

Case Study

Asset Tracking Program Gets A+ at Florida Community College

*College erases inventory maintenance hassles
with user-friendly Apex II terminals*

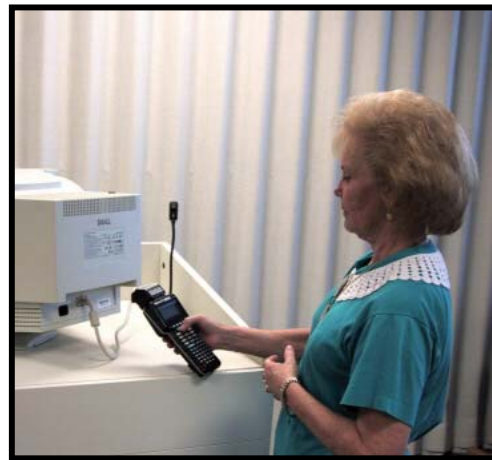
By Doris Kilbane

Locating several old computers for replacement, among 10 possible sites at Florida Community College at Jacksonville, could have consumed as much time as a college entrance exam. Thanks to a new asset-tracking program, however, it took only a few minutes for the Materials department to identify where each computer was located—all the way down to the specific room in the specific building. The program also makes it easy to quickly identify assigned "owner".

The new asset-tracking program, awarded top grades for user friendliness by the Material department, comes from DHS Associates of Orange Park, FL. It is called Total Recall™ for Windows and it operates with bar codes and Compsee's rugged Apex II hand-held scanners to deliver a complete inventory-tracking package. Total Recall™ enables Florida Community College to keep tabs on all fixed assets with an original acquisition value over \$750, as required by state regulations. The College's property can move between four major campuses with multiple buildings and six centers, including the Geis Marine Center and the college administration building. The assets range from medical supplies for nursing education to machine guns for the police academy. Typical assets include computers, furniture, lawnmowers, tools and outboard motors for its marine repair/mechanics center. The total value of the 12,566 assets is \$28.5 million.

Florida Community College had used a bar code tracking system before, but in 2000 changed over to the much more powerful Total Recall software program powered by Microsoft's SQL database engine and the Apex II hand-held terminals with 1 MB memory and integrated laser scanners. Previously, if Materials Manager Tim Bloodworth had to locate particular computers, the hunt was limited to database searching by a bar code number, which itself had to be researched. Now, any field in the database can be searched, including asset receipt

date or model number, as was done for these computer models.



Inventory and more

Just as students learn to apply their knowledge in a variety of applications, Bloodworth has found multiple uses for this asset tracking system. First and foremost, of course, is inventory control. Before anyone can know if an asset is lost, stolen or just in another room, a record must be entered into the college's database of its receipt by the college and its destination or location. Now, when an item is received, a bar code label is applied. (An exception is Dell Computer products that arrive pre-bar-coded.) Originally, the Code 39 labels were printed on a Monarch Marking 9800 thermal-transfer printer. But now, preprinted Duraguard labels are purchased from Seton in Branford, CT. Similarly, the college originally printed its own labels for the door jamb identification to each room, but now the school purchases preprinted aluminum labels from Metalcraft in Code 128 symbology. This symbology was chosen because it could accommodate the 15-digit door jamb code number.

Once bar coded at receiving, the bar code number, purchase order information and receipt module are accessed on a PC tied to the college's mainframe system. That tells the operator where the item is supposed to go and other PO data that is then entered into the Total Recall™ program on the PC. A drop-down menu for campus buildings and room numbers reduces the amount of key strokes, eliminates invalid entries and speeds the process.



"This helps reduce inventory write-offs. If you make it easier, people are more likely to use it and that makes property management a lot easier," says Bloodworth. "We had a very cumbersome system before that was heavily paper

driven. If an asset was moved from one place to another, a three-part form had to be filled out, sent to the data center and manually entered into the system. If filled out incorrectly, the information would be rejected and the form would lay on a desk until the discrepancy was resolved."

That's changed now. "The user friendliness has encouraged people to use the system and to quickly get the information into the central database," says Bloodworth.

Latest figures show 85% of new assets are entered into the Total Recall system in two days or less, the remainder in three to five days. The goal is to have all the data entered in two days or less, says Bloodworth.

"The human tendency is to procrastinate if something is difficult. With the new system it is easier to enter assets and that's encouraged staff to use it," he says. As a result, when it was time for the annual inventory, it eliminated hours spent searching for assets moved from one campus to another.

