

Certainty, Clarity and Customisation for Virbac's SA Laboratory

Virbac, a multinational player in the veterinary pharmaceutical field, has taken a major step forward with a new lab information management (LIMS) system. The system, LabInfo, integrates lab processes and systems to achieve streamlined data management in Virbac's laboratory.

Headquartered in France, Virbac is one of the world's largest veterinarian pharmaceutical groups. Its wide range of vaccines and medicines is used in the prevention and treatment of the main pathologies for companion and food-producing animals, and its South African laboratory, located in Centurion, tests raw materials and finished products to ensure they are within the required specifications.

However, Virbac's laboratory was faced with several challenges, among which was the need for:

- An efficient and reliable data management system
- General instrument integration
- The capacity to generate multiple reports on diverse products within a single lab
- Error elimination
- Paperless searches (and therefore save skilled analysts' time)
- A faster, more efficient, more finely tuned interface
- Validated results

Ian Smith, operations director at Virbac, explained, "We had been using Excel spreadsheets to register samples and then Word to type up certificates of analysis (CoAs). We'd seen LIMS in France and Mexico that could help us but - while these were impressive - they were extremely expensive. So we looked for a local vendor who could keep it simple, without superfluous bells and whistles, customise a system to meet our needs, and unify their methodology and expertise with our business requirements."

The vendor Virbac identified was Technology Systems Integration (TSI), and its LabInfo system.

LabInfo is a capable and affordable LIMS that makes labs more efficient, reliable and productive by facilitating the management of information. It uses internet technology, enabling quick and easy access from any PC with a web browser. In addition, it uses a multi-user database that runs on a central server so that everyone can work on the same data and reduce paperwork.

Bi-directional instrument integration allows the LabInfo system to generate work lists for lab instruments, and then read the sample results when they are available. This saves time and reduces errors, compared to manual data entry. In addition, standard reports can be generated on demand or automatically, in Adobe pdf or Microsoft Excel format.

LabInfo also offers functions that help a lab conform to regulatory requirements, including secure user login, an audit trail and the tracking of equipment and chemical usage.

Once the LabInfo system had been demonstrated to Virbac, workshops were conducted to define how to tailor the system to the laboratory's needs. Both partners also had to consider Medicines Control Council regulations on quality and risk management.

Nico Mulutsi, Virbac's lab coordinator, added, "We needed peace of mind, the kind that comes, for example, from using a calculator rather than adding manually or in one's head. Finger trouble is still a consideration, yes, but with technology like the LabInfo system we use now, we've successfully achieved that critical first phase of certainty."

A number of custom reports, including the all-important CoA, were developed specially for

Virbac. LabInfo interfaces with Virbac's Perkin Elmer and Shimadzu high-performance liquid chromatography instruments for direct data transfer; for custom reporting, users can use the ODBC interface to extract data into Excel.

The lab is particularly excited about its new ability to quickly find historical data; previously, staff had to spend time hunting for it. "We have more control now," said Anita Bybee, quality assurance manager at Virbac, who was also impressed by LabInfo's cost-effectiveness: "It is considerably cheaper than other systems, because it is locally developed and uses free open-source components."

Virbac also feels supported. Backups are simple and can be done online, the support turnaround time has been good to date and there's a sound fault-reporting system.

In short, in the few months since its installation, LabInfo has revolutionised the way things happen at Virbac. Smith said, "It's a little like baking a cake. Some analytical technique is still required, but with the ingredients and equipment now at Virbac's disposal, root cause analysis is possible and results can be checked before release. We're able to be that much more confident in the quality of what we can deliver."

About TSI

Located in Randburg, TSI was established in 1992 and offers a notable track record in lab management systems. Its LabInfo system is based on well-tested solutions including Java and Linux, which ensure system longevity.

Built-in technology allows TSI to provide efficient, secure remote support via the internet, and its online data backup service allows quick recovery from a system failure or disaster.

About Virbac

Virbac is dedicated to the health of companion and food-producing animals by supplying veterinarians and owners with a complete range of products and services. Central to the company's development processes are: seeking new molecules; creating and combining original formulations of existing molecules; developing medicines to counteract emerging pathologies and preventing emerging pathologies. Virbac worldwide launches four to six products a year - the best way to target the ongoing development of veterinary medicine. 



Left to right: Neill Rosenthal from TSI, with Nico Mulutsi, Tiky Ramokopela and Arcilia Malefane from Virbac