Why We Switched To Agilent
CEO Standardizes on Employees’ Instrument of Choice for Clinical Testing

Ken Lewis, the founder and CEO of OpAns—a provider of optimized analytical solutions—noticed a pattern among the analysts in his lab soon after buying his first Agilent triple quadrupole mass spectrometer.

“We found that people would let the other instruments sit idle, coming in on the weekend to run their samples on the Agilent instrumentation,” Lewis says. “That was because they found it so much easier to use the Agilent software and the Agilent instrument over the other machines.”

In fact, he noted that the Agilent triple quad was running pretty much all day, every day, while instruments from other vendors stood idle half the time.

“It was only when people couldn’t get onto the Agilent instrument that they would use something else,” Lewis says. “It was at that point that we started to standardize on Agilent equipment.”

Based in Durham, North Carolina, Lewis started OpAns in 2004 as an analytical contract research organization serving the biotech industry. He added bioanalysis services compliant with good laboratory practice (GLP) in 2008, and expanded into clinical diagnostics in 2010.

The lab is staffed from 6 a.m. until 9 p.m., but machines continue to run samples overnight. Breakdowns, he notes, are extremely rare on the Agilent instruments.

“We have worked with all the major mass spec instrument manufacturers, and have a long relationship with all of them,” Lewis says. “What caused us to standardize on Agilent instrumentation is a combination of two things: ease of use and cost of operation.”

Lewis has always taken a holistic approach to costs. It’s not just the purchase price of the instrument that interests him, but also the cost of maintaining it—and having access to factory-trained experts who can help when needed.
“All of that together figures into the total productivity of our Agilent instrumentation,” he says. “Agilent instruments are robust. If you’re putting a mass spec into clinical diagnostics, it has to be a production workhorse. That’s what is needed. Agilent instruments are very well engineered.”

Lewis also has high praise for Agilent’s data acquisition and analysis software.

“The advantage of MassHunter software is that it’s intuitive and does not require detailed training to be productive,” he says. “With MassHunter, you literally show someone one time, and when they do it by themselves the first time they may have a question or two, but that’s about it.”

Lewis notes that, if you want to take advantage of everything MassHunter has to offer, then, yes, you will want additional training—and Agilent offers plenty of online and in-person instruction.

“MassHunter is quite powerful, particularly when you combine the scripting programs that enable you to automate steps within MassHunter,” he says. “Using that process, we’re able to do our full data analysis in MassHunter and come out with completely reviewed data that goes back into our informatics system for reporting to the physician. I think that’s a unique capability of MassHunter: the ability to automate the review of assays with as many as 50 or 100 different analytes.”

What’s more, MassHunter software provides alerts that focus on exceptions. What that means to OpAns is simple: “No one has to be bored to death looking at thousands of chromatograms over and over such that you go blind and don’t even realize what you’re looking at anymore.”

“We hired lots of people who had experience from large pharma, and they had experience on the other major platforms that have historically been popular in pharmaceutical clinical-trial support. So they came in and learned to use the Agilent software, and every one of them has preferred using MassHunter over what they were using before. I think that is a clear statement about the ease of use of MassHunter, and that’s why I say that from an operator standpoint that MassHunter has made us more productive.”

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