

The Curator's Guide to  
**ASSET TRACKING &  
COLLECTIONS MANAGEMENT**

**Honeywell**

**HL** GROUP





## Keeping it All Together

Museum curators work hard to create the best experiences for visitors and craft the most interesting exhibits. The job is tough. It requires strong organization and a heightened understanding of what is and isn't available to the museum at all times. Each item must be noted when it's on display, traveling, or in preparation for an exhibit. At the end of the exhibit, these objects must be delicately removed from display, catalogued and returned to their respective storage facilities; sometimes this means shipping them back to the original museum or estate from which they were borrowed.

Because of this, it's absolutely crucial to a museum's functionality and purpose to keep artifacts and logistics items, like tools and equipment, carefully catalogued and in a manner that would help anyone searching for something locate it quickly and easily.

In the coming pages, we'll explore how a combination of radio frequency identification (RFID) technology, barcode labeling, and smart software systems can improve your visitor experience through improved visibility of your collection.

# Components of a Museum Asset Tracking Solution

## Mobile Asset Tracking

Everything starts at the Museum object. The most accurate way to track that object is to record information about it wherever it is. A Mobile Asset Tracking solution works with mobile devices, like tablets or hand-held computers, and manages information collected on those devices through scan or screen entry. It then prepares and communicates that information electronically to the Museum's core systems – the Collection Management System and the Digital Asset Management System.

## Collection Management System

A Museum's collection management system is its core database for their object collection. It stores all of the data and history surrounding each object that the Museum owns – or has in their possession. The CMS is the heartbeat of your object collection data, providing your organization with accurate records, detailed reports, and accessible item-level information about where assets are located, and who possessed them most recently.

## Digital Asset Management System (DAM)

This solution has a similar function to your CMS – and complements it. The DAMs organizes and maintains photographs, multimedia files, and other documentation that accompanies a piece of your collection.







## Penn Museum, Philadelphia

Researchers at the Penn Museum re-discovered a 6,500-year-old human skeleton inside a storage room, after it was tucked away and forgotten about all the way back in the 1930's. The skeleton was only re-discovered after the museum began the process of digitizing its collection, and a project manager noticed that paperwork for a full Sumerian skeleton was present, but the artifact itself was not.

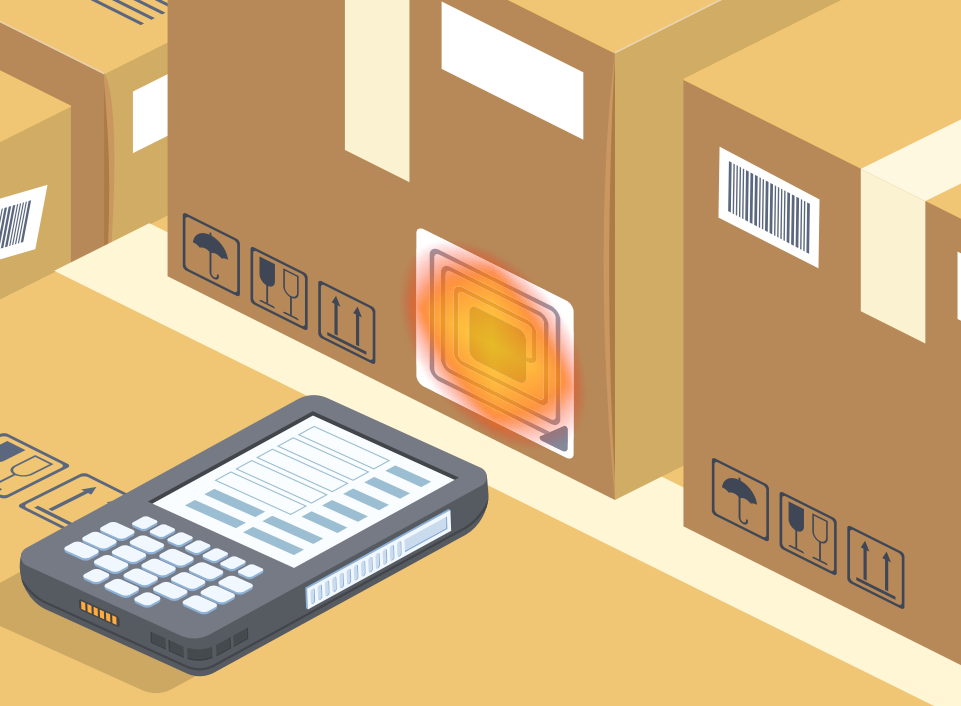
## Web Portal

Some Museums also provide web portals to their visitors that allow a visual representation of their collection via the web. It extends the reach of your Museum to provide an online experience for potential visitors, visitors unable to physically visit your location or to generate excitement about an upcoming exhibit. A Portal can also be helpful when communicating with storage facilities or other museums about what items you have on hand.

