



The Western and Southern Life Insurance Company helps ensure safe end-of-lease returns with Asset Recovery Solutions from IBM Global Financing



Overview

- ***IBM Asset Recovery Solutions simplified and reduced the costs of a major lease-end technology refresh at The Western and Southern Life Insurance Company, one of the nation's most prestigious financial services firms.***
- ***Using IBM Asset Recovery Solutions for secure, documented data destruction on 2,500 mobile computers coming off lease, Western-Southern Life took important steps to help protect itself from legal exposures under the Right to Financial Privacy Act (RFPA) and other data privacy regulations with a cost-effective data cleansing solution—without diverting critical IT resources from its core mission.***
- ***Refurbishing all computers for a flat fee per unit as part of the end-of-lease returns process with IBM Asset Recovery Solutions eliminated enormous asset management challenges by avoiding the need to engage the services of a third party or utilize precious IT resources to audit, test and fix equipment that was either damaged or in ill repair.***
- ***With a simple process of pre-addressed labels and clear shipping instructions from IBM Asset Recovery Solutions, the company network of 182 offices in 23 states was able to ship all computers directly to the IBM asset recovery facility in Morrisville, NC.***

Business benefits

- Potential legal exposures relating to customer data security under RFPA were reduced or eliminated by implementing a fully documented hard drive overwrite process.
- The rollout process was much more efficient as the need to pre-audit and repair machines for compliance with lease-return terms was eliminated.

Financial benefits

- The expense of engaging a third-party service provider and/or diverting IT resources to cleanse hard drives and assess machine condition was eliminated or reduced.
- End-of-lease costs associated with machine condition were transformed from an unpredictable variable to a budgetable cost that was simple, fair and predictable.

Technology benefits

- With end-of-lease processing handled by IBM Asset Recovery Solutions, Western-Southern Life resources remained focused on other critical aspects of executing a successful field rollout.
- The technology refresh program for the field sales force was efficient, straightforward, and resulted in a seamless upgrade experience for users.

The problem

As one of only seven Standard & Poor's triple A-rated (AAA) life insurance companies in the United States, The Western and Southern Life Insurance Company is a prestigious organization that seeks to avoid unnecessary risks. As a well-managed and efficient financial services firm, Western-Southern Life is committed to serving its clients and has a long history of investing its resources wisely.

Building and supporting the business are 2,500 field associates operating out of 182 offices with a direct presence in over 23 states (clients in another 20 states are supported a call center). The field representatives' notebook computers were leased through IBM Global Financing and distributed by an IBM Business Partner. As part of the rollout, the new assets were deployed by Western-Southern Life with the leased assets being returned directly to IBM.

Western-Southern Life's rollout strategy was to deploy all the new equipment in a condensed time frame. "We wanted to do it quickly and in a big way," says IT director Pat Walsh. He and his deployment team used a Collection Day at each field office, resulting in the sudden challenge of preparing and shipping more than 2,500 notebook computers in multiple locations.

This gave Western-Southern Life a threefold challenge with several levels of complexity.

The first part of that challenge was data security. With an ever-changing legislative environment including the Right to Financial Privacy Act (RFPA), Western-Southern Life could be in for hefty fines if any customer data ever showed up on a future user's screen. Preventing this potential legal, financial and public relations disaster was important.

While there are many commercially available disk-cleansing applications that will overwrite hard drives and the data contained on them, virtually eliminating the chance of it ever showing up again, Western-Southern Life knew the issue was not the tool itself but the time involved in using the tool to perform the overwrite. Using it in their corporate environment could be tricky because of the sheer volume and the geographical dispersal of machines.

Any disk-cleansing application would have to run fast and be licensed for multiple locations. More to the point would be assurance that the application had been run on every machine, and that each one of the 2,500 machines had been tested for thorough data destruction.

That's a lot of machines to touch. That's a lot of time with each machine. That's a lot of documentation to generate, manage and report. It would mean hiring a temporary staff just to run this application and document its use, or diverting the company's IT staff from their primary support tasks for an extended period of time. Neither of which was a particularly attractive investment of resources.

The second part of Western-Southern Life's challenge was machine condition. As part of the lease terms, it was their responsibility to return each leased item of equipment in good working condition assuming normal wear and tear. However, in a previous refresh, they learned that although a notebook may be deployed and working, it may not always be returned intact or without minor damage like cracks. Western-Southern Life found their organization had been charged for these repairs that had not been expected.

This resulted in two unplanned expenses. The first was the repair fees themselves. These had not been anticipated. The second was their own audit of machine condition. Western-Southern Life had to assign people on their staff to monitor the machine assessment and either engage a third party to handle these repairs or pay damage fees.

This time around, Western-Southern Life wanted data destruction confirmed and documented, and they wanted their returns accepted without surprise costs. They wanted the process to be transparent to their staff. But most of all, they wanted to protect the company with the least fuss and expense possible.

