

Selecting Equipment for Your In-Office Histology Lab

Abstract: If you are setting up your own in-office histology lab, more than likely your capitol equipment expenditures will comprise the bulk of your costs. Some groups will attempt to mitigate this expense by looking into the refurbished market for their equipment needs. While this may save some money upfront, it will most often lead to higher ongoing costs and service/support challenges down the road that will eat up those savings very quickly. Whenever possible, purchasing bundled new equipment and services packages from a single supplier can get you the most bang for your buck, and provide the added benefit of a single point of contact should anything go wrong.

Cherry Picking Equipment: If you decide to outfit your lab with equipment from a myriad of suppliers, what will you be faced with when technical or applications problems arise with any of these units? You could find yourself calling a variety of support teams to assist you in troubleshooting and/or repair. The fewer help lines you have on speed dial, the happier you, your lab technician and your pocketbook will probably be. Look for a single supplier that can provide you with quality products for everything you need in your lab. Most reputable suppliers will appreciate the opportunity to provide you with all of the necessary tools to run your lab, and will make it worth your while. Bundling these tools really can save you time and money.

Warrantees: While, on the surface, equipment warrantees may appear to be simple and straightforward, you will want to look beneath your supplier's surface. Each supplier will provide a separate service and maintenance warranty for their equipment. If the supplier is a reseller, they may provide the warrantee service themselves, it may be provided by the manufacturer, it could be provided by a third party, or it could be some combination of these three. Try to identify a single supplier that can not only provide you with a one stop shop for equipment, but also for the warranty and physical service of your equipment. In short, look for a complete lab warranty versus multiple equipment warrantees. Really dig into each supplier's warranty program(s). Again, refurbished units can be a great way to save money in the short term, but few will carry the same warranty level and length of term as new equipment. Ideally, you will want suppliers who either provide loaner equipment while yours is being serviced, or will swap-out your faulty instrument. Fast Service Technician response is great, but if they do not have the means at hand to complete repair during the first visit, which is most often the case, it will mean more downtime for your lab, your patients will be waiting that much longer for their results and you may even have to send samples out for processing, disrupting your revenue stream.

Who is Supplying Your Equipment? : There are a number of consultants in the in-office histology lab market who, in addition to guiding you through the rigors of setting up your laboratory, will put together equipment packages or refer you to an equipment supplier(s). These individuals can be helpful for a number of tasks, but that help may come with hidden costs. Consultants often require equipment suppliers to pay them "referral fees", that will inevitably be added to the amount you pay for your equipment. Then, what happens after your lab is set up, your final payment is made, and a machine breaks down? What is the Consultant's relationship with the OEM (Original Equipment Manufacturer) for the equipment? Do they have a service infrastructure? Will they be providing equipment service on behalf of the OEM, or will they provide you with a replacement unit?

In many cases, there are no clear answers to these questions. To avoid these problems, it is best to look for single suppliers that grate products and services, bundling all of the equipment, technical and regulatory assistance required to get you up and running, with the service and support you will need to stay that way long after the go live date. If your supplier has an OEM relationship for the equipment they're providing, this generally means they offer factory authorized service for the equipment you will be purchasing. If they are the manufacturer, they are the hands down expert on that equipment and can most likely remedy any problems encountered quickly and with relative ease.

Incentivize Your Supplier: Some suppliers in the histology lab space not only offer equipment, but also the consumables you will need to keep your lab running. Of course, this is ongoing revenue for the supplier, but it can provide you with leverage you would not otherwise have. You can find excellent equipment packages at attractive prices when bundling those with consumable commitments. While you may be hesitant to make ongoing commitments when you are setting up your lab, doing so is a great way to ensure that you, the customer, continues to receive a quality experience service with regard to your equipment going forward. After all, the longer your lab is down, the fewer consumable orders it will generate. In addition, any consumable related issues you might experience will also be addressed by the same supplier as your equipment. A good supplier will be able to provide you with fair pricing for their consumables, while ensuring quality, long-term service and support for all of their products.

Conclusion: Equipment purchases for a lab are a large part of the lab setup process and making a poor choice will stay with you for a long time. You will want to be certain that what you are purchasing will produce reliable, quality results for your patients, and is quickly and easily serviceable in the event that something breaks down. Refurbished units can defray costs early on, but at what long-term cost? As implied by the term refurbished, there is a good chance it already broke and someone had it removed from their lab for a reason. A nice paint job and some polish may just be hiding what's below the surface. Take a holistic and informed approach to the setup of your new lab. Who is supplying your equipment, who is servicing it and how will they provide that service. What incentive will they have to address your service issues, 6 months, 1 year, 5 years down the road? Drilling down and finding the answers to these questions right up front will help you choose the best possible partner for the setup of your new in-office histology lab.