With the Total Recall system, multiple users can download and upload data simultaneously. "We used to do inventory over several months," he says. Downloading restrictions in the school's previous software really slowed inventory taking. Each campus was assigned a day to download, and only when that was done could missing items be identified. That's changing for the better with each annual inventory. "The last one took three months, we hope to reduce it to two months this year and eventually even more," says Bloodworth.

Missing items figures decreased also. Two years ago, 2.36% of total inventory was not located during the annual inventory count. Under the new system last year, that was cut by more than half to 1.09%. "We hope that number will decrease even further this year," says Bloodworth.

Verification tools

The decrease in lost items, and timesavings, comes from the ability to download the asset database into the Apex II terminals. When a property specialist enters a room to do an inventory, he or she scans the bar code on the door jamb, then all the applicable items in the room. As the worker scans an asset, a description of the item appears on the unit's 4-line x 16-character display screen. If the asset number says copier, but the label is on a chair, the worker can pull the label off the wrong item and request a new barcode to put on the correct one .

The Apex II can also tell the worker what items weren't scanned that are supposed to be in the room, thus initiating additional searching for missing items while the worker is on site. Previously, this information wasn't available until the data from the handheld terminal was later downloaded to a computer, requiring time-consuming return trips.



Damaged bar codes don't slow down the inventory tracking procedure either. If a bar code doesn't scan, the workers key in the asset number. Later, a report shows which codes were keyed, enabling the Materials department to research why it was not scanned. "We want 100% scannability to cut back on errors," says Bloodworth.

Other benefits

With Total Recall™, the Florida Community College at Jacksonville can easily track actual components of an asset when necessary. For instance, the history of where and when a computer had been located and relocated the past year can be recalled with a few keystrokes. Similarly, it's easy to uncover which computers need an upgrade.



It's possible, says Bloodworth, because "We can query and export to Excel, then we can narrow down to the data elements we need."

Wide area and 'net

Total Recall uses the college's wide-area network (WAN) system to communicate with other PCs and printers located on several campuses, while its server runs from the central campus. Each campus has up to three property specialists using the system as well as computer support personnel.

Bloodworth was excited about the new Internet-based program being installed the week he was interviewed. The on-line, paperless property-control process lets any accountable college employee pull up their allocated items on a Web browser. If the employee transfers an asset to someone else, the original owner directs the system to send the new owner an e-mail notification. That person then is advised to access a specified Web page to accept the asset.

"That updates the database with the new owner. Before it was so cumbersome. With assets constantly moving, the database was not reflecting the moves of the assets. It's made asset tracking a lot easier," says Bloodworth.

The Web-based system also brings college staff into the inventory process. Via the Web, the inventory crew notifies employees of the items under their ownership needing to be scanned and asks to have those items available. "We're hoping this too will cut time and non locatable items," says Bloodworth. "They know we are coming and hopefully have located the applicable items."

Training for shortcuts

Like a football coach, Bloodworth's a believer in continuous user training. In addition to the initial 2- to 4-hour training (depending on their tasks) given when the program was initiated and when new employees are hired, the receiving staff gets quarterly refresher training sessions.

"We discovered there were shortcuts they didn't know, so that is what I focus on in the refreshers. After you feel more comfortable with a new tool, you want to do things quicker. We give them more knowledge, a little at a time," says Bloodworth. The result is greater accuracy and reduced data entry



time.

A security feature on the Total Recall software made this training less time consuming also. Access to its various applications is based on the user's job and security clearance. So, Bloodworth trains by application or user group, reducing the amount of information each group must learn and focusing in on only what is needed by those users.

Success spreads

Other Florida colleges will soon enjoy the benefits of the DHS Associates Total Recall™ Asset Tracking Software with Compsee's Apex II handhelds. Florida Community College at Jacksonville is a member of the Florida Community College Software Consortium. As a result of its success, Miami Dade Community College, Broward Community College, Palm Beach Community College, Indian River Community College, Tallahassee Community College and Okaloosa Walton Community College have purchased the Total Recall™ Asset Tracking Software solution. They too want an A+ in inventory control.



For information contact
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Total Recall™ for Windows®

Total Recall™ for Windows® is the most comprehensive and simple to use Asset Tracking and Management software available. It features an intuitive Windows® interface and works with the Apex II™ hand held bar code scanner. The program utilizes MS SQL databases and maintains a complete log of all activities.

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