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Director of Information Technology and Career and Technical Education

Windsor Public Schools Attain Very High ROI with SyAM Integrated Asset Management

When you are responsible for thousands of PCs, workstations, tablets and laptops you can't afford to have different systems for addressing things like asset management, trouble tickets, mobile device management, insurance claims, power management and remote support. More importantly, you can't afford a vendor that is less than committed to making you successful.

In 2010 Windsor (Connecticut) Public Schools found such a vendor in SyAM Software Solutions. Sharon Johnston, Network Analyst, said, “SyAM was brought in for power management purposes. Our power company was offering schools a rebate if they had a power management system that could disconnect IT assets when not in use. We qualified for the rebate and that's why we brought in SyAM.”

Today Windsor uses SyAM for asset management, trouble tickets, insurance claims, power management and remote access to track 600 PCs, 700 iPads, and 4,000 Chromebooks, all using a single integrated database.

According to Matt Dadona, Director of Information Technology and Career and Technical Education, “Support for these types of applications is critical and SyAM has a really good history of working with us. So we felt comfortable as we added more and more SyAM applications.”

Integrated Asset Management for Desktops, iPads, and Chromebooks

Assets are tracked with SyAM's Asset Manager program which tracks devices that are active, devices that have been retired, and devices no longer owned. It monitors device location, function, and whether it belongs to staff or students. SyAM monitors the overall health of each device and if the machine is critical, if it's out of disk space, or if it's overheating.

Matt said, “With SyAM's Asset Management, I feel that, for the first time, we have a solid handle on our assets, how many we have, and the health of each one.”

Mobile Device Management

“Tracking the Chromebook insurance policies with SyAM is a huge time saver,” said Matt. “I don't know how else we could keep track of which students have insurance, which policy they are on, which incident it is, and how we proceed with repairs. That type of management is critical and it is built in to SyAM.”

The school district uses SyAM's Mobile Device Manager (MDM) to manage all of their iPads. Sharon said “We now fully understand how many iPads are out there, how they're being used, and how we can make sure we have the right apps for each iPad. We don't want our younger students going on Safari and browsing the web, so we are able to take Safari off of those devices. Students only have access to the core educational apps that they should have.”

SyAM also has a utility that allows Windsor to automatically integrate Chromebook data from the Google Console into the Asset Manager. The MDM and the Chromebook integration allow Windsor to include those two types of devices in the same database as the desktops. This gives Windsor the full functionality of SyAM for all the desktops, iPads, and Chromebooks.

Customizable Help Desk

For many years Windsor used a help desk application that was described as being “okay,” but one that did not allow for customization. This precluded end users from adding trouble ticket information that IT needed to fix problems. Consequently, it wasn't saving much time. Sharon said, “In 2016 we rolled out SyAM's Help Desk application which provides a portal accessed by our staff to enter trouble tickets. We customized our portal with easy-to-use drop-down windows that offer users the options available for submitting as much information as possible. That is working very well for us.”

Matt explained, “It's easy for users to submit help desk tickets and we push them to use it. Whenever we get an email or someone catches us in the hallway with a problem, I tell them to use the help desk system. That's the best way to address problems. The help desk system allows IT to stay on top of the things that need to be fixed versus trying to go back and find things through email. SyAM's Help Desk application has been a big help.”

Remote Access for User Support

SyAM's Remote Access feature allows IT and support people to access devices remotely and fix many problems without having to travel or go onsite. Instead, technicians can take control of a device while the end user watches what the technician is doing as it happens. Sharon said, “If I see a ticket come in and I feel like I can help that person immediately, I will ask them if it is a good time to remote in and fix the problem. It saves me travel time and it often turns into a training session for the end user. When they watch what I'm doing they understand the issue better. Remote Access saves me a lot of time and is a feature that I use a lot.”

Chromebook Insurance Policies

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In the fall of 2017 Windsor initiated SyAM’s Chromebook Insurance. “We have four insurance policies that our student’s families can choose from,” said Sharon. “Whenever we display a particular device we can see what insurance policy has been purchased for that asset. The policies cover two incidences so, unless they have lost the Chromebook or it was stolen, pretty much everything is covered for two incidences.”

Matt elaborated, “We also don’t cover intentional damage. So if a student picks off keys, or my favorite, plays basketball with the Chromebook, that is not covered. However, accidents or anything that is wear and tear of the device is covered.”

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Working with SyAM’s people

When it comes to working with the SyAM people, Sharon was quite effusive: “Oh my gosh, I’ve never worked with a software vendor that has been more supportive than SyAM. “They’ll often contact us and ask if there is anything that we want to see added to the product or anything that they could do better. I love just mentioning ideas to them. They keep a list and many times these items are rolled out in their next update.”

Sharon continued, “We had an instance where Nick (Nick Thickins, SyAM’s president) and Matt (Michael Mazzariello, SyAM sales rep) showed up onsite and helped us enroll the iPads. We needed to get these iPads out and they were here, helping us get the work done. I don’t know anybody else who would ever do that. They’re just a joy to work with.”

Mike added, “When we were planning the rollout of Chromebook insurance, Nick and Mike came down and showed us their product and asked how we envisioned the product being used by our people. They then showed how they could customize it to make it work for us. It wasn’t just ‘here’s our product.’ Rather it’s ‘here’s what it looks like, what functionality do you need added in.’

“I haven’t found this level of customer support with any other vendor that I use. It’s unheard of. Normally vendors just want to sell you products and then have you submit a trouble ticket or call customer support to get any help. SyAM is different. They are always proactive to make sure their solution fits our needs.”

SyAM is “a very high return on our investment.”

Matt said, “Over the last ten years we've added thousands of devices without adding staff. In fact, we're down two and a half people. One retired, a second moved away, and my involvement was reduced by half. SyAM has been instrumental in allowing us to add more devices, even while we were reducing resources. We could only do that because SyAM has so much functionality.”

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For companies thinking about using SyAM Matt has a few suggestions. “First I would ask them to contemplate how many vendors they are paying to do all the functionality that is built in to SyAM and what is the total cost. Then I would ask them to think about how well all those systems talk to each other. It is critical that all these systems are integrated. When you have separate vendors integration doesn't happen. You don't get that crosstalk. It is so important that your Asset Management system works smoothly with each one of these applications. It prevents double entry and things from getting missed or lost. It allows us to have a much better handle on our assets. I strongly recommend SyAM.”

Matt concludes, “I would say SyAM's excellent customer service plus robust products and their willingness to customize the product adds up to great value and a very high return on our investment.”

