Asset Systems, Inc

Ten things to know before you buy an asset tracking solution

1. All asset tracking solutions are different. We've often heard "All asset tracking systems are the same" from prospects evaluating alternatives. This is simply not the case. While on the surface the basics are covered – bar code scanning, user interface, reporting and data base management – every system has unique aspects that will either benefit or cost you over the years of usage. You need to understand these differences and their impact before you buy.

2. Scalability is more than more assets. Even if a system is built with a database capable of managing millions of assets, it may not be scalable except in terms of linear growth. The ability to easily add data fields, perform global maintenance, integrate with other data bases, solve future requirements and the vender's track record in keeping pace with changing technology are equally important to the long term value of the product.

3. Be careful of scope creep. If you are shopping for asset tracking, it's not a good idea to allow your must-have list to include purchasing, fixed asset accounting, equipment maintenance, billing, help desk and other similar systems. Of course, if they are essential, include them, with the understanding that your product choices will be greatly narrowed. Moreover, solutions that try to do too much often end up mediocre. We've seen prospects allow a single feature to dictate the purchasing decision only to return the selected product after months of frustration when it was recognized that the fundamentals were not covered.

4. Understand implementation costs. Most organizations do not have asset data worth converting to the new environment. If it is available, it is often out of date and requires significant attention prior to going live. When starting from scratch, assets need to be identified, tagged and the original data base created. The features of the asset tracking system will dictate how difficult and costly this may be. It is incumbent on the purchaser to understand the magnitude of this cost before proceeding. Having the budget to buy software without the funding to get it implemented is not a path that leads to good outcomes.

5. Understand implementation risks. Once the solution is selected, a sizable number of decisions need to be made to create the original data base and populate it with asset information. Staff needs to be trained and procedures put in place to perpetuate the data base going forward.

Consider how these decisions will be made and how this work will be done. The active participation of the vender in this process can prove invaluable as they possess years of experience from which you can benefit.

6. Consider the vender. There are a large number of asset tracking venders some of which specialize in the application and some which do not. Virtually all application specific venders are relatively small. Some are new to the industry; some have decades of experience. Some have a shrink wrap go-to-market strategy and some invest significant efforts into your success. In many cases, the vender can mark the difference between project success or failure. Make sure that the vender you choose is a strong complement to your implementation strategy.

7. RFPs won't work. Because the asset tracking market is dominated by small venders, most unsolicited RFPS will not receive a broad response, eliminating from consideration many viable alternatives. Furthermore, this approach assumes that you know specifically what you need and all the features from which you can benefit, and can accurately articulate them, before researching the market. Asking for certified financial statements, onerous insurance requirements or nontraditional contract terms will further limit response. Often, RFPs place an undue importance on up-front price. Consider identifying 3 to 5 venders for proposals and select form those. If your purchasing standards require an RFP, recognize the limitations and work to minimize them.

8. Data collection is critical. One of the most often overlooked product features of asset tracking software is data collection. Just because asset tags can be scanned doesn't mean that a product's data collection is easy, or even accurate. Make sure that maintaining the database requires a minimum of steps and that key entry is eliminated. Make certain that all inputs have been completely verified before including them in your records. Carefully evaluate the equipment and technology verifying it is appropriate for your environment. There is a whole spectrum of equipment choices at different price points so pay attention to up-front and long term costs.

9. Be open to different approaches and new ideas. In an industry with hundreds of venders, there is a wealth of product designs and ideas. Having often witnessed prospects having spontaneous insight into how they could improve their operations using a particular feature, we are ever mindful that asset tracking is best approached with an open mind.

10. Think long term. Select an asset management system that you expect to use at least 5 to 10 years (much longer lives are not uncommon). Small savings in operational efficiency will add up over the years either for your benefit or to your detriment. Up front cost differences will become immaterial when spread over the useful life of the product. Remember, you do not want to do this project over anytime soon.