

GETTING MORE OUT OF YOUR PROPERTY MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

By Nicola McCarthy, CPPS, NOVA Chapter



Do you realize how many easily-movable, valuable, or potentially dangerous assets your organization controls that can be lost or misplaced by neglect, or by the benign, or malicious actions of users? Organizations are responsible for managing these unconventional, yet easily movable and valuable assets, and many do not believe they have the means or the technology infrastructure to do so accurately. How do you track a canine, or a sensitive document like a personnel file, or even vials of biological agents, such as anthrax?

Many will jump into purchasing a new system that specializes in managing one of these specific types of unconventional assets. Instead of rushing to spend more money on yet another system, organizations should look in-house. An introspective look may reveal that the current property management system is already performing the functions necessary for managing these unconventional assets, but for IT assets or vehicles instead. Adapting an existing property management system versus purchasing a unique solution can be a huge money saver for any organization. For that reason, as an alternative to splurging on something new, organizations should think outside of the box when it comes to readily available property systems and determine how to get the most out of what is already in place.

Property management systems are in place to help manage all of the day-to-day items that people need to do their jobs. Whether it be computers, furniture, vehicles, or firearms; property systems help account for all of these items. In a nutshell, most property management systems are responsible for tracking assets throughout their useful lives.

Core property management functions include recording the method of acquisition, tracking location and accountability changes during the asset's useful life, and

lastly, tracking final disposition. During the life of the asset, property management systems also assist with transfers of accountability, track preventative, emergency maintenance, and item-specific ongoing events, and ensure that supporting documentation can be uploaded and attached to asset records. Additionally, property systems have associated IT system benefits, including role-based access management, system security, automatic alerts and notifications, and electronic audit trails. These

functions, when combined with the unique skill sets of property professionals, open the door, and the system, up for additional use beyond traditional asset management.

Canines, personnel files, and vials of biological agents are certainly not traditional assets, yet they all require surveillance, monitoring and care, just like traditional assets. Let's take a look at the special requirements associated with each class of non-traditional assets mentioned above, and examine how an existing system can be easily

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modified to accommodate them.

First, let's examine canines and their unique considerations. Most traditional assets are "fixed" and usually reside with their respective owners. But unlike traditional assets, canines are highly mobile; they are taken out on duty, out for exercise, or they might even free themselves. Unlike other assets, canines are truly capable of getting up and walking off on their own. Suffice it to say, active location tracking is absolutely essential with canines. Additionally, canines have special training and health concerns that must be tracked and recorded. Items such as vaccinations, health status, and specialized training are critical pieces of information for any handler to understand about their canine companion. So let's look at some of the existing capabilities of your property management system and how they can be modified to track canines.

First, property management systems have maintenance or work order functionality – we usually associate these functions with required maintenance for either vehicles or IT components. But couldn't the same functionality that is used to schedule oil changes be used to schedule veterinary visits or daily exercise? Additionally, property systems store location information for all assets, but this location information has to be updated and managed by the users. While this is an acceptable tracking level for most assets, it is not sufficient for canines since canines can move themselves. So how about integrating RFID technology into the property management system? RFID readers can be placed throughout the areas where the canines live,

eat, and stay while off-duty and RFID tags can be inserted into each dog collar. Whenever a canine leaves the designated area, either unintentionally or to be taken on assignment, the combination of the tags, the reader, and the property system, can generate and send an automatic email notification of the movement. This movement would also be recorded as an event in the canine asset's life.

In conjunction with the RFID technology, the item check-in and check-out functionality within your property system can be utilized for the animals. If a canine leaves the designated area to go on assignment, the canine can be checked-out and recorded as being in-use in the system. When the assignment ends and the canine returns, it can be checked back in to the system. This kind of tracking will allow your organization to consistently know the location of the canines, as well as the most frequent assignments for the canines. Based on the canines that are utilized the most frequently, and the training levels recorded for these animals, your organization will be able to determine the most beneficial training classes for the canines. Additionally, your organization will also be able to determine the most cost-effective number of canines to have at any given time. So now, not only are you utilizing an existing system to help keep track of the canines, but you are also using the system to analytically determine the best business processes surrounding canine management and this can equate into large monetary savings for your group.

