



FIXED ASSET MANAGEMENT FOR A COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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A community college (CC) had just gone through their second audit by the state and it was not good: CC had failed to gain control and knowledge over their fixed assets after the first audit, and now one year later, they were criticized again by the state. One more failed audit and people would be fired and heads would roll.

I was approached by the VP of Financial Systems, Joan (not her real name), who was very frustrated by CC's apparent solution to this: the users were going to implement a solution recommended by a state-wide consortium of community colleges, but Joan believed it to be too political: the software company was too closely associated with the consortium for complete comfort. The \$80,000 software application endorsed by the consortium – a price which did not include handheld barcode scanners – would require replication of locations (rooms within buildings), general ledger codes, and fixed assets.....information already stored in the mainframe. Plus, CC's users were not really happy with the reports and functionality that the software company flatly refused to change.

Joan asked me how I would solve this problem, and after a few questions and answers I had the solution which, as I explained, was very similar to one I used for my first client, a luxury resort hotel, in keeping track of the inventory in their nine retailer stores across different properties.

The solution would be to create a simple data collection program on some batch data collection terminals – I suggested the hardware and program-generator software to use. Working with one of Joan's expert programmers, we would extract validation data (such as building/room locations) and import this into the handhelds. I would create a Microsoft Access® database that would accept imported information from the handhelds, as well as the "frozen" fixed asset locations from the mainframe.

I created various analysis reports in the Access database, showing discrepancies between where the mainframe thought assets were and where assets were actually located based on the handheld scans. Reports included assets not scanned and scanned assets not in the mainframe. Joan told me after the project that my report formats were so highly praised that they were to be used as examples for setting departmental standards.

We set out to accomplish the necessary programming and testing, and very shortly thereafter fixed asset tags were being scanned campus-wide and reconciled. I included a function in the Access database to allow the scanned assets to be exported for upload to the mainframe – easier than manually correcting the data one asset at a time.

The total cost of the project, including the hardware and program generator software, was \$8,000 – one tenth the amount of the consortium's endorsed solution AND including the necessary hardware to get the job done. (In fact, the hardware portion of the project cost was a little over half of the total \$8,000.) The total project timeframe was only a few weeks.

CC has passed all their state audits for fixed asset management since.

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