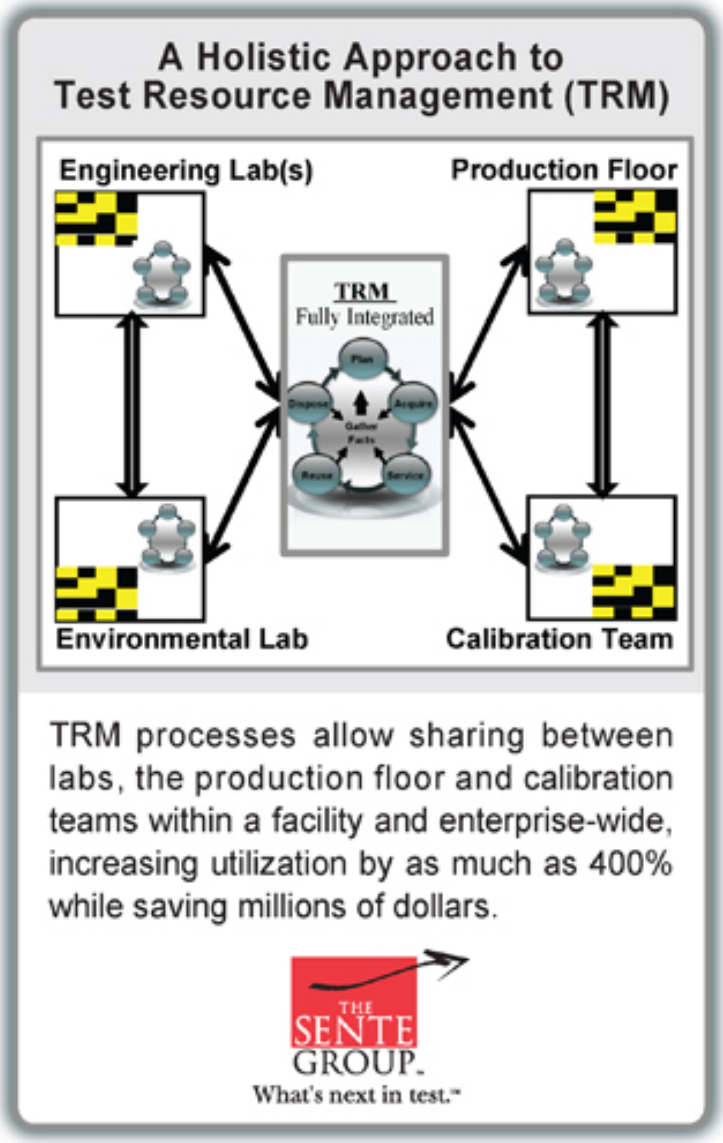
Advantages to Managing Your Test and Measurement Environment Holistically

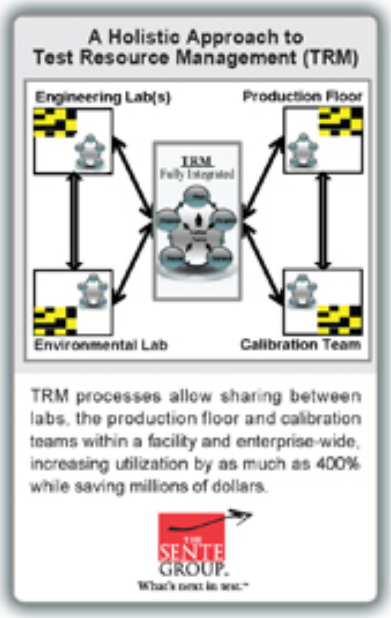
Paul McNamara, CEO, The Sente Group

In the current competitive climate, organizations everywhere are under pressure to innovate, reduce total costs and accelerate products to market. Today, I'd like to call your attention to one area of your business that can support all three of these efforts: your test and measurement function.

In far too many companies, test equipment utilization remains unacceptably low, topping out at about 20 percent. Such low utilization quickly translates into time wasted tracking down equipment, unnecessary equipment purchases, maintenance and—perhaps most crucially—time not spent on new product development.

The reason? Most test asset management programs are isolated, incomplete and inconsistent. A more holistic approach to Test Resource Management (TRM) can help your company vastly improve efficiency, freeing engineers to focus instead on the innovation you need to succeed.





Using Complete Data about All Your Equipment

At the outset, one critical problem of a typical test asset management effort is lack of comprehensive data. This phenomenon is true not just of general purpose test equipment, but especially of the larger fixed “monuments” that make up some 70% of the cost of capital equipment. The problem becomes more acute in companies with multiple locations including international test locations.

For example, when we started working with one major global company’s aerospace division, leaders there lacked comprehensive data about approximately 150,000 test assets spread across 15 facilities. They weren’t aware of the full potential for the efficiencies they could gain.

A holistic approach starts with a full cataloging of all equipment in all asset classes, from small lab hand tools to larger fixed-in-place assets. Although the controlling criteria will be different for the different classes—you won’t need to track the location of a fixed piece, for example—the overarching process should be cohesive, coherent and fully integrated.

Addressing the Cause, not Just the Symptoms

Engineering-driven organizations naturally focus on the software, databases and other technical aspects of test equipment management. But the root of the problem isn't the system; it's the culture. To put it simply, equipment doesn't lose itself. People horde it, misplace it, don't plan for it or forget about it.

That's why holistic management of your test environment addresses not only the equipment, but also the people who manage or use it. To secure engineers' support of the new system, a holistic approach instills confidence through:

• Communications targeted at the concerns of each constituency.
• Incentives carefully aligned with their interests.
• Real-time measurements of scheduling and location accuracy, lead times, etc.

By fostering greater alignment with and trust in a test resource management solution, this more holistic approach has helped a wide range of organizations rapidly achieve significant performance improvements in their test environments. And in doesn't take long. In fact, the aerospace manufacturer from our earlier example saved over $10 million in its first year, greatly increasing their ability to fund and accelerate new projects in engineering.

Like others taking this approach, your company could increase utilization by as much as 400 percent and increase your competitive edge in the process.

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