

Marking Your Assets: You or the Experts?



The Department of Defense has set a firm September 30, 2014 deadline for all branches of the military to be prepared with Statements of Budgetary Resources (SBR) in compliance with the Financial Improvement and Audit Readiness (FIAR) directive. No exceptions. Labeling all of your qualifying assets with an Item-Unique Identification (IUID) barcode is essential to achieving sustainable Existence and Completeness (E&C) of your mission critical assets and inventory. This involves a disciplined multi-step process – called marking and data capture (MDC) – that will likely place a significant burden on your available time, personnel and resources. For some, performing the task internally may work just fine. But in most cases, it makes sense to have an expert MDC team come in and get the job done for you quickly and accurately, with no interruption in your operations and in time to meet the deadline. What are the key factors to help you decide? This white paper lays it all out and points you to the right people should you choose to outsource.

HIGHLIGHTS

What's involved in asset marking and data capture (MDC)

Performing asset MDC yourself

Outsourcing MDC to the experts

Understanding the technology

When you're not sure

ASSET MARKING AND DATA CAPTURE: WHAT'S INVOLVED

Asset marking and data capture is the process of locating and identifying certain targeted assets and placing a barcode label or other machine-readable identification tag on them so that information on the asset can be stored in a central database, updated automatically and tracked. Here's what's involved in an asset MDC effort:

- Locating critical assets and items that must be marked
- Capturing information about each asset and turning it into a meaningful string of unique, identifying data elements
- Translating that data into a machine-readable code
- Imprinting the code on a label or plate
- Testing the quality and validity of the code
- Attaching the label or plate to the asset
- Registering the unique asset data to a specialized database

The unique identifying data elements mentioned above consist of pedigree information (i.e. manufacturer's code, part number, serial number and NSN) and other identifying elements, which can include physical features, material composition and more. A machine-readable IUID barcode can contain up to 50 data elements. That's a whole lot of unique.

An estimated 23,000,000 military assets require an IUID label. Who's going to do that? Who has the internal resources, bandwidth, trained personnel, equipment, capital outlay and solution support to take on such an enormous effort? Depending on your specific situation, it might make sense to do it yourself. But if you're not up to the task, there are experts who eat, sleep, breathe and live to capture asset data, create labels, stick them on assets and register them on a daily basis.

So do you do it or do get the experts to come in? Let's examine...

THE FIAR COMPLIANCE DEADLINE IS SEPTEMBER 30, 2014

Not meeting this deadline is not an option. If you're a military inventory manager, government furnished property manager, or a defense contractor manufacturing products for the DoD, you really have to get this done. You're required to locate all qualifying assets in your possession (determined by dollar value or strategic importance*), capture the asset data, create a label with a barcode containing that data, place it on the item, verify the barcode's quality, and register the item with the IUID Registry (the DoD database). Time to get a plan together.

DO-IT-YOURSELF ASSET MARKING AND DATA CAPTURE

Whether or not you choose to perform the asset marking and data capture (MDC) in-house depends on the scope, locations and quantity of the applicable military or government furnished assets that need to be marked. There are turnkey systems available that will allow you to do all or some of it internally, and for some organizations, it may be the most appropriate way to go. But there are many things to consider before deciding, any one of which could be a deal breaker.

Bandwidth

Since an in-house MDC effort will be an added activity to your primary operations, you'll need more time, more personnel or, most likely, both. And you'll need to develop a schedule that optimizes both as well. If assets are located at multiple facilities across a wide geographic area, more time and personnel will be needed. Available workspace at one or more facilities is also a consideration.

Personnel Expense

Obviously, if you decide to hire more individuals to handle the marking and data capture of your critical assets, you can expect payroll to shoot up. There's a tradeoff when it comes to time and personnel. More hands will get the job done quicker. But if assets are spread out in numerous facilities, and unless the manpower is already there, costs can skyrocket when you include weeks or months of travel and lodging in the equation.

