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*look for the answers,
not the supplies.*

SUCCESS STORIES

Supply Center Solutions

Centering on a solution: how Supply Centers enabled one company's evolution from costly chaos to everyday efficiency

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—Lab manager

The challenge

Before Supply Center by Thermo Fisher Scientific, there was ordering chaos. A scientist charged with managing cell culture and cell banking describes the free-for-all at her rapidly growing therapeutics company four years ago: “Everybody ordered their own stuff and stored it at their benchtop—or for reagents that needed to be stored at four degrees, everybody had some shelf space in the cold room, so you could go in there and see that four different people had ordered MEM. It was unsustainable.”

Like many successful midsize science companies, they were growing quickly and realizing that many aspects of their project pipeline could be more cost-effective, faster, and smarter. Their disorganized process for individual product ordering, for one thing, was causing product duplication, waste, and unnecessary costs—the labs were sometimes throwing away excess reagents, which felt a lot like throwing away money.

In addition to the need to save money, the company's objective of getting as many products to the clinic as quickly as possible meant that they needed to minimize lag times across their processes—from product development to manufacturing. Delays caused by individual ordering were adding up—a three-day wait for a reagent multiplied over the course of a year meant the possibility of a delay in getting a product to the clinic.

And on top of the increased pressure to save money and time, company growth was also resulting in less and less space for product storage. After one difficult budget cycle, the lab manager recalls a meeting where they concluded that they needed to quickly implement something to address all of these issues.

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The solution

With several labs spread across multiple buildings, the therapeutics company sought a smart solution that would feature a central location where, in the lab manager’s words, “If four different people needed the same item, they wouldn’t find themselves with four separate orders for the same thing.” The solution would make supplies readily available to researchers working across a variety of application areas; it would be convenient because supplies would be easily accessible when needed; and it would be efficient enough to save researchers time while saving the company money. “We wouldn’t have to be running around making orders or scrounging around because we forgot an order,” she added.

It was ultimately easy for the lab manager to recommend that the company choose the Supply Center solution from Thermo Fisher Scientific. This is an on-site ordering system where products are stored in smart temperature-controlled cabinets, with product ordering and access made simple through the Supply Center Management System (SCMS)—a web-based interface for product searches, selection, and purchasing. The SCMS also provides automated management of on-site inventories, including reporting features for cost-center accounting.

In fact, the other supplier the therapeutics company considered when seeking to improve their product management didn’t offer

a comparable on-site stocking solution—and when it came to most of the essential products being used in the labs, the majority of the researchers were already ordering them from Thermo Fisher. That was a critical factor in the decision: changing a reagent can require a series of experiments to compare the new reagent with the old, so the ability to implement a turn-key solution with their trusted supplier was appealing. “It was therefore a very easy transition,” the lab manager says. “Our scientists didn’t have to change what they used and were able to proceed with their assays or their cell cultures without any hiccups in terms of their timelines or what they needed to do.”

Another factor that helped them choose the Supply Center solution was the professional support they received. The lab manager, together with several other company decision-makers, put together a list of the reagents and supplies they’d potentially need in order to see what could be done. Their Thermo Fisher sales representative helped them create a cost-effective Supply Center plan based on stocking high-volume items the lab used throughout the week and those that were used across several teams. The lab manager felt reassured having a dedicated contact person for their Supply Centers—if they ever had an issue with their Supply Centers or needed to add products, she knew they could simply contact their representative to help them make any adjustments.

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The results

Goodbye chaos, hello money and time savings. The therapeutics company implemented two on-site Supply Centers, which have helped them decrease costs while increasing efficiency and peace of mind. According to the lab manager, “It used to be a free-for-all until we realized we needed to stick to a budget—so the Supply Center solution has been looked on very favorably by the executive committee, since the process really hit the budget in a positive way while helping optimize our timelines.”

One benefit of the Supply Centers that the lab manager appreciated immediately was knowing that what the labs needed—whether it was reagents for western blotting, qPCR, or cell culture—was always stocked and ready to use. She describes her experience: “You don’t even have to think about it. If you’re in the middle of doing something and you’re like, ‘Oh, I need this,’ you just go down, open up the fridge, take it out, have it scanned, and you’re done. It takes a minute and you’re back to work. You don’t have to try and remember to order anything, you don’t have to worry whether you have enough. Or, if there isn’t enough, worrying, ‘Who do I call?’ For me, and for a lot of my coworkers, it takes the stress out of doing our work from day to day. Whatever stocked item we need, it’s always there. You don’t have to worry about it.”

An example she offers of why this so important is that some of the company’s groups involved in analyzing samples from production don’t know whether they’re going to get samples each day or, if they do, how many. She considers it a major advantage that no matter how many samples they’re analyzing, or whether samples get delayed, the Supply Centers are there with the reagents they need to handle however many samples come from production.

She also sees an increase in the company’s ability to get more work done. For one thing, the Supply Center solution eliminated the time spent online ordering products. “It doesn’t sound like much time,” she explains, “but when you multiply it by the number of people that needed to be doing this all the time, it adds up—now they just scan the thing, open up the fridge, take their stuff, and go.”

Also, before the Supply Centers, their scientists frequently received more samples than they had reagents to handle, causing repeated delays of timelines. That’s now a thing of the past. She explains, “With a Supply Center, if you’re suddenly confronted with two times the number of samples you were expecting, you just pull out more reagent, and you can still get your work done in the expected time frame.”

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The results (continued)

As with any new system, there was some initial reluctance within the company to adopt the Supply Centers, but the lab manager and some of her colleagues worked hard to educate everyone on the cost-effectiveness and advantages. During the adoption phase, they found it very effective to have their Thermo Fisher representative provide regular on-site training sessions to show users how to log in and access their products. “It took a little bit of time, but we’ve got just about everybody [in the company] using the Supply Centers now.”

She notes that one other advantage of their Supply Centers is how well

they’ve integrated with the company’s effort to improve their ordering system. Before the Supply Centers were implemented, the ordering process was tedious: “You had to look up each reagent, write down the order number and cost, and then put the order in.” As they’ve continuously updated their system, the lab manager appreciates how the improved software for procurement and inventory has worked seamlessly with the Supply Centers, so everything they need to order gets charged appropriately and on time.

Summing up her company’s Supply Center experience, the lab manager says simply, “I think it’s great.”

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