Confidence in Computer Lifecycle Management at Grant Thornton

Global Audit, Tax and Advisory Firm Manages 8000+ Computers with 99.997% Accuracy

With its national office located in Chicago, Illinois, Grant Thornton LLP is the U.S. member firm of Grant Thornton International Ltd, one of the six global audit, tax and advisory organizations.

With a corporate history that has seen the firm build market share through the acquisition of other accounting offices, the Grant Thornton's IT team was challenged to design and continually refine a single, standardized IT model that sought efficiency in a high degree of standardization. To add to the challenge, the mobile nature of Grant Thornton's employees and preference for leasing its computers meant that the IT team needed to track and provide data security for more than 8,000 computers regardless of their physical location – whether in the office or with a travelling employee. As part of its approach, Grant Thornton selected Absolute® Software's off-the-network IT asset management and security solution, Computrace® Today, the firm exercises state-of-the-art IT management capabilities including the ability to remotely inventory its computers with 99.997% accuracy.

Harnessing the Cost-Efficiencies of Leased Computers

For many strategic reasons, Grant Thornton has a preference for leasing its computers from a single hardware provider. However, a key determinant of Grant Thornton's ability to harness the cost efficiencies of leasing computers is the ability to manage leased computers effectively and plan to return them on schedule to avoid lease non-return penalties. Simply put: the IT team at Grant Thornton must be able to understand when computers are due back and successfully recall them from employees on time. According to Dave Johnson, Grant Thornton's Director of Strategic Services, "This is where Absolute comes in. Asset management without real-time capabilities is worth very little. So, I would rank the ability to reach out and manage computers regardless of their physical location with Computrace as a 'must have'. The role of Absolute is critical in two specific ways: it provides validation to our internal asset management platform and extends access to our computer population when we find them outside of our control."

Computrace: How it Works

Computrace is an IT asset management, data protection and computer theft recovery solution. At the heart of Computrace services is patented Computrace technology, the Computrace Agent. This small piece of software is embedded in many computers right at the factory.

Every day, computers managed with Computrace connect to the Absolute Monitoring Center to report their IT asset information including critical details like location, user, installed software – even whether components like removable memory are still installed as normal. Importantly, this check-in happens regardless of whether the computer is located in the office, in the field or on another continent. Dave Johnson and his team view this information for all of Grant Thornton's computers in an online portal called Customer Center. Using Customer Center, IT can report on its entire computer population at any time and perform a number of management functions including setting alerts to ensure IT knows when computers are coming up for lease end. By

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Absolute® COMPUTRACE

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using the Geotechnology feature, IT can locate their computers on a map and if necessary, use the Device Freeze capability to freeze the screen of computers remotely while displaying a message telling the user that the computer needs to be returned to IT.

Built-In Tamper-Resistance: Key for IT Asset Management

Because the Computrace Agent is built into the firmware of many computers before they are shipped to Grant Thornton, it is extremely tamper-resistant. This has one major benefit for Grant Thornton; confidence that no matter who attempts to tamper with a Computrace-protected computer, it can still be managed and protected. "In our years of mastering asset management and making it a core competency, we have found that about 1% of all systems are lost before they even arrive at the front door. Therefore, for us to have attained a 99.997% return rate on our leased systems last year, we needed to focus on closing the gaps in all areas where loss can occur. It is my view that if you master the big things, you'll be good at what you do, but if you can master the little things as well, you'll be great at what you do," says Johnson.

Data Protection and Theft Recovery Services Close the Loop on IT Management

Despite the best laid plans, the theft of computers remains a headache for IT and the security of sensitive data on lost or stolen computers must be maintained. Since deploying Computrace to manage the lifecycle of its 8,000+ computers, the Absolute Theft Recovery Team has recovered nearly 80 stolen computers and returned them to Grant Thornton. On other occasions where missing computers contained sensitive information, Grant Thornton requested a remote data delete operation – effectively removing the sensitive data before it fell into the wrong hands.

Internal loss is never a primary concern at Grant Thornton, but the thought of external theft is always top of mind. Tracking IT assets to 99.997% accuracy means that critical data is also secure. Hardware may be fairly limited in terms of replacement value, but lost data can be much more costly. At least one case of external theft occurred before computing assets were even delivered to the Grant Thornton facilities – resulting in a box arriving from a manufacturer with nothing in it. A subsequent investigation revealed that the computer assets had been stolen from the box before they had even left the manufacturers shipping bay. This further highlighted the need to track computers with Computrace from the date leaving the manufacturers facility to the date the computers are retired from service.

For Grant Thornton, the end of lease process includes negotiating upcoming lease conditions and certifying that all old machines are repaired and returned. Since the firm has a "no fault" warranty on its leases, charges are only levied on machines that are not returned, making it even more crucial to locate and recover all leased inventory at the end of term.

When Johnson's team reports a computer stolen to local police and to Absolute Software, a managed theft recovery investigation is triggered. Using information sent from the computer via Computrace as well as a number of proprietary forensic tools, the Absolute Theft Recovery Team tracks the computer and gathers evidence – ultimately developing the full suite of evidence required for local police to obtain a search warrant and physically recover the computer.

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when faced with the worst-case scenario of a missing computer containing sensitive data, we can say that not only is the data encrypted, but also that we also remotely deleted it, have a report certifying that it was not accessed by thieves and that there is a crack team of investigators tracking it down to physically recover it and apprehend the alleged thief. That, is confidence in our lifecycle management capabilities."

The Value of the People Behind the Technology

Johnson concludes: "Absolute Software offers some very innovative and useful technology, but by far the coolest thing about Computrace is the people behind it. The technology is great, don't get me wrong, but without the people who support it, refine it, who interact with police agencies and help us when our staff encounter the unexpected, we just wouldn't have the same experience. The software isn't the only value here."

About Absolute Computrace

Absolute Computrace by Absolute Software allows organizations to centrally track and secure their IT assets within a single cloud-based console – the Absolute Customer Center. They can easily identify computers and ultra-portable devices that have gone missing, enforce software policies, and maintain a fleet of optimally running devices. Most importantly, they can remotely invoke preemptive or reactive security measures to safeguard each device and the data it contains.

About Absolute Software

Absolute Software is the global leader in firmware-embedded persistent endpoint security and management solutions.

We provide organizations with comprehensive visibility and control over all of their endpoints – regardless of user or location. Our customers are able to optimize productivity, reduce operating costs, prove compliance, and remotely secure all of their devices and the corporate data they contain.

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