Training

Of course, any use of organization personnel, whether they're added just for the effort, or you assign existing workers, assumes they are all trained in how to capture asset data and mark and register the items



accurately. To do MDC right, there are a significant number of steps involved, and an array of devices, software and equipment each individual will need to learn how to use.

Equipment and Software

Professional MDC teams work with a range of specialized equipment and software developed specifically for capturing and managing asset data, creating and printing barcodes, applying labels and plates, providing detailed progress reports, and registering data with the database of record. Your internal team will require the same tools, but not without an initial outlay on your part, the size of which will depend on your situation.

Mobile computers – for working with the software necessary to generate the Unique Item Identification (UII) and create the linear or IUID barcode or RFID tag.

Printers and laser-etchers – for imprinting barcodes on label material or metal plates, respectively.

Label and plate materials – and other consumables for attachment and surface preparation

Handheld scanners and computer terminals – for scanning each label and validating that it is unique (not already registered in a database).

IUID verifier – for checking the quality of the printed or etched barcode and whether the data it points to is meaningful.

Asset tracking and data management software – for leveraging the benefits of marking critical assets in the first place. Advanced software is used for maintaining item ‘visibility’ throughout its lifecycle so that property managers, inventory supervisors, defense contractors and others can know exactly what they have anytime, and from anywhere. That way they can be accountable come audit time and make the best possible decisions.

Process Interruption

A full-scale, internally driven marking and data capture effort will impact normal operations. There’s no way around it.



OUTSOURCING MARKING AND DATA CAPTURE SERVICES

For most, if not all, large-scale marking and data capture projects, handing the job off to a focused, expert team with proven marking and data capture experience is the only course of action that makes any sense. Whether you're mandated to implement Automatic Identification and Data Capture (AIDC) or determined to gain the ROI advantages of continuous process control and efficiency, a professional MDC team can make your life very easy. By enlisting a dedicated team of experts you will:

- Ensure total asset control, accuracy and compliance
- Avoid any capital outlay for various equipment, software and consumables
- Get a workforce that is already trained in the marking and data capture process, as well as the systems and software needed to perform it
- Forego having to hire, train, transport or sustain any additional personnel
- Keep your operations running with little or no interruption
- Be able to use the accurate asset data you've generated to sustain long-term operational efficiencies and compliance

The ideal asset marking and data capture solution is a balanced mix of project management know-how, expert individuals and proven technology.

Project Management

Someone has to organize and monitor the entire project and make sure quotas, intermediate goals and final objects are met. This includes scheduling, on-site activity, ongoing collaboration with customer representatives, real-time generation of data metrics, and regular project in-briefs and reporting. An experienced project manager is familiar with various industry standards, supply chains operations, how inventories must be performed and how to manage property. He or she also understands how an extensive diversity of asset types need to be handled – how they're stored, used, valued and accounted for. What's more, the project manager is adept at getting in, getting the job done and getting out with minimal, if any, disruption to normal operations.



Expert Teams

An experienced project manager will assemble the right team to complete the project, whether it involves multiple teams visiting numerous locations around the globe, or a single team visiting just one site. The size of these experienced, fully trained teams will vary depending on the scope of the project. It's not uncommon for some solution providers to mobilize dozens of MDC teams to scores of locations concurrently. They're trained to get the data right and stay on schedule because strict compliance, and downstream demands, don't take time off.

In one instance, A2B Tracking dispatched numerous field-marking teams to military bases, installations and depots around the globe simultaneously – some on the remote outpost of Diego Garcia, some in Kuwait on the outskirts of armed conflict, even some in tsunami-stricken Japan. The project called for nearly 2 million assets to be located, marked and registered. The movement of people and equipment all had to be managed precisely, including all travel logistics and asset availability.

Of course, it's important that any potential field team members have the proper government clearances to enter military facilities, government agencies, research labs and other secure environments, in order to access assets. The right MDC crew has this covered.

