

## Assessing Your Assets

**Systems for tracking and managing IT assets can save time and dollars.**

**By Patricia A. Holub**

The average school district loses more than \$80,000 per year because of lost or damaged IT assets, according to a QED survey cosponsored by Follett Software Company. And many districts—59 percent—still use manual systems to track assets. Enter asset management systems.

As executive director for technology in a large urban district, I can attest that software for managing assets, when implemented properly, can save time, money, and human effort. The following are suggestions to help you realize the promise of automated asset management in your district.

### Asset Management Software: 5 Key Benefits

- Lets your district be proactive about optimizing hardware and software usage.
- Enables management of software license compliance; prevents licensing penalties.
- Makes audits, such as for E-rate, easier to complete.
- Facilitates efficient use and measurement of systems so informed decisions about reallocation of underutilized assets can be made.
- Offers accurate asset information at your fingertips for budgeting and tech planning.

### 1. What issues can asset management systems address?

For starters: the ability to know where PCs are and who is using them. While this information is extremely useful, asset management systems typically offer many other benefits. Are you interested in tracking software licenses? What about computer components within a system? Would you like to be notified when components change? Do you want

to track PC drift, the undocumented movement of equipment within or out of your organization? Do you need to track lease expirations on equipment? All of these issues need to be considered when comparing systems.

### 2. How does asset management software work?

Asset management applications work by gathering information from systems connected to your district's network. Systems usually require having a client installed on each workstation.

Each client checks in with the main system periodically to report its internal inventory of hardware and software and where it is calling in from—its IP address. This is not like GPS technology, where you can pinpoint the exact physical location of the computer (however, you can get close if your network is segmented properly). The real benefit of knowing the IP address is that you can determine if a computer is sitting on your district network or an outside network. This saves you from filing unnecessary theft reports for equipment that has simply been moved without approval.

### 3. What features do asset management systems offer?

The majority of systems will allow you to gather and report information about computer assets on your network, including hardware, software, and software utilization. If you are concerned about theft of components like memory or hard drives or want to be alerted to system upgrades, more advanced systems will monitor assets at the component level and generate alerts for missing items or changes to system components.

Most asset management systems will report software installed on each computer and allow you to track software licenses compared to actual usage for optimum license management and compliance. Once you set your purchased license levels, the system can generate alerts for software license agreement violations and unauthorized software installations. And if your district wants information regarding computer peripherals such as printers and audio-visual equipment, many systems track items that are not network aware.

## 4. What technical requirements need to be considered?

Having comprehensive asset management across platforms is the only way to accurately track items like software licenses and lease expirations, so verify that the systems you are considering manage computer assets across multiple platforms (Windows, Macintosh, Unix, Linux, Novell). A system that supports only one platform will ultimately frustrate your asset management efforts.

You'll also want a system that can be accessed by all the people that need to use this information, from technicians to senior IT staff who need usage data to develop long-range technology plans. Many Web-based systems such as SchoolDude's ITAMDirect provide distributed access to information.

## 5. Do you have issues with theft or PC drift?

PC drift is a significant problem in districts, especially those with large campuses. A computer might be moved to another room, for example, and no one will document that move. Or staff might take laptops, and sometimes even desktops, home to do work. When inventory time comes, no one remembers the computer was moved, no one can find it, and a theft report is generated. Many resources are wasted tracking equipment that has "drifted" with no ill intention.

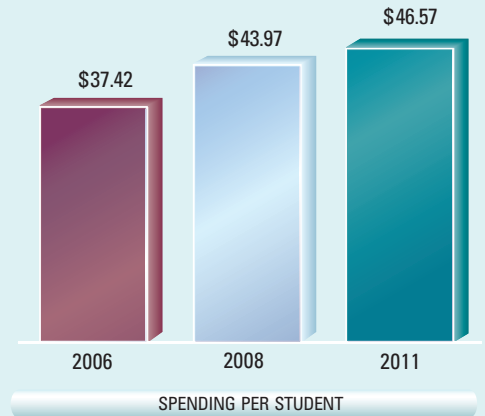
Theft is another huge concern. Current technology can be difficult to come by for most districts, and protecting this precious equipment is foremost in most technology directors' minds. Laptops are typical victims because of their portability. Products such as Absolute Software's Computrace can help you recover these assets by tracking the IP addresses of stolen systems.

## 6. How much does it cost?

Costs for these systems will vary based on the features you are looking for and how robust you expect reporting to be. Some products are licensed for a certain number of years, typically the usable life of the asset, and can cost about \$80 per computer for a four-year license. Others, such as Follett's Destiny Asset Manager, can be purchased outright and installed on a local server. This type of arrangement will allow you to track assets as long as you own them. &

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## All Student Devices Spending



School districts are spending \$37.42 per student per year on student devices of all types—desktops, laptops, tablet computers, PDAs, student appliances, etc. This will climb to \$46.57 per student per year by 2011, an annual growth rate of 4.9 percent.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATORS

Because the student device category is so large, any change in the numbers will have a large impact on school budgets. A growth of \$1.2 billion over five years is significant.

### SIGNIFICANCE

It appears that student devices, one of the largest single expenditures in schools, will grow at a slow rate that will not allow for ubiquitous computing at today's prices. However, since the average cost of devices is dropping rapidly, the total growth in units is much higher than the percentage growth would indicate.

—America's Digital Schools 2006



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