



The 4 biggest considerations when choosing a digital transformation partner

There's no denying that the digital revolution is here, and it's making a significant mark on the laboratory industry. Adding digital elements to a lab offers demonstrative operational advantages and significantly improves productivity,¹ but as more organizations adapt to reap the benefits of this new reality, labs that don't embrace innovative digital solutions will fall even further behind. In fact, business leaders who were surveyed by the Global Center for Digital Business Transformation believe that 4 of today's top 10 incumbents in market share will be displaced by digital disruption in the next 5 years.²

However, taking the digital plunge isn't as simple as recognizing the need to upgrade processes and technology. New technologies are critical to digital transformation, but prioritizing, selecting, customizing, implementing, integrating, and optimizing them is just as critical.

Labs need the right partner to help guide them through the transformation journey, and choosing a partner that doesn't set them up for success can negate the benefits of digital transformation and threaten productivity, performance, and adoption at every step.

We collaborated with a number of leaders in the lab field to find out what to look for when choosing a digital partner for a lab transformation. By keeping these 4 biggest considerations in mind, you can start your digital lab transformation off right and set your lab up for success for years to come.

1. A good digital transformation partner sets expectations

Humans are hardwired to follow the path of least resistance,³ and it's no secret that change isn't always easy. Transitioning to innovative new ways of thinking or implementing unfamiliar processes and procedures is bound to bring a few bumps in the road, but having realistic expectations is one way you can be better prepared for any potential roadblocks.

The best digital science transformation companies work with you hand-in-hand to set those expectations to pave the way for a smooth transition to a new digital lab system.

"With any system like this, it's not just, 'I'm going to pick this off the shelf and it's going to work,'" says a national director of supply management for a diagnostic testing lab. "There are some intricacies. Processes are going to change."

It's important for a digital transformation partner to establish clear expectations on what to expect from a wide variety of angles, from initial workflow delays as new equipment or software is installed to projected time savings once the new technology is up and running. Lab administrators don't want to encounter any unexpected surprises during the transformation process, so setting expectations is pivotal.

In addition to setting expectations with top-level administrators, partnering with a digital lab company that involves lab employees of all levels in the transformation process is paramount.

"I think you have to win the hearts and minds [of lab workers], to get them involved early and let them feel that they're empowered—and they are empowered," he says. "From there, you start changing their mindset to say, 'Hey, change is good.' I think there are a lot of times where corporate and other outside entities come in and say, 'This is how we're going to do it,' without any input from the staff and such. So, I think if you take it the other way, then it's easier."

Once they've laid high-level groundwork in advance of overall process changes, digital lab vendors should also help clients on a more granular level as they prepare to incorporate new products into their day-to-day routines.

"If you think about folks on the floor, they maybe have a piece of paper and a pad," he says. "Now, they're going to have handheld machines where they can now look at their phones or their tablet and they can perform all their duties there by a scanning capability." Setting realistic expectations for those new systems and products will create a strong foundation to build on as you embark on or continue with your digital transformation.

Digital transformation tip: Establish clear service expectations

While a reputable and reliable digital transformation partner should establish a breadth of expectations up front, it's important not to make any assumptions on topics they might not have covered. Be sure to ask appropriate questions so you feel comfortable not only with the new technology itself, but also with the vendor's service policy and response time.

A lab manager recalls an occasion where she spent \$125,000 on new lab technology and then was hung out to dry when it came to product support.

"We didn't have any customer service," she said. "It was not reliable at all."

On one specific occasion, she called the company with a troubleshooting question, expecting a quick return call to resolve the problem.

"We called, and they called back after a week," she said. "If I have a problem at 9 o'clock in the morning on Monday, I'm expecting a phone call at least the same day, not a week later."

Needless to say, it was an eye-opening experience, and it's changed the way she thinks about making purchases going forward. Now, she makes sure to properly vet vendors on a variety of capabilities, from knowledge and expertise to customer service and response time, before making a purchase for her lab.



