

Asset-Tracking Solution Takes Houston Middle School to the Head of the Class



With the regularity of final exams, schools within the Houston Independent District must annually audit all fixed assets, including computers and technology equipment, and file this audit with the District. This arduous task is made even more difficult since it must be completed within a six-week timeframe in school's already busy spring.

West Briar Middle School, which serves more than 1,350 students and 80 teachers in grades 6-8, struggled to accurately track its fixed assets. The school relied on a combination of Excel spreadsheets and sticky notes, which made routine asset management and end-of-year audits time consuming and inaccurate.

"I have gone as far as late June in getting my audit report to District. It's bad news for the principal and for me," said Erskine Vanderbilt, campus network specialist at West Briar. "I spend a huge amount of time locating equipment, and if the equipment can't be accounted for, it is marked as missing."

This missing equipment costs the school money, squeezing its already tight budget. West Briar must use its limited dollars to purchase replacement equipment instead of investing in new technology - technology that's important for educational advancement. Even inexpensive items like USB cables can add up to hundreds of dollars. "Being able to reutilize items is essential to the school's process and budget. To a big company, \$250 for cables may not be much, but to us, it's a considerable amount," Vanderbilt said.

Roll Call

Each campus receives an annual list from the Houston School District itemizing their fixed assets. Once received, Vanderbilt must account for the equipment, verifying what's actually on hand. Anything that's on the list but unaccounted for is noted on a shortage list. If the school's shortage list exceeds the limit set by the district, the school is flagged. West Briar's manual asset tracking system led to misplaced and lost items, and as a result, the school was often flagged for exceeding the annual shortage limit.

"No one was happy with the situation," said Vanderbilt. "It cost time, money and lots of unwanted attention from the district."

CASE STUDY AT A GLANCE...

▶ INDUSTRY

Education

▶ ORGANIZATION PROFILE

Located in Houston, TX, West Briar Middle School is part of the Houston Independent School District and serves more than 1,350 students and 80 teachers in grades 6-8

▶ SITUATION

Used a labor-intensive Excel-based process to track assets. The spreadsheet was inaccurate and resulted in missed deadlines and the costly replacement of already purchased equipment

▶ RESULTS

With Wasp MobileAsset, the Campus Network Specialist slashed his annual auditing time by 75%, ensuring he submits his District audit on time. Further, MobileAsset's ability to accurately track even small dollar assets has reduced lost items, freeing up scarce budget dollars that can be used to purchase new equipment

▶ SOLUTION USED

- Wasp MobileAsset Standard
- Wasp WPA1200 mobile computer
- Wasp WPL305 barcode printer

Top of the Class

Determined to improve the time-consuming district audit and end needless spending on misplaced devices, Vanderbilt purchased Wasp Barcode's MobileAsset Standard with a WPA1200 mobile device and barcode printer. MobileAsset is an affordable asset tracking solution, designed to improve efficiency and eliminate errors. Vanderbilt has begun implementing the solution and expects to be fully operational by the start of the 2010-11 school year. Already, he is seeing significant benefits.



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Erskine Vanderbilt
Campus network specialist

With help from the teachers, Vanderbilt is inputting equipment into MobileAsset. Since the school-year was underway and equipment was distributed before the MobileAsset implementation, he created check-lists of all teachers' equipment. Teachers review the lists and return them to Vanderbilt. He also uses the Wasp mobile computer for immediate update and verification as he travels the school and classrooms.

“I love the idea of using the mobile device,” said Vanderbilt. “It provides an ongoing and automated way for me to update the equipment each and every day. It's been a big time saver as I am constantly verifying our inventory.”



Next year, teachers will not need check-lists. All equipment will include a barcoded asset tag and will be tracked in MobileAsset. At the beginning of the next school year, Vanderbilt will check-out equipment to teachers and have an accurate and up-to-date account of each teacher's inventory.

If teachers trade or lend equipment, they complete a form and Vanderbilt updates the information in MobileAsset. Likewise, if a computer or device is out for service, MobileAsset will note the original equipment's status and location, as well as that of any loaner replacement device, said Vanderbilt.

MobileAsset also enables teachers to speedily receive new equipment. In the past, a new device would arrive at the school but couldn't be used until Vanderbilt received an asset tag from the district. Although West Briar will continue using the district's asset tags for all equipment, MobileAsset allows Vanderbilt to dole out new gear as it arrives, then add the district's tags when they are shipped, he said.

"Teachers could wait a month or more for the district to send out the information. Now I can put it into the Wasp system, call it all up and distribute it to the teachers immediately," said Vanderbilt. "I enter the purchase order into the Wasp system, where the equipment has gone, and when the tag comes in, I can assign the district's tag to the device. Wasp will bring up all items from that purchase order and replace the temp asset number with the permanent asset number."



On the Honor Roll

Using Wasp MobileAsset, Vanderbilt expects to complete his mandatory, annual audit within three weeks, not three months - a 75% time-saving. Since his primary role is to provide IT support to the school, saving this much time during the annual audit will reduce his stress and grief while enabling him to provide the support the school requires.

"Being able to accurately account for the equipment will eliminate having to repurchase equipment that has been lost or misplaced," Vanderbilt said. "The replacement money comes from the school's funds. There are much better things we can use the money for than replacing technology we own but can't find."

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