

# Medical Center Automates IT Asset Tracking

The Scott Air Force Base Medical Center uses radio frequency identification (RFID) to improve IT asset audits of equipment in its hospitals and other facilities.

BY BRIAN ALBRIGHT

Asset tracking has become one of the leading applications for RFID technology, with end users across a range of vertical markets deploying RFID tags to improve asset utilization and make inventory processes more efficient. But a successful RFID asset tracking installation requires more than just attaching tags and setting up readers; customers require a complete solution and ongoing support to get the most out of their investment.

Integrator AssetPulse is deploying an IT asset tracking system for the Scott Air Force Base Medical Center that includes an end-to-end RFID solution — in the midst of a large renovation project. According to AssetPulse CEO Sujatha Bodapati, the company has developed a close working relationship with the client, resulting in a smooth implementation despite the sometimes challenging working environment. “We’ve worked closely with their team to identify and work around any road-

blocks and to help them use the technology in an optimum fashion,” she says.

The 375th Medical Group at Scott Air Force Base (AFB) uses a significant amount of IT equipment in its hospitals and other facilities, including laptops, desktop PCs, monitors, printers, and other devices. As these assets were moved, stored, or in some cases misplaced, managing the IT property became more complicated. Periodic audits required employees to travel from room to room, writing down the serial numbers on each asset. Not only could this process take several days, it also

potentially caused inventory errors because employees had to record the serial numbers manually into an existing asset database.

Officials at Scott AFB approached AssetPulse because they wanted to track IT assets across several buildings, including the medical center, pharmacies, a dental clinic, and an off-site facility. AssetPulse deployed its Web-based AssetGather asset tracking solution, in conjunction with EPC (electronic product code) Gen 2-based passive RFID tags and handheld readers, to allow the medical center to quickly inventory thousands of IT assets across more than 2,000 rooms in multiple buildings.

## Instant Auditing Cuts Staff Time Drastically

Because of the wide variety of assets being tracked,

AssetPulse and Scott AFB tested a number of different passive RFID tags before selecting 915 MHz Steelwave RFID tags from Confidex. The wafer-shaped tags are attached to each asset using an acrylic adhesive and are also used to mark each room as a location within the tracking system. “We had to consider read distance, read performance, and some aesthetic issues, such as how bulky the tags would be,” Bodapati says.

Employees now go from location to location using handheld Motorola MC9090 RFID readers to sweep the room, scanning the location tag and any asset tags in the vicinity. “The software on the handheld tells them what to expect to see in every room,” Bodapati says. “If they find all of the items in that location, they can be done in a matter of seconds.” If an item is missing from the location, it is flagged in the system until it is located. “If they find that item in another room, the system can automatically track that move and record it in the database,” Bodapati says. Because of the speed of the RFID scanning, Scott AFB will be able to conduct more frequent audits, which should improve the efficiency and accuracy of its asset inventory process.

## Construction Poses A Challenge During Deployment

The new system is being rolled out in phases. Currently, AssetPulse is helping the medical group incorporate RFID tagging into its existing business processes for receiving and deploying new IT assets. The ongoing construction and renovation at the base has been a challenge. The medical group is in the process of relocating a number of its facilities, including several offices, its laboratory services operation, and its clinic pharmacy, so several offices and room numbers have changed during the project. “The base is undergoing a fair amount of renovation, so things get moved around all the time,” Bodapati says. “Despite the challenges, implementing the system now could prove beneficial instead of waiting to perform implementation until after the renovation is complete.” This is because the assets were RFID-tagged (for the first time) before they were moved to a temporary location while the offices were being rebuilt. In this way, the system has provided an audit trail of what was being moved for the renovation and has allowed for reconciliation when the assets are returned to the offices after they have been renovated. AssetPulse has also tweaked its software so that it can be used in a more streamlined fashion at the base. ●

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TO SOLVE AN ASSET TRACKING CHALLENGE AT SCOTT AFB, ASSETPULSE DEPLOYED ITS OWN WEB-BASED SOLUTION ALONG WITH CONFIDEX RFID TAGS AND MOTOROLA MC9090 HANDHELD RFID READERS.