

Taking Inventory Management and Asset Tracking to the Cloud

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Why does it make sense for manufacturing companies to consider putting their IMAT deployment on a web-based platform?

By moving [inventory management](#) [1] and [asset tracking](#) [2] (IMAT) to a web-based platform, manufacturing companies realize major cost savings as well as increased operational efficiency from general time saved in deployment and overall maintenance of the system to increased real-time collaboration within the team.

Cloud-based IMAT applications are faster to deploy and involve lower IT infrastructure costs than a traditional, client/server based product. Additionally, any updates or enhancements to the IMAT software are supplied automatically to the user; companies do not have to purchase and individually install software updates to every individual server and/or desktop computer within the organization — as they would need to with a client/server solution.

Using a cloud-based application with [barcode or RFID](#) [3] hardware allows manufacturers to automate the IMAT process as well as gain access to critical data anytime, anywhere—in the warehouse, plant, stockroom, back office and even in the field. With [ASAP BarCloud](#) [4], for example, employees simply scan an item's barcode (or RFID tag) on their mobile device, and the data is synced to a centralized server, making it quick and easy for them to share real-time updates, reports and more with management.

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Equipped with real-time access to important data such current asset and inventory levels, management can make more accurate forecasts and improve coordination of business processes such as purchasing, which ultimately creates a leaner and more efficient supply chain.

What are the benefits of development, deployment and customization? How much time is saved in development (pre and post)?

In terms of development and deployment, IT infrastructure costs are much lower with a cloud-based platform — the web-based application effectively allows the company to do more with less time and money spent on hardware, software, and development.

By using a web-based platform like ASAP BarCloud, the manufacturer has eliminated the need to integrate with current IT infrastructure because the software vendor has already put together all the necessary components of the IMAT solution and made it easily accessible online. The actual time saved will vary depending on the manufacturer's needs — for example, how much configuration with things like feature additions is desired. However, in general, with companies like ASAP Systems, installation, training and implementation can be done in less than a week because the software does not need to be installed and it's easy to learn. In addition, companies can configure the software to their specific needs by "turning on" enhanced features and functionality and customizing data field names specific to the organization. These customizations can also be changed or adapted to suit the growing needs of the company.

Manufacturers also benefit from post-development savings in IT infrastructure and staffing/development costs because they receive automatic product updates and the provider resolves any patches or bug fixes in the software.

What are the savings in relation to staffing? How does this affect cost management and savings in staff resources?

First, there is of course the savings from a reduced need for resources in development and IT personnel. Another important factor in using a solution like ASAP BarCloud with barcode (or RFID) technology is that the manufacturer will benefit from reduced labor costs for performing physical inventory counts. In the case of having IMAT in the cloud, operations personnel on the warehouse floor can perform inventory counts right away when the product comes in using a mobile scanner. That data is then uploaded to the cloud, reducing the need to delay data entry until an employee in the back office receives it. Essentially, the process by which the floor staff in the warehouse/ operations center shares IMAT information with the back office (e.g. accounting and management) becomes automated, creating additional savings in staffing.

How does this benefit hardware, software and supporting infrastructure?

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Because IMAT solutions like ASAP BarCloud operate in the cloud, there is less of a need for a manufacturer to invest in IT infrastructure such as hardware, servers, software and storage. This also reduces recurring IT management and servicing costs within the company. In some cases, employees can use their existing smart phones and tablets as a mobile scanner or, in the case of manufacturers that deal with a higher volume of inventory, the organization can purchase hardware that is integrated with the IMAT system, such as a Motorola mobile barcode scanner.

While it may become necessary at a future date to purchase upgrades for the operating systems on these hardware devices, the actual IMAT software will automatically upgrade through the cloud-based platform, reducing IT management costs overall.

How does cloud computing benefit business performance? How does this affect the quality of the IMAT?

There are several key benefits for manufacturers that take their IMAT in the cloud—all of which contribute to improved profitability. First, manufacturers who use web-based solutions like ASAP BarCloud will spend significantly less money on development, deployment and maintenance. Secondly, using web-based applications save time because they are faster to deploy than those of the traditional client/server model — small- to medium-sized manufacturers can be up and running in less than a week. Moreover, the sharing of real-time data between personnel in the warehouse/operations center and executives/management is automated with a cloud-computing application, increasing supply chain efficiencies by providing manufacturers access to information they need to make better, more informed forecasting.

Are there limitations to a web-based platform that companies should be aware of?

The only limitation with using a cloud-based platform is that the client must always have access to the Internet in order to access data. However, we have hit critical mass with regard to access to the Internet in all markets, and so this is no longer an issue. Small to mid-sized manufacturers may need to increase their wireless access points within the warehouse/operations center, but this is an inexpensive fix that can be done quickly and easily.

Are there any security concerns with using a web-based platform?

Providers of cloud-based IMAT services such as ASAP Systems use encrypted security so no, it is not a concern. A client's data can be automatically backed up with customized data backup plans that include regular downloads of the data to a local hard drive or server. This safeguards organizational data and other vital information against disasters, equipment failure and simple human error.

What is the best way for companies to begin moving to a web-based IMAT platform?

We recommend that a manufacturer first make an internal assessment of current

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processes and IMAT needs including what inventory/assets they are tracking, how they need to track them, how many locations are involved, naming conventions, etc. Once this is complete, the company should research and compare vendors. It is a good idea to demo any solution the company is considering purchasing. Regarding pricing, manufacturers should be sure to get quoted fees based on their specific needs so that they do not pay for unnecessary features. They should also take advantage of a free trial if it is available (ASAP Systems offers this). Another important step is to make sure the warehouse/operations center has enough wireless access points. Once this has been completed, the company is ready to buy the solution, train staff, implement the system and test for and resolve any bugs before moving forward.

For more information, visit www.asapsystems.com [5].

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Links:

[1] http://www.asapsystems.com/inventory_control.php

[2] http://www.asapsystems.com/asset_tracking.php

[3] <http://www.asapsystems.com/hardware.php>

[4] http://www.asapsystems.com/barcloud_stock_features.php

[5] <http://www.asapsystems.com/>