THE TECHNOLOGY FACTOR

Successfully completing an asset marking and data capture project requires the right tools – data capture software, label and plate production equipment, as well as tracking and data management systems. Technological advancement has simplified the task of seeking out, marking and registering critical assets regardless of the environment. Mobility plays a prominent role in processing items and tracking them from anywhere on the planet. Mobile computers, handheld scanners, cloud technology, tablets and smartphones have revolutionized how organizations can pinpoint and manage all their critical assets.

Your personnel will likely require some training in the equipment need to properly mark and register your assets, whereas an experienced team of MDC professionals already have a handle on the technology that not only gets your assets marked, but also allows you to take advantage of the fact that your all your asset can now be tracked throughout their lifecycle.

Label Production Software, Printers and Verifiers

This tool is what translates item pedigree information, which is input by marking team members, into a concatenated string of information stored in an IUID barcode or asset tag. Once created on-screen, it can be printed onto a label or laser-etched onto a metal plate and attached to the item. If you chose to hire a marking and data capture team, this equipment, as well as a verifier, scanner and other devices, are available to each team member. No initial investment in equipment is necessary.

Often, label and plate materials have to comply with certain production or military standards to be accepted. For military assets, the standards are MIL-STD-130 (for IUID) and MIL-STD-129 (RFID). Labels for commercial assets are often required to comply with specific ISO industry standards. And contractors and organizations in charge of government furnished property need to comply with specific contract clauses that require certain assets in their possession to be marked. Expert MDC solution providers are well aware of this and know the industry standards at play going in.

None of the above really means anything, however, without registering the item barcode or tag with the IUID Registry. This step is part and parcel of the marking and data capture process, and marking teams are equipped with laptops and mobile devices containing cloud-based asset tracking and data management software.

Tracking and Data Management Software

Asset tracking and data management software leverages cloud technology to communicate, register and update item-unique data. The premier software for managing the data accessible through IUID barcodes and RFID tags is UC! Web. This software is designed to store, process and manage item pedigree data. It tracks and traces asset lifecycle events such as a transfer of custody, a change in location, maintenance history, and final disposition. And it uploads and updates all this data to a centralized database, which is cloud accessible at any time. In short, it gives asset and property managers complete and immediate “visibility” into what they have and where it is.

Data Analytics and Benefit Sustainment

Instant visibility into the location, quantity, condition and availability of critical items – from virtually anywhere in the world – is what makes marking assets so valuable. The ability to track lifecycle events by analyzing item data will help you make better management decisions, move resources to where they're needed most, and enable you to avoid ordering assets you already have but couldn't locate.

Whether marking your critical items is a military or government directive, or something you recognize as an organizational imperative aimed at streamlining processes or preventing counterfeit assets in the supply chain, you can greatly increase your return on investment – get more for your marking and data capture buck – just by easily scanning, tracking and analyzing the data for every item you just stuck a label on and registered.

FOR LARGE-SCALE MDC PROJECTS, LEAVE IT TO THE PROS

You don't have to go it alone. Attempting to marshal the resources, time, people, equipment training and ongoing analysis internally, using existing personnel and facilities for large-scale marking and data capture, makes it a challenge for you to break even. You may need to comply, but you don't need to lose money.

Let's put it this way. This white paper has over 2300 words. Imagine if they were all critical assets that required an IUID barcode label or RFID tag. Now consider how long it would take to process all of them yourself. If you're overwhelmed just thinking about it, you need a company like A2B Tracking to come in and help. That's just the kind of stuff we do.

A2B can help you identify, mark and track your assets anywhere on the globe. We have the expertise and experience to mobilize numerous MDC teams concurrently and the project management to handle all the logistics and get you in compliance for the September 30, 2014 FIAR deadline. You can learn more by visiting our website at a2btracking.com or calling **800.733.7592**.

**For details about the qualifying type and value of DoD assets subject to be in compliance with the Financial Improvement and Audit Readiness (FIAR) directive – as well as other important information regarding FIAR – you can visit the public website of the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller) at comptroller.defense.gov.*