



focus on
Laboratory Products

How to Set-Up and Source Equipment for your Lab

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As an industry, the life sciences sector has been suffering for a long time. With limited access to academic funding and a lack of interest from venture capitalists, setting up a lab has never been more difficult.

The entire sector is facing enormous challenges, both from a business and scientific perspective, which have been building for years. From a business viewpoint, funding is still very difficult to secure, even for the larger pharmaceutical companies, who also face challenges from patent expiration and securing contracts for increasingly expensive products.

At the same time, the cost of research is rising, and that includes the purchase of lab equipment. As the cost of lab equipment increases and puts additional strain on already limited budgets, laboratories need to adapt to be more cost-conscious and efficient when sourcing lab equipment.

After staff costs, the purchase of lab equipment can be significant, with costs for specialised and bulky equipment such as fume hoods and spectrometers potentially running into hundreds of thousands of pounds.

With the current trend towards 'lean business', organisations should always aspire to be more efficient with their resources because it makes them more profitable, whatever measure of profit is applied. People and equipment account for the lion's share of a lab's expenditure and purchasing used equipment can significantly reduce the costs of setting up a lab.

There are a number of companies which can help to source used lab equipment including Akribis Scientific, Richmond Scientific and the online lab equipment marketplace, Lab Merchant. Using companies such as these to procure used equipment at a discounted rate can often help realise savings of between 50% and 75% of the recommended retail price.

With savings as significant as these, it's clear that sourcing used lab equipment can play a crucial role in conserving the lifeblood of a lab-based business – cash.

It's not just buying used equipment that can help budgets. Selling surplus equipment can also generate additional cash for organisations and this can be re-invested into upgrading equipment or taking on-board additional researchers.

Labs need to be proactive in identifying redundant equipment that can be sold in order to recoup costs and should remember that what one lab manager may consider as old technology may be viewed as state of the art by another.

Research has found that laboratories and similar research areas consume between 4 to 100 times more energy per square foot than commercial space. Releasing idle equipment to generate income and reduce the need for break-up and disposal is advantageous to organisations wishing to meet their financial and environmental targets.

If you can't find the equipment you need here in the UK, you may want to try going to the US as there are a number of companies, such as BioSurplus, who can help source lab equipment. However, you will have to deal with the high shipping costs and import taxes associated with the importation of such equipment.

There are a number of options for securing the best deals that will help to keep costs down and maximise efficiency in your lab.

10 tips for sourcing lab equipment and getting the best deals:

1. Do your research and compare prices: it never hurts to shop around and you'll get a better understanding of what the cost is for an old, used, reconditioned or new item.
2. Know what you want to pay for an item: You'll probably be working within a strict budget so try to stick to it.
3. Consider your future, not just present, needs: it's worth considering where you'll be in 12-18 months and if an item is available at the right price then snap it up.
4. If you're buying on behalf of a customer, then really try to identify their needs: it sounds like a no brainer but some crucial equipment can be overlooked which can have an adverse impact on costs later on. A comprehensive list is essential.
5. Items are sold for various reasons, so don't be afraid to ask why it's being sold: It pays to develop a dialogue with the seller and understand the reasons for the sale.
6. If there's not enough information about the item, again, don't be afraid to ask: Ask questions of the seller. Knowing the usage and service history of an item may help to knock some money off the price.
7. Check if the items come with a warranty: Check if there's a warranty or any insurance on the purchase. Reputable sellers will have some sort of replacement procedure if your item arrives broken, or if you're not satisfied with it. They may not, so it's worth checking.
8. Note the shipping time and any additional costs: You may be working to a tight schedule as well as a tight budget, so be sure to ask about any additional costs and whether they're acceptable to you and your organisation.
9. Understand the payment options: Some merchants only accept certain types of payments, such as bank transfer. Others accept credit cards, cheques, money orders and even PayPal. You need to make sure that you are able to pay with the proper method of payment.
10. Regularly check the website: Items are regularly added to the Lab Merchant website, so check back often or sign up to the free weekly equipment alert. You don't want to miss any bargains!

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