Q&A On Digital Transformation in the Pharma Lab – Where to Start and How to Navigate the Pitfalls

Later this month, Westbourne IT Head of Sales and Marketing, Dennis Blanck, will be speaking at the [Pharma & MedTech Expo](). Westbourne IT is a sponsor of this important event which takes place at RDS Simmonscourt in Dublin on 28 and 29 May. The topic of Dennis's speech is "Digital Transformation in the Pharma Lab".

Ahead of the Pharma & MedTech Expo, David Tucker, Service Delivery & Program Manager at Westbourne IT, sat down with Dennis to find out more about where to start with [digital transformation in pharmaceutical labs](), the pitfalls that can hamper success, and how to avoid those pitfalls.

Digital Transformation in the Pharma Lab Q&A

David: *Digital transformation is a buzzword that can mean different things in different situations and to different people. So, let's start with the basics: from your perspective, what does digital transformation look like in pharmaceutical labs?*

Dennis: "I think you hit the nail on the head with your question, as there is no single answer. A one-size-fits-all solution to digital transformation doesn't exist for pharmaceutical laboratories or any other business function for that matter.

"At a very high level, digital transformation involves using technologies to improve and optimise laboratory processes. This can involve transitioning a process from paper-to-glass, manual to semi-automated, or semi-automated to fully automated.

"Digital transformation also involves integrating systems horizontally and vertically through the organisation to enable a seamless flow of data. This flow of data includes across various laboratory functions as well as manufacturing functions and other units throughout the business – purchasing, finance, R&D, marketing, customer service, etc."

David: *So digital transformation is about improving processes, integrating systems, and making better use of data. What are the benefits for pharma laboratories?*

Dennis: "The benefits of digital transformation are substantial – too many to cover in this conversation. I'll highlight some of the most important, including productivity, patient safety, quality, and compliance.

"Digital transformation initiatives improve productivity by optimising processes, enhancing control, and increasing automation. Digital transformation projects can also enhance your batch release by exception or track and trace capabilities, for example, enhancing everything from patient safety to product quality to the resources you need to allocate to ensure ongoing compliance.

"The push for digital transformation is also being driven by the market – improving productivity to remain profitable and competitive, improving flexibility and agility to better respond to changing customer demands and market forces, improving how you use data to comply with evolving regulations and best practices in compliance and quality control – these are just some of the trends that are putting digital transformation into sharp focus for pharma labs and the wider pharmaceutical industry."

David: *Your speech at the Pharma & MedTech Expo will cover where to start with digital transformation in the pharma lab and how to navigate the pitfalls. Where should pharma labs start and what are the main pitfalls to avoid?*

Dennis: "Where to start will be different depending on circumstance, but the best approaches are to focus on the low-hanging fruit, the biggest pain points, or a combination of both. Low-hanging fruit covers areas where you will see the quickest wins and the biggest pain points are the areas where there are substantial productivity, efficiency, or labour savings to be made.

"As for the main pitfalls to avoid, there is one to highlight. When people think about digital transformation, they think about technologies – software applications, big data solutions, artificial intelligence, robots, etc. These things can all be a part of digital transformation, but our experience at Westbourne IT is that digital transformation is as much about people as it is about technology.

"In fact, in most situations, the success of any digital transformation project lies more with the people involved than it does with the new technologies being implemented.

"Let me give you an example of implementing a new or enhanced technology in a pharma lab to digitise and largely automate a previously paper-based and manual process.

"You could hand that project to a technical team that could develop a solution that works perfectly in a demonstration but completely fails in the real world. Why? Because the people responsible for the paper-based manual process were never consulted. Nobody ever thought of asking them why they do things the way they do and, crucially, what ideas they have for making the process better.

"So, the main pitfall in pharma lab digital transformation projects is focusing too much on the technologies involved and not enough on the people, the skills they have, what they do, and why they do it. Focusing on people is the fast route to digital transformation success."

David: *Yes, that reflects my experience too. Let's finish – where can people catch your speech and maybe even get a coffee with you at the Expo?*

Dennis: "The event is the Pharma & MedTech Expo and it's in the RDS Tuesday 28th and Wednesday 29th of May. Get in touch to arrange a chat – I'll buy the coffee, sandwiches, a beer in the evening - whatever works."