2. A good digital transformation partner educates

There's no shortage of companies who want to sell you shiny new equipment for your lab, but the key is finding one that will do more than just drop it off and call it a day. The best digital transformation companies will help you establish a strong foundation of knowledge and devote the necessary time and resources to product training—before, during, and after delivery and implementation.

That kind of in-depth education is incredibly important, according to a scientist in an oncology lab.

“We will not adopt a product ‘sight unseen’ by just going to the website and looking at their white papers and documentation,” he says. “We want an actual demonstration to show the true features and functionality. I’m a very hands-on scientist. I want to actually play with it, I want to ask questions, I want all my lab mates to ask questions.”

Another lab manager in charge of inventory and equipment, agrees.

“Sometimes they give you a lot of manuals, sometimes they give you a book, but it’s not the same (as hands-on training),” she says.

A digital transformation company with a strong commitment to initial education is crucial, as is choosing a company that has the kind of existing knowledge base that only comes from years of hands-on experience. Being able to tap into that knowledge base at any point of a digital transformation journey is an invaluable luxury.

“It’s very beneficial because you don’t know what you don’t know, so you’re relying on other folks’ experience,” the scientist says. “I might be trying to reinvent the wheel, but it’s already invented somewhere else and they’ve gone down that same path.”

**“You just need more expertise.
Not everything that is in the
book is real life.”**

– Lab Manager in charge of inventory
and equipment

3. A good digital transformation partner brings scientific expertise

With the digital revolution impacting nearly every aspect of society, many vendors have attempted to offer one-size-fits-all solutions to capture a wider swath of customers. But what works for one industry might not necessarily fly in the scientific space.

It's helpful for labs to choose a digital transformation partner that shows a mastery of laboratory science beyond just digital capabilities.

"It's not just helpful, I think it's critical," says a scientist in an oncology lab. "If this company is selling an inventory system for scientific use and also selling it to auto parts companies and to a paint company, yeah, that's great, but they need to have someone that's specialized in science that knows the difference between -20 and -200 degrees refrigeration in freezers, that knows the difference between incubation and hybridization—things like that. Knowing the kind of minutiae and the details of the science is important."

4. A good digital transformation partner offers the ability to easily scale

Bringing productivity-boosting digital technology to your lab is a vital advancement that can pay dividends almost immediately, but what about in the future, as your lab continues to grow? Will your new software and devices be able to scale appropriately to accommodate new users and additional data?

It may seem like a given that digital lab equipment and software could easily grow along with a lab, but many labs have learned the hard way that's not always the case.

"I think later on in my career, I realized the important thing is obviously scalability," says the oncology lab scientist. "Can this grow with my lab? If we shifted and grew inventory-wise, grew product-wise in the sense of we added another machine, we added more research associates, more scientists, can this be modular where we can add stuff to it? Can we scale up and scale down?"

Those are the questions that I wish I would have asked earlier on—but now, they're questions I ask all the time."

The leading digital transformation companies offer scalable solutions across your entire organization, from small labs to global enterprises, ensuring you can reap the benefits of your investment in the latest technology for years to come.

No matter what type of scientific lab you work in, looking for a lab partner that checks all 4 of these boxes—expectations, education, expertise, and scalability—will help secure a smooth digital transformation process and support the best outcomes on the road ahead.

References:

1. Heyward S. Digital data in the lab—What now? Real-time analytics, multifactor trend analysis, and data visualization. *Lab Manager website*. <https://www.labmanager.com/laboratorytechnology/2017/10/digital-data-in-the-lab-what-now-#.XWgVRJNKjUI>. Published October 9, 2017. Accessed September 3, 2019.
2. Bradley J, Loucks J, Macaulay J, Noronha A, Wade M. Digital Vortex. How Digital Disruption Is Redefining Industries. *Cisco website*. <https://www.cisco.com/c/dam/en/us/solutions/collateral/industry-solutions/digital-vortexreport.pdf>. Published June 2015. Accessed September 3, 2019.
3. University College London. *ScienceDaily website*. <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2017/02/170221101016.htm>. Published February 21, 2017. Accessed September 3, 2019.

For more information, visit
thermofisher.com/digitaltransformation

ThermoFisher
SCIENTIFIC