## Asset Tags

Tags are the most important component to an asset tracking solution. Every object in the collection (and often their packaging and conveyances) have some type of identification marking. These are the Asset Tags. They are used to identify, track and manage objects throughout their life in the Museum.

Tags have a combination of human-readable text and often a barcode and/or a radio-frequency identification (RFID) tag. These tags can be attached to items in a variety of ways, to accommodate the varying materials and delicacy of museum items. RFID tags, which contain electronically stored information, can be scanned and read, much like a barcode. However, these tags are far more powerful and can store a vast amount of data per tag, allowing you to capture each and every relevant detail you need about the object.



# Hardware Components

## Mobile Devices

Mobile devices are critical tools that provide a way for your staff to go wherever objects reside. They include tablets and handheld computers that can work on your existing network – or disconnected if there is no network coverage. They work directly with the Mobile Asset Tracking software to equip your team with everything that they need to successfully track and manage inventoried items inside the building, off-site, or even inside of your fleet vehicles.

## Scanners

There are different kinds of scanners, and what you should choose depends on your specific need or use. Scanners, like barcode scanners usually reside within the mobile devices. There are also external barcode scanners, like those you may have seen attached to desktop computers. And there are RFID scanners. These are also external to your mobile device, but can communicate with RFID tags enabling you to capture information about multiple objects in a single scan within range of the device.

Again, the types of devices and scanners that are the best fit for your organization depend on your teams specific needs. Typically, there is a mix to ensure that your curators, collection managers and other staff have the tools that they need, where they need them.



## Royal Ontario Museum (ROM), Ontario

Immediately after he was hired as the new associate curator of vertebrate paleontology at the museum, Dr. David Evans set out to locate a sauropod dinosaur to display in a new gallery that was being created. After spending valuable months searching for one, including entertaining options like purchasing a cast, or paying to dig one up, Evans found the perfect specimen. While on a flight, he happened to read an article in an on-flight magazine, about a significant Barosaurus skeleton – located at the ROM. The databases turned up a blank for the skeleton, but after a hefty search, Evans found isolated bones scattered throughout the collections room that actually all belonged to the singular Barosaurus.

[source]



# The Key Benefits of a Physical Asset Tracking System

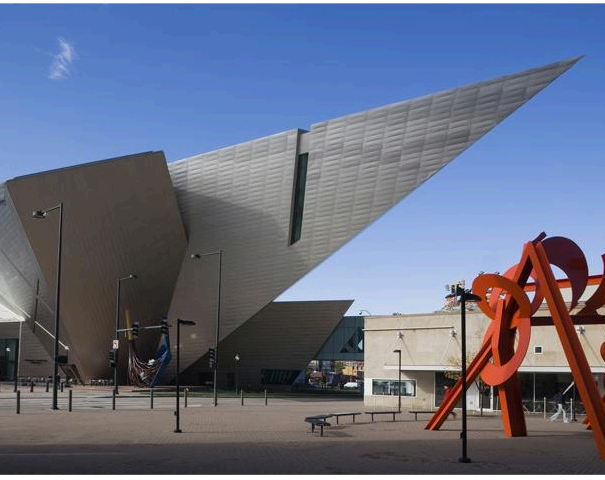
## Differentiating Experiences for Visitors

Much of this comes down to crafting different exhibits, and determining what artifacts to feature in which groups or showings. But you can't do that if your archives are a mess, or if items have wandered from their designated space and can't be located.

Mobile asset tracking technology can help you stay aware of what you have, where you've stored it, and its overall condition – all things that can help you plan your exhibits quickly and more easily. Electronically capturing object inventories provides the clear opportunity to easily account for items that may have not been well-tracked previously, along with new items as they come in.