And, of course, there was the third part of the challenge—shipping all that hardware. Western-Southern Life arranged the shipping centrally as part of the rollout of the new units.

The solution

IBM Asset Recovery Solutions had the answers. For the first part of Western-Southern Life's challenge, there's IBM Asset Recovery Solutions Disk Overwrite Services.

“In fact, Asset Recovery Solutions will be potentially even more valuable to us as we seek to maximize the value of our owned machines.”

*Pat Walsh, IT Director,
The Western and Southern Life
Insurance Company*

Western-Southern Life had to determine the best method for dealing with data contained on the hard drives in a cost-effective, efficient manner. One option was to “reformat” the drive, although reformatting a hard drive simply rewrites the allocation table, basically clearing the disk's “table of contents.” This leaves large chunks of data intact—and visible to simple file recovery utilities. This is far too much of an exposure for machines with company data or customer information on them.

Asset Recovery Solutions Disk Overwrite Services, by contrast, actually rewrites the entire physical disk with random ones and zeroes. The overwrite service that Western-Southern Life chose for secure data destruction overwrites the hard drive. This process confirms that the hard drive has been overwritten by putting residual data well beyond the reach of the operating system.

But most importantly, IBM Global Financing provides a complete audit trail of services performed with serial number–based documentation certifying that the overwrite process was successfully performed. This credible documentary support helps demonstrate appropriate diligence relating to data security and privacy in the event that Western-Southern Life should ever face legal challenges over data security.

While disk overwrite was the primary end-of-lease return service for which Western-Southern Life engaged IBM Asset Recovery Solutions, they ended up using IBM Asset Recovery Solutions in a new way—refurbishment to help the company with the second part of their challenge.

Here's how it worked. Instead of sending the computers to a third party to have each of them inspected, tested and repaired prior to return at end of lease, Western-Southern Life sent their computers to IBM Asset Recovery Solutions to be refurbished at a flat per-machine fee. The machines were refurbished and accepted in good working condition at end of lease. “We worked together to come up with a price that was fair for us,” says Walsh, and it saved Western-Southern Life an enormous amount of time and money.

On collection days, Western-Southern Life field representatives would simply drop by the field offices and trade their old computers for new ones. IT staff wrote data migration scripts which were used by the agents to port their data to the new machine and the old one would be put into the new machine's carton.

Pre-addressed mailing labels, clear instructions for office staff and specially reserved reception facilities at IBM Asset Recovery Solutions in Morrisville, NC, helped Western-Southern Life meet the third part of their challenge—without compromising the autonomy of their field offices.

The benefits

The benefits were basically twofold:

Western-Southern Life mitigated risk against potential RFFPA violations by having each of the returned machines' hard drives data overwritten in a secure, reliable, documented and audit-ready disk overwrite process by IBM Asset Recovery Solutions.

Western-Southern Life saved money on the overwrite process by using the efficiencies of the cost-effective data cleansing service of IBM Asset Recovery Solutions in lieu of handling this task with existing staff. Western-Southern Life also saved by engaging IBM Asset Recovery Solutions to refurbish all machines during the end-of-lease return, thereby avoiding the unpredictable expense of damage return claims.

IBM Asset Recovery Solutions

According to Walsh, IBM Asset Recovery Solutions converted a complex process with the potential to demand unpredictable quantities of resources (both in cash and IT personnel hours) into a turnkey operation with a predictable, budgetable cost. “The key to it all,” says Walsh, “was the simplification of the process, billing and logistics.”

Western-Southern Life shipped their machines to IBM Asset Recovery Solutions, using the provided, pre-addressed shipping labels, and received confirming documentation showing that each machine had 1) the data on its disk overwritten, 2) been refurbished, and 3) been accepted and fully credited as a return under the terms of his IBM Global Financing lease.

At the end of the day, IBM Asset Recovery Solutions helped Western-Southern Life with their asset management. Specifically, they benefited from:

Central management IBM Asset Recovery Solutions handled the entire return process, taking place over a couple of months and through almost two hundred locations, giving Western-Southern Life a single point of contact for both status reporting, and engaging any issues that might come up.

Collaboration IBM Asset Recovery Solutions was hired to overwrite the hard drives. But thanks to the productive working relationship between Western-Southern Life and their IBM Global Financing representative, Western-Southern Life's machines could be refurbished for a low, fixed fee per machine.

Satisfaction Would Walsh repeat the process in this way? Would he work with IBM Asset Recovery Solutions again? Citing his positive relationship with IBM Global Financing, as well as IBM Global Financing flexibility, creativity and responsiveness to his needs, Walsh answers with a resounding "Yes."

For more information

- *Contact your IBM Global Financing representative*
- *Visit the IBM Global Financing Web site at **ibm.com/financing***



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North Castle Drive
Armonk, NY 10504-1785 USA

ibm.com/financing

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