

Seven Questions Every District Should Ask about Asset & Inventory Management Solutions.

Asset and Inventory Management has always been an important role for School and District IT departments. Managing licenses, finding moved PCs, locating available IT resources and theft are vital roles, yet over half the schools reporting not using automated asset management. This paper looks at how Schools can easily automate these tasks with easy-to-use software solutions. It also addresses how such systems typically pay for themselves quickly. While any program requires a learning and deployment curve – this can be reduced by proper testing and choosing the right vendor partner.



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Systems for Tracking and Managing Software & Hardware Assets can Save Tech Coordinators & District IT Departments Time and Money

Asset Management Benefits

- Manage software license compliance to prevent licensing penalties.
- Locate and help prevent asset drift (moving or loss of equipment)
- Conduct and save time on audits for programs such as E-rate
- Optimize hardware and software usage.
- Reallocate underutilized assets.
- Accurate asset information for budgeting and tech planning.

According to a recent QED survey, the average school district loses more than \$80,000 each year because of lost or damaged IT assets. Additionally, well over half of the districts in the survey (59 percent) still use manual systems to track IT assets. A solution that saves schools and districts time, money, and IT teaching resources is to implement an automated IT inventory and asset tracking system.

1. How does asset management software work?

Asset management solutions, such as CrossTec EMS, work by gathering inventory information from PCs and servers connected to your district's network. Like similar applications, CrossTec EMS allows each PC to have a client installed. Each client can then be polled by administrators on-demand or it can be automated so they report their status periodically. These reports generally include an internal inventory of hardware and software installed and in use and also where the system might be located (IP address). Knowing the IP address can help you determine if a computer is sitting on your district network or an outside network. If your network is segmented properly it could tell you which building or department it is located in. This helps you determine if a system has been stolen or simply have moved.

2. What challenges can asset management solutions help with?

While one of the main benefits of asset management and inventory tracking for schools is the ability to know where PCs are and who is using them, other features are also vital for districts. Tracking software licenses, knowing what computer components are in a system, being alerted if components change or are removed, and tracking PC drift or the undocumented movement of equipment within or outside of your schools. Another useful feature is to track lease expirations on equipment.

3. What are some of the important features in asset management systems?

Most systems allow you to gather and report information about computer assets on your network, including hardware, software, and software utilization. More advanced systems like CrossTec EMS let you track components like memory, video cards and hard drives. You can even be alerted to system upgrades and for missing items or changes in system components. Another useful feature is finding out where available hard drive storage may be so you can utilize it for storing files, videos and lessons.

Most asset management systems report software installed on each computer and enable you to track licenses compared to the actual usage of the application for license management and compliance. This alone can save you money. For example, if you have licensed 1,000 users for a particular program and you find that only 600 PCs actually run that software you can reduce your yearly software maintenance bill. You can also generate alerts for software license agreement violations and unauthorized software installations.

4. What are the technical requirements for asset management applications?

Having comprehensive asset and inventory management is the only way to easily and accurately track items like software licenses and lease expirations. CrossTec EMS can do this for both Windows and Linux systems across your network. Each system requires that the CrossTec EMS client is installed which takes a very small amount of hard drive and memory space.

Administrators who wish to use the system will need the CrossTec EMS reporting tool to read, view and report on network assets. This may include technicians wanting to track software loaded on machines to senior IT staff who need usage data to develop long-range technology plans.

5. Can Asset Management really help with theft or PC drift?

PC drift is a significant problem in schools and districts, particularly those with large campuses. A computer might be moved to another building without documentation. Or staff might take laptops or other items home to do work. As always, no one ever remembers the computer was moved and then a theft report is generated. Many resources are wasted simply tracking equipment that has "drifted" and forgot about.

Theft is another major concern. Protecting equipment is a constant concern for technology directors. And as more schools embrace notebook PCs – theft becomes easier. While you can try to lock down systems and prevent them from running if removed – it still happens. While most asset management applications can protect the PCs, they can let you know immediately which PCs, or even components, are missing. The faster you know you have a problem – the better your chances are of finding the missing item.

6. What things should you consider when looking for an asset management solution?

As with any system, asset and inventory management software can only be useful if it is fully deployed. Shelfware (an uninstalled or unused application) does nothing to help you, and a partial roll-out is only a partial solution. So consider what it will take to deploy your solution to every desktop, server and laptop in your school or district. How long does it take? How many resources does it require? Ease of use, documentation, training, automatic software (client) distribution and update roll-outs all need to be tested. One recommendation is to test a system out in a single school or area first. It can significantly save you time and effort down the road. You may learn things that will help you in a larger scale implementation or you may decide an application simply does not meet your requirements. CrossTec EMS provides a free, fully-functional, evaluation along with no-charge, toll-free, technical support.

Many asset management programs now come as part of larger desktop management suites. EMS for example not only has in-depth asset management and inventory but also has easy to use software distribution and optional remote control and Internet monitoring available. Buying such a suite saves you money by providing a discount for multiple features, reducing roll-out time, and providing a single interface that administrators have praised.

7. How much does asset management cost?

Costs for asset management systems vary based on the features you need, reporting abilities and vendor. Some products are licensed by the year and others, like CrossTec EMS, are a one-time investment with a yearly maintenance fee. Managed Service Providers (MSPs) have also entered the market providing a yearly fee but offering turn-key installation, reports and support. Prices for asset management can vary from as much as \$200 per user down to the sub-\$50 range for products like EMS.

The return on investment (ROI) for such a solution can be quick. You should be able to easily cover the investment with savings in excess software licenses, finding and using excess IT assets such as hard drives and memory, reducing the time it takes to locate missing PCs, being immediately alerted to missing PCs and components and the manpower time savings can be re-allocated to other important projects.

Conclusion:

Asset and Inventory Management has always been an important role for school and district IT departments. Managing licenses, finding moved PCs, locating available IT resources and theft are vital roles, yet over half the schools reporting not using automated asset management. These tasks can easily be automated and such systems typically pay for themselves quickly. While any program requires a learning and deployment curve – this can be reduced by proper testing and choosing the right vendor partner.

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