silver, and copper will be recovered. Beyond its environmental benefits, the program has generated income opportunities for local collection networks, demonstrating how sustainable business models can drive social and economic progress.

Collaboration has been a key driver of success. Vodafone's market reach, combined with Closing the Loop's expertise in circular business models, has enabled One for One (also known as 'waste compensation') to scale effectively. This partnership sets a precedent for the telecom industry, demonstrating how corporations and social enterprises can work together to make circularity actionable today.

Looking ahead, the opportunity for expansion is huge. With billions of new devices entering the market each year, the need for scalable waste-compensated solutions will continue to grow.

Vodafone Germany aims to continue to implement and offer circular initiatives such as One for One.

At the same time, Closing the Loop is scaling its One for One service globally (also together with OEMs and applied to other products such as screens and laptops). The collaboration has also allowed CTL to leapfrog on its goals to establish Africa's first e-waste smelter (a facility that turns electronic waste into metals)—a major step toward localized urban mining and material reuse.

One for One is more than just a program—it's a tangible example of pragmatic circularity in the telecom industry. By embedding sustainability into the core of mobile sales, Vodafone and Closing the Loop are proving that business success and environmental responsibility can go hand in hand.