

CASE STUDY

Driving Operational Efficiency With Asset Tracking



In today's global economy, businesses must continuously seek out ways to gain a competitive edge. With the rise of Industry 4.0, many companies are turning to smart technology to streamline their operations and achieve optimal operational efficiency. Through the integration of smart technology, companies can now automate previously manual processes, resulting in time and cost savings. One of the emerging technologies of Industry 4.0 is asset tracking.

WHAT IS ASSET TRACKING?

Asset tracking, sometimes called asset management, is the process of keeping track of a company's physical assets. In addition to tracking the location of assets, asset tracking solutions can also be adapted to monitor temperature, moisture, gases, fluid flow, lighting and more, thus helping protect critical assets from costly environmental threats. Depending on the type of business, physical assets can be different kinds of equipment, IT devices, tools, vehicles, keys or other important items.

Asset tracking works by building a geofence on site and attaching sensors to critical assets, then using GPS, Wi-Fi and Bluetooth to send feedback to the tracking software about the status of each sensor. The sensors can be programmed to send status updates at regular intervals or just when there's a change in status, such as when the asset moves or exceeds a set temperature threshold.

Since time is money, time spent looking for or checking the status of assets can add up to a huge expense. Jorvix, a track-and-trace company, estimates that a company loses five to 10 labor hours per week just picking and locating materials. By automating these processes with asset tracking, businesses can save time and reduce expenses related to asset management, including labor expenses, margin erosion due to missing assets and the cost of human error associated with manual processes.

ENGINEERING SERVICES PROVIDER DOUBLES PRODUCTION CAPACITY WITH ASSET TRACKING

WESCO | Anixter's* customer, a U.K. engineering services provider, needed to double production capacity for 2021 and was looking at an asset tracking solution to achieve this. The customer, who repaired military equipment for the Ministry of Defence, needed to be able to track the location and movement of parts kits created during a vehicle overhaul process. During this process, kits are dispersed across the site for refurbishment and are then aggregated again for reassembly. Across the site, they had up to 20 cages of parts, the locations of which were manually recorded on paper, leaving it prone to human error and leading to misplaced parts and delays. Between the time spent looking for parts and the cost of replacing missing parts, this process was becoming expensive.

The customer had completed a small, high-profile proof of concept trial of the asset tracking solution with the goal of running a larger trial and eventually rolling it out to all business units. The objective of the trial was to track component parts of military equipment as it went through various maintenance and refurbishment processes, enabling production to ensure all parts were back at the reassembly track at the right time to avoid delays in production.



Before progressing to the next trial phase, the customer contacted WESCO | Anixter, as their core supplier for consumables, to stock and supply the hardware to support the trial. WESCO | Anixter evaluated several suppliers and determined Alliot Technologies' asset tracking solution was best suited for the project. After discussing the project scope with Alliot, WESCO | Anixter went back to the customer with some key questions around the application and requirements of the system. It quickly became clear that the hardware being requested did not add up to a complete solution and would require adaptation to ensure the solution was scalable.

Regular calls were arranged with the customer and Alliot to rescope the requirements and develop a solution that was not only fit for purpose, but also future-proofed. The sensors for the new solution were supplied by Alliot while the WESCO | Anixter team provided technical support to promote a smooth rollout. Although a full end-to-end solution is available through Alliot, due to the complexity of the customer's operations and the highly sensitive military data they deal with, they own and manage their own platform for the software.

Close collaboration between the customer, WESCO | Anixter and Alliot resulted in the completion of a successful large-scale trial that is now progressing to a companywide rollout. Without WESCO | Anixter's intervention, the customer would have wasted valuable time and money on a solution that would not have been scalable beyond the initial trial.

Additionally, the asset tracking solution implemented by WESCO | Anixter and Alliot is helping the customer achieve their goal of doubling production capacity at the pilot site. Having the right parts in the right place at the right time has led to increased efficiencies and time and cost savings. They are able to track the location of kit crates through their user-friendly interface and can extract location reports from the database to inform production process planning. The solution is also being used to develop an operational improvement plan to target specific delays and improve throughput moving forward.

OTHER POTENTIAL APPLICATIONS FOR ASSET TRACKING

The use case above is merely one way in which asset tracking can be used to improve business outcomes. As an IoT solution, asset tracking can be beneficial to almost any business since it is not only used to track specific assets but can be used to monitor temperature, moisture, gas levels, fluid flow and more. The ability to keep track of the number of people entering and leaving areas and the proximity of those people has been especially useful during the COVID-19 pandemic. Sensors can also detect vibration, so they can be used to monitor how long equipment is operating, thus allowing for maintenance planning.

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Legal Statement: anixter.com/legalstatement

Anixter Inc. World Headquarters
2301 Patriot Boulevard
Glenview, Illinois 60026
224.521.8000

WESCO International
225 West Station Square Drive, Suite 700
Pittsburgh, PA 15219
412.454.2200

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