In this publication, Ed Thompson, CEO at Pharmaceutical Manufacturing Research Services, Inc. (PMRS), Horsham, PA, USA, describes how using Agilent OpenLAB Enterprise Content Manager (ECM) eliminates the bottlenecks associated with a paper-based supply of documentation to clients in the pharmaceutical industry and at the same time meets the requirements of quality and regulatory guidelines.

The challenge for contract laboratories

Contract laboratories are often multifaceted enterprises, providing pharmaceutical companies with reliable, compliant resources for analytical services, manufacturing, microbiology services, and quality management. The complexity and diverse nature of all these activities translates into a cumbersome flow of information. Contract labs typically interface with multiple departments and facilities at a client company, which are managing new products in various stages of development that involves teams at multiple sites. The exchange of information between all these entities has been predominantly based on the movement of paper. The pharmaceutical industry worked this way out of habit and necessity - there just wasn’t comprehensive, easy-to-use software available that allowed the efficient flow of data and documents generated from multiple disciplines and functions.

One organization that faces the challenges of efficient communication with their clients today is PMRS. Even though PMRS was considered one of the market leaders in providing the highest quality manufacturing and research services available for the pharmaceutical industry, it felt restricted by its inability to rapidly communicate information to its clients.

The Situation

PMRS realized that their key productivity bottleneck was the paper-based supply of documentation to their clients in the pharmaceutical industry. "The system was as efficient as the slowest person in the process", said Ed Thompson, CEO at PMRS. "We had to fundamentally change our process, if we wanted to continue to be a major contract laboratory for pharmaceutical companies." The paper-based system was also preventing PMRS from achieving their aggressive goal of 10% annual growth.

The Solution

After a thorough evaluation of all commercially available systems, PMRS decided to move away from their paper-based documentation system and to implement Agilent's fully electronic content management solution, Agilent OpenLAB ECM. This software’s web-based portal allows PMRS to capture, integrate and share information with all their clients. Within five years PMRS have been able to double their business productivity as well as meet their aggressive goals for growth. According to Ed Thompson, "ECM enabled us to stay ahead of the curve and ahead of our competitors to become indispensable for our customers."

"Agilent OpenLAB ECM gives us the freedom to work on the most important problems because we know that data and information are where they belong."

Ed Thompson, CEO at PMRS
Web-Based Solution

After an exhaustive look at commercially available systems, PMRS decided to deploy Agilent OpenLAB ECM, an enterprise content management system designed to combine the laboratory-specific needs of analytical data management and document management in a single system.

Agilent OpenLAB ECM manages all types of information with an intuitive location-cabinet-drawer-folder (LCDF) hierarchy. The system manages any type of electronic file and has the ability to extract an unlimited number of keys for searching and reporting, as well as offers extensive automation features such as automatic archiving, file transfer, meta-data extraction, workflow automation and email notification. Further, Agilent OpenLAB ECM provides PMRS’ clients with instant access to their specific information such as material management reports through a web-browser. Thompson acknowledged that, “Prior to deploying Agilent OpenLAB ECM, I was very nervous about the electronic sharing of information. However, once it was installed and I saw how excited our clients were about the ability to access their information at any time, from anywhere in the world, it didn’t take me long to realize the potential of this technology.” PMRS has set up the Agilent OpenLAB ECM system to enable its customers to provide an advanced IT team with access to manipulate the interface, determine its LCDF structure, thereby customizing Agilent OpenLAB ECM to best meet their needs.

Deployment of Agilent OpenLAB ECM

The deployment time was about 3 months for initial system implementation and validation. But taking full benefit of the system meant for PMRS providing a full enterprise workflow for both scientific and business processes. With streamlining and automating manual day-to-day processes they further evolved their lab informatics systems to a workflow-driven business management solution.

Business Benefits of Agilent OpenLAB ECM

Overall the deployment of Agilent OpenLAB ECM provided PMRS with a set of clearly measurable productivity, cost and quality improvements:

• Doubling business productivity (measured as revenues per employee) within five years. “Agilent OpenLAB ECM was the major enabler for doubling our business productivity within five years and constantly reaching our aggressive annual growth goal of 10 %”, said Ed Thompson.

• Reducing time and resources for on-site audits at PMRS. With storing all company data electronically in Agilent OpenLAB ECM, PMRS was able to reduce the time for (governmental) on-site inspections by 80% and the PMRS manpower involved from 6 to 2 people.

• The transformation to digital data management helped to achieve PMRS’ goal to reduce paper and energy consumption and achieve ISO 14001 certification, which is rare in the pharmaceutical industry.

Summary

Agilent OpenLAB ECM was exactly the type of solution that PMRS was looking for, and almost overnight it went from a company that believed the fax machine was the best way to transfer data to their customers to one that has now fully endorsed this web-based flowing interaction of information with their clients. Clients may access their information directly through a secure site and request batch records, reports, and data directly, instead of having to take the extra step of requesting it from PMRS. Also, PMRS reduced the time for their internal review and approval processes through moving all of their documentation into Agilent OpenLAB ECM and thereby gaining access to any information within seconds.

About PMRS

PMRS (Pharmaceutical Manufacturing Research Services, Inc.) is a well-respected pharmaceutical contract laboratory. Founded in 1994, PMRS specializes in much of the core competence required by the pharmaceutical industry, including manufacturing, quality management, analytical and microbiological services. Based in Horsham, PA, USA, PMRS serves mainly medium to large pharmaceutical organizations and virtual companies, which either may not have the complete spectrum of expertise in-house or have the philosophy that it is more cost-effective to use contract vendors for some important R&D functions.

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