

Technic Inc.

Industry: Chemical
Client Since: 2012
Location: Woonsocket, RI

LabLynx LIMS Helps Rhode Island Lab to Improve Data Security and Efficiency

Overview

Improving data security and setting access controls were two of the main reasons that Technic's Engineered Powders Division decided to purchase a laboratory information management system (LIMS) more than five years ago.

"It was chaotic, and we needed a LIMS system to get some kind of control in place," said Justin Lloyd, lab manager of the division's 93,000-square-foot laboratory in Woonsocket, Rhode Island. It's a remote lab located in an old mill town about 20 miles from Technic's headquarters in the city of Cranston in Providence County.

The Woonsocket lab produces metal powders used in the electronics industry for everything from car fuses to solar panels. The powders are fabricated to client specifications from metals like gold, silver, platinum, palladium, and copper. Then clients sell them to their clients or use them in global end-products that range from solar panels to the fuses of cars.

In addition to engineered metal powders, Technic is a global supplier of specialty chemicals, custom finishing equipment, and analytical control systems to multiple industries.

Implementing LabLynx LIMS at the Woonsocket lab has not only helped set data security parameters that limit access to data entry and approvals at the Woonsocket lab, it has also made Lloyd's job as lab manager much easier.

Even though he doesn't have an IT background, he's been able to easily navigate the LIMS. He's also very pleased with the support he's received from LabLynx over the years. Support is there when he needs it, even when he just has smaller issues or requests.

Before LabLynx LIMS, anyone could manipulate data in the lab

The Engineered Powders Division lab runs a lot of different tests on the metal powders it manufactures using multiple techniques. These include trace metal analysis, particle size analysis, and tests to determine surface area density measurements.

"Every particular material we make might have a different particle size and different morphology, so we classify it as a product code, and it has a batch number which will be unique to that actual material," said Lloyd. "Then that will get tested before it goes out."

Lloyd, who has worked in the lab for 12 years, explained: "When I came on board, we had a Microsoft Access database, and everything in the lab was running through this huge database. But it was obsolete because it was no longer being supported by Microsoft at the time. There must have been hundreds of tables in there. And if it went down, we lost everything."

The database was also linked to a sales order entry system in Cranston; however, there were no login rights to access the database. "Anyone could log in and could basically change the data, so there was no security," he said.

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Describing the situation as chaotic, Lloyd said, “We’d put in data, and the next day the data would be different because someone had changed it.”

There were other problems as well, such as difficulty locating the data for specific lots and keeping the numbers straight. “When I came here, we were probably processing 40 batches a day, so there’s information flying around, and I was spending at least an hour or so a day trying to work out what the heck was going on.”

Choosing the right LIMS for the job

Lloyd was tasked with finding the LIMS that would be the best fit for the Woonsocket lab. A native of Liverpool, England, he had previously worked in other labs with LIMS. One was an out-of-the-box solution, and the other was a “homegrown” system which worked well.

In shopping for a LIMS, Lloyd looked at four different suppliers before landing with LabLynx. One of the key considerations in his search was finding a software solution that could be customized to communicate with the sales order entry database at the company’s headquarters.

“We could easily have bought something out-of-the-box, and we wouldn’t have gotten any value from it. We had to have some customization. And that was really the biggest seller with LabLynx, because they were willing to do what we needed,” he said. “A lot of companies just want to sell out of the box and don’t want to deal with anything else. They just want to sell it and be done.”

LabLynx sent an applications engineer to Rhode Island to get a close-up look at the workflows and systems used at the Woonsocket lab, which Lloyd said really impressed him. LabLynx also agreed to host the database offsite and, as with all its customers, offered ongoing support if any issues arose. Lloyd said the small IT staff at his company’s headquarters didn’t want to deal with hosting the LIMS database or having to fix it if any problems occurred.

“I wanted a system where if something went wrong, I could call someone and get it fixed rather than have to wait weeks,” Lloyd added.

Once he chose LabLynx LIMS, he said the implementation was fast, taking approximately three months to complete. “Once we agreed that LabLynx was going to host the LIMS for us, they sent the engineer down for the install, and he sat down with the individual departments and just made sure that he understood exactly what they wanted. And then he modified the menus for us and made sure the menu showed exactly what we wanted to see and use.”

The system was integrated with the order entry system at the company’s headquarters, and it was also set up to create customized reports.

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LabLynx LIMS improves data security and makes lab management easier

LabLynx LIMS has helped to improve data security at the lab, and it has also made Lloyd's job as lab manager easier. Those working in the lab now have access rights to either read-only or edit data. "The process owners, or lot managers as we call them, can just see the data, but they can't touch it. That has prevented a lot of headaches," Lloyd said.

The lab workflows also run a lot more smoothly, he explained. The LIMS creates batch numbers, eliminating the task of manually searching physical logbooks containing batch number sequences. "I used to spend an hour a day chasing batch numbers, paper fixing batch numbers, so my job is now a lot easier," he said.

Another satisfied LabLynx LIMS customer

Lloyd says he also knows that LabLynx is always there if he needs something, even if it's minor. They've helped him when he had problems getting reports to download and even assisted him with adding the ISO-9001 certification sticker to the division's certificate of analysis reports that are sent to customers.

He said he wouldn't have gotten that level of support or customer care from larger LIMS providers, whereas LabLynx is always there willing to listen and do what they can to assist in a timely manner.

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