**Mistakes happen, but when items are misplaced in a museum, it can be a blow to the organizations reputation. But it also means that priceless cultural or historical artifacts were lying forgotten in an archive room, when they could have been on display.**





## Denver Art Museum, Denver

The Denver Art Museum stumbled onto a beaten up, poorly conserved painting hidden away in its storage. The piece had been there for untold years, and had suffered greatly at the hands of restorationists' heavy-handed and damaging work, and it was nearly unrecognizable by the time staff stumbled upon the un-recorded painting. They began the process of cleaning it up, and working to identify the mystery painting. Once the misfiled original paperwork was located, it identified the painting as a piece called Venice: the Molo from the Bacino di San Marco, created by none other than the Venetian master Canaletto.

## Provide Careful and Considerate Custodianship

Many objects within the archives of your museum may be borrowed from donors, estates, or other collections owned by outside organizations. That, coupled with your museum-owned artifacts, can create a consistently changing archival system that needs to be monitored in order to ensure every artifact that's being generously lent to you is tracked, stored properly, and cared for adequately. Consequences of lost or stolen items can have ripple effects, damaging your organization's reputation, donor faith, and overall impact in future curations.

Asset tracking allows transparent visibility to everything you have, and provides opportunity to log its condition, so you can track and note when this condition has changed, and why. This is critical to providing an extra layer of security against damage, theft or mismanagement of items, and can minimize your risk of loss overall.

## Reduce Overall Expenses & Maintain Productivity

It may seem simple, but having a better asset tracking solution in place will overall cut down on costs within your museum. Because this can restrict losses, or damaged items, there will be far lower risk overall to the facility. But it can also help to cut costs in employee hours as well. When things are catalogued efficiently and fluidly, personnel hours will drop as the need to hunt down missing items and equipment, or work to repair something that was handled or stored poorly will diminish. This will also help to improve staff satisfaction in their jobs overall, providing them with a less frantic, less disorganized work environment.

Mobile asset tracking solutions are designed to make it quick and easy for the user to scan an object and update its records with just a few quick taps on a screen. This cuts down on messy paperwork, speeds up the process considerably, and helps to keep records on items up to date and accurate. With online databases up to date and populated with recent images or other multimedia files, curators and other museum professionals can also help to provide input from remote locations, without having to physically go in to the archive or storage center to confirm the location or condition of an item.

# Museum Asset Tracking Solution by mobilePLUS

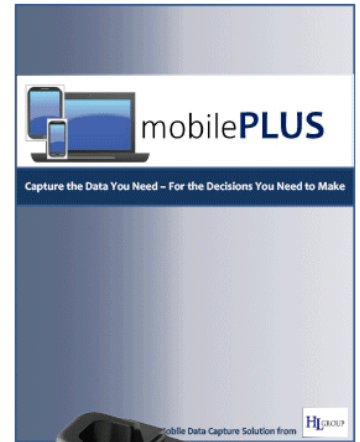
mobilePLUS offers a packaged mobile collection inventory capability for your tracking needs. This solution meets the challenge many organizations face when trying to effectively conduct mobile audits and inventories. It eliminates the need for manual inventories done with paper lists by providing an easy, automated way to capture current information regarding collection objects. mobilePLUS uses mobile devices like scanners and tablets to capture barcodes, RFID tags or screen entries, then integrates with your collection management systems to ensure that the data collected is accurate and current.

## Benefits Include:

Mobile - conduct inventory electronically at the asset - without needing a network connection

Communicates electronically with your CMS and/or DAM or other core business system

Pre-configurable setup to start using mobilePLUS in days – not weeks or months



[Learn More](#)

## About Appware Solutions

Appware Solutions is a free service that connects businesses with technology solutions. We know that technology can make a business better. We also understand that finding the right technology solution for your unique business can be a daunting challenge. Save time, save money, and reduce stress with our free solutions directory and educational resources.

### How we help:

We simplify the research and selection process with our free, comprehensive directory of hardware, software, and bundled solutions for popular applications like point of sale, digital signage, asset tracking, inventory control, mobility, and payment processing.

We provide free resources including articles, eBooks, and guides that are designed to help educate and inform technology buyers.

We do the product research to identify proven solutions that have been tested, certified, and can be bundled to provide best of breed solutions that integrate seamlessly.

We make it easy to find industry-specific solutions that can be customized to meet the unique needs of your business through our "In a Box" series of vetted solutions.

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