One-stop-shopping for Asset Management, Ticketing, and Device Insurance

Steve Ouellette

Westwood (Massachusetts) Public Schools has 3,400 students in K through 12. They have one high school, one middle school, and five elementary schools. With the inclusion of district staff, the Westwood school district manages 4000+ assets (Chromebooks, Desktops and iPADs.)

Starting with the 2018-2019 school year, the district will be fully "one-student to one-Chromebook" for students in grades 3 through 12. Students in grades 3, 4, and 5 will have Chromebooks that stay in the classrooms. Students in grades 6 through 12 will have Chromebooks that they can take home.

The district has iPads for the students in kindergarten and first grade. They found that for the younger kids the tablet experience is much better because they don't have the fine motor skills or the typing skills needed for a Chromebook, so the tablets have been a much more effective device for that age group.

The district has been using SyAM software since 2007. Westwood initially purchased SyAM for Power Management. The district had approximately 1,000 desktop machines and SyAM showed how their Power Management program could generate savings that would more than justify the cost.

Steve Ouellette, Director of Technology, Learning, and Innovation says, "Today, ten years later, we continue to reap the benefits of Power Management. For us, it's one of those 'set it and forget it' kind of things. It simply runs on its own."

Since then SyAM has become Westwood's one-stop-shop for asset management, ticketing and asset insurance.

SyAM for Asset Management

Steve states, "Awhile back we used a different asset management program, but we weren't using it well and our database was not current. We needed to beef up asset management. We knew that we already had the system built-in to SyAM, we simply weren't using it. So, we made a commitment that we would be much more vigilant about our recordkeeping and make sure that it accurately reflected our IT assets. SyAM made that easy."

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"The other thing that was a real advantage for SyAM was that since we had the Power Management client on our desktop devices we were already capturing their asset data in SyAM. We knew that we could maintain our inventory because it was already automated. Since SyAM is an integrated solution it was easy to simply start using SyAM for asset management."

SyAM for Chromebook Asset Management

When Chromebooks are enrolled, a record is automatically added to the SyAM database that captures the serial number as well as other information, such as the MAC address and some of the Google information. They then import student information maintained by Active Directory where the student's email address is found. When assets are tracked and trouble tickets are created, students are automatically sent email notifications. Steve says, "The integration with Google and Active Directory is phenomenal. It's a seamless process."

Partnering Leads to Chromebook Insurance.

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Over the years Westwood and SyAM have become very good partners. One shining example of SyAM and Westwood working together is Chromebook Insurance. The district self-insures so they collect premiums and do all the repairs in house. Westwood used to have disparate systems where they maintained spreadsheets of student insurance coverage. When entering a claim, they had to cross-reference a separate spreadsheet to see if the student had insurance and then go back to SyAM and create the ticket. Steve says, "Now insurance is integrated within SyAM. We can see how a device is insured and then we can put the claim in right then and there."

A Help Desk Run by Students

Westwood actually has a help desk run by students. Steve says, "It's our students that are actually doing the repairs. Our students are given accounts in SyAM so that they can create tickets and look up assets. SyAM is structured in such a way that we can give granular permissions to our students so that they don't see everything, but only what they need to see.

"We encourage students to actually go to a help desk and speak with one of our help-desk students to resolve issues. Our help-desk students then create the tickets on the backend. Our student technicians then get an email notification and can in turn help resolve the issue."

Mobile Device Management.

SyAM also includes asset management for mobile devices. Steve says, "Their Mobile Device Management has been fantastic. I have a bird's eye view of all the iPads and the apps that are loaded on each one. I can purchase apps through Apple's system and deploy the apps right to the device itself. There's a silent install that happens in the background for our managed iPads. We are currently upgrading our kindergarten and first grade iPads. By using SyAM, we are able to essentially disassociate all the apps that were on the older devices and push them down to the new devices silently in the background. That's been great."

Steve adds, "The value of the SyAM tools that we're using, like Asset Management, the insurance module, and ticketing, has eclipsed the value of the Power Management. That's where we're now focusing our interest and energies with SyAM."

Working with SyAM

Steve is very positive about working with SyAM's people. He says,"SyAM is one of the best vendors we've ever worked with. Their responsiveness is like nothing I've ever seen. It's so impressive that we can make feature requests and then they happen. I'll give you an example. Last week, I emailed Nick (Nick Thickens, president of SyAM) and I said that it didn't seem like there was a convenient way to export our insurance subscribers. Within 24 hours, he had fixed that so that there was a method to export the database of insurance subscribers with all the information I needed. It is not unusual to ask for something and to get something done within 24 to 48 hours."

SyAM: "Incredibly useful on many fronts."

"The use of SyAM for our one-to-one program has been the area of greatest impact," said Steve. "It has streamlined all our processes in managing insurance, chasing down ticketing, and identifying kids that are frequent abusers. With asset management, I'm pretty confident that we have a very clean database and we can use that information to make decisions about purchasing or to estimate service and support needs. We also use that data to justify decisions that require a cost. It's been incredibly useful on many fronts."

"We have the same number of technical support personnel in 2018 that we had in 2010, but the number of devices that we're managing has grown exponentially. One of the reasons why we were so interested in going down the Chromebook path was that they are ridiculously easy to manage. The management of 10 Chromebooks versus 10,000 isn't that different. SyAM and the Chromebooks are very scalable. Between the two, we've managed to handle this influx of devices and maintain the staff level that we had ten years ago."

"I think we've made good decisions about meeting the needs of our learners but also identifying technologies that are easy to support. When I look at those two things, I think we've hit on a pretty good thing."

Steve explains why SyAM is a success at Westwood. "There are a lot of companies out there that do asset management, and there are others that do ticketing. But, based on the research I did, there aren't that many that do both. And, for those few that do have both asset management and ticketing, some of their costs are exorbitant. I feel like we get a fair price with SyAM. Having our assets and ticketing system in one integrated database is huge because we can call up assets and enter tickets associated with the assets, and you have all that information sitting in one place."

Steve concludes, "We've been very happy with SyAM. They've been a great partner. They offer a very comprehensive integrated solution at a very good price with tremendous support. Those are the things that I look for more than anything else. SyAM has hit on those things and done them very well."

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