Next, let's examine the nuances associated with managing the lifecycle of a volatile and dangerous

substance – such as a vial of the biological agent anthrax or another specimen that needs to be controlled. Unlike canine assets, vials cannot move around without somebody physically touching them. The safe keeper for these items does not have the same logistical issues as the safe keeper for the canines. Instead, the logistical issues for these items focus on ensuring they do not get lost or stolen. Unlike other conventional and unconventional items, the loss or theft of a vial of harmful fluid can cost individuals their safety, their security, and possibly their lives. The easiest solution would be to lock these items in a vault, but this solution proves unfeasible and impractical because individuals still need access to these items. Vials of specimens and other materials need to be accessible for testing and scientific study. Access however, must be tightly controlled. But, just like with the canines, property systems can be adapted for the successful tracking of these items.

Now that we have determined that a property system could be used to track unconventional items, let's take a look at how exactly it would work for these vials. Similar to the canines, the combination of RFID technology and the existing system can be used. An RFID tag can be placed on the door that opens the container holding the vials of fluid, and every time those doors are opened your property system can send an email notification for this activity. Similarly, if a hazardous material needs to be removed from its secure container for testing, the property system should be utilized to record this event. The item can be classified as checked-out, and the check-out parameters would list

when the item was removed, who removed and is using the item, and also when the item is expected to be returned. When the material has been tested, the item should be checked back in to the secure location, and the check-in details should be annotated in the property system as well. Along with the check-out and check-in data the system will store, the RFID data from the door initially being opened and closed, and then again being opened and closed, will reinforce your group's ability to consistently know the location and activities for even the most sensitive items. Also, given the nature of this asset, monitoring the environment in which the vial is stored is also critical.

Unlike the storage requirements for conventional assets, unconventional items, such as vials of biological agents, might require certain temperature or humidity levels. Intelligent RFID can be employed to monitor the environmental controls of the vials. For instance, if the temperature of the vial container gets out of tolerance, an alert can be sent from your system to a trusted custodian. So now, not only are you tracking the vials in your system; you are also using the system to manage the sensitive environment where the vials are housed. While RFID tags are expensive and may not be necessary for every item, it might just be worth spending the money for this specific class of asset.

Lastly, let's examine one final type of unconventional asset that is common throughout all organizations: personnel files and records. Personnel files and records can be tricky to manage because the records contain information

that is sensitive, and in many cases classified. Personnel files are generally composed of a master set of data about an individual (name, address, DOB, SSN, etc), and a ton of supporting information. Supporting information could include medical status, performance evaluations, benefits elections, awards, commendations, and reprimands. All this data can be compared to the manufacturer, model, and serial number information that makes up a conventional asset record. So if all you are doing is storing different data sets, why couldn't a personnel file be set up as an asset in your property management system? The master set of required attributes would make up the actual asset record, and the supporting documents and files could be uploaded and associated with the master asset record.

In addition to having the entire personnel file in one location, you can also take advantage of the inherent security and access controls of the property management system. Given the sensitive nature of personnel files, every organization needs secure traceability and tracking of each file, and every organization needs to know who has looked at and modified each record. Using role-based system privileges, viewing, reading, and writing within the personnel files would be based on organizational structure and granted roles. Designated professionals could have full access, while others would have query and view-only rights; the majority of system users would not have the ability to search for records, or the knowledge that the records are even stored in the property system. Every time the personnel file is changed in the system, the pre-existing audit trail capabilities will

record who made the change and when it was made. And lastly, given what other classes of sensitive items your property management system is already tracking, the system is most likely already certified and hardened to prevent unauthorized disclosure of information and unauthorized access. So once again, by examining the tracking requirements of an unconventional asset, we have been able to modify existing system capabilities to match what is needed - which is a secure and role-based system that manages personnel files and other sensitive documents.

The more you examine the specific requirements associated with special assets, the more you will find that your existing asset system can accommodate them with only minor modifications. The lessons learned from the examples above can be extrapolated for any kind of non-standard asset.

The unique skills of your property management team, coupled with the supporting IT infrastructure and property system, can be utilized to help your organization solve tracking and traceability issues surrounding most conventional and unconventional assets. So lower the risks, and increase the savings, and adapt the organizational property system to meet your ever evolving and always changing needs. ■

BIOGRAPHY

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