

BACKGROUND

LabWare provides best-in-class laboratory automation software solutions to meet the data handling requirements of laboratories in diverse industries around the world. Labware employs Laboratory Information Management System (LIMS) software used in laboratories for the management of samples, instruments, users, standards, and other laboratory functions.



LabWare is a market leader in global LIMS applications. The majority of LabWare customers are Fortune 500 companies which use Labware's LIMS across multiple sites.

THE PROBLEM

In the past, Labware used an FTP server to collaborate with internal employees, consultants, and contractors, as well as with customers. Because FTP protocol focuses on just the transfer of files, real-time collaboration was not possible under this implementation. "We were trying to use FTP in ways that it wasn't intended," says Jeremy Upole, Labware IT Manager. "It just didn't have the document collaboration and security that we needed to support our wide range of users. FTP wasn't cutting it." They didn't have an easy or efficient method for users to share files with each other, or to easily collaborate on files with customers or outside users. To make matters worse, the FTP server was difficult to manage and didn't scale well. Labware had been experiencing increasing difficulty in managing permissions. Administrators needed to manually change even simple permissions. The system was not dynamic enough to meet Labware's growing needs.

"The feedback from our project managers was that 'It's great that we can put our files here and always have access to them.'"

Jeremy Upole
IT Manager

SEARCH PROCESS

Labware began looking for a solution the usual way: with an Internet search for "group collaboration software." Many solutions appeared in the results, but Labware quickly eliminated a number of options due to proprietary technologies or lack of flexibility.

"We liked South River Technologies' option of having either a web interface or a client," says Upole. "While the virtual drive client is a great productivity tool, there are times when it's not practical to install client software. Having both options was important." Labware consultants typically work on-location at customer sites, where they may not have the freedom to install additional software on the customer's computers, and in many cases can't get a port open for FTP. Using a browser-based interface eliminated both of these issues.

EVALUATION

Labware requested a fully-functional product trial. The structure of Labware's FTP server content was similar to the file organization of SRT's solution. "We literally laid their solution on top of the FTP server structure. It was entirely seamless," says Upole. "It just worked."

Labware was also able to solve an underlying problem they hadn't even known they had, thanks to ability to send QuickLinks. With a QuickLink, an external user could access a file from any location, without even needing to log in through the WebUI, so long as Labware configured the server settings to allow open sharing.

Labware started testing the QuickLinks immediately. A team made up of operations staff, IT, the support team, and software developers tested QuickLinks internally for about a week. Labware created a number of common scenarios to see how QuickLinks would work in their environment. After a week of testing, the participants were asked to provide their feedback. The test team "overwhelmingly liked it."

Next they tested the Virtual Drive client and the Web Interface. The Virtual Drive technology worked flawlessly, enabling users to easily collaborate on large ODBC databases. SRT's solution allowed for the ability to create test databases "on-the-fly," use them for project work, then dispose of them. The ability to easily share databases with other users was a significant productivity enhancement.

IMPLEMENTATION

Labware migrated to the production server without issue. The initial implementation defined 300 user accounts. Labware chose to use native authentication capabilities rather than integrating with Active Directory. The entire production system was built in about 3 hours; most of that time was devoted to importing the files from the legacy FTP server.

Several directory paths had to be modified after the file import, and a few accounts had to be updated. "It was a very painless process. What we thought would take us all night was literally accomplished in a few hours," explains Upole. "The support site is great. There's excellent documentation on how to upgrade the database, configure the servers, and define the file sets."

SRT's solution proved to be a very flexible solution for Labware. Each group within the company uses it in a different way. Once the users become comfortable with the application, it's easy to tailor it to suit their needs.

TECHNICAL SUPPORT

One of the primary requirements for Labware was the ability to receive large database files from customers and share them amongst the technical support team members. Previously, the technical support team had to put huge databases on their laptops, burdening the machine with significant processing cycles and storage requirements. Labware was able to store files in a central database accessible via the drive mapping client or the WebUI.

"This solution has really streamlined our support process, enabling us to quickly resolve issues," says Upole. "Customers can quickly send us their database, and we can recreate an issue in minimal steps, correct the configuration, and return the corrected database to the customer."

The support team works with users over the phone, but being able to see the database files and easily modify them has increased productivity and shortened response times.

PROJECT MANAGERS AND CONSULTANTS

For pre-sales projects, sales managers have been able to create folders and share them with the team. This is a simple way to keep all of the pre-sales project documents in a single location. Users can easily access and make modifications to files. These files may include hardware recommendations, technical implementation documents, price quotes, and other sales documents.

Labware most heavily utilized the user-to-user sharing feature. Easy access to files for a distributed team has made managing pre-sales documents simple for the members of the project. All projects are backed up to a separate server and are archived when the project is complete.

Labware works with hundreds of consultants domestically and abroad. These consultants may work from home or on-site with a customer. Because the consultants are not typically connected to the Labware internal network, SRT's solution has become the primary means for backing up their PCs. Using the built-in backup feature, consultants can easily schedule full or partial backups of their PC to the server.

APPLICATIONS

Because the client maps a drive letter straight to the server, any client-based application that reads or writes to a drive letter is instantly integrated with the server. The files on the server appear in the user's file management application, as if the files were located on the individual computer. Labware has found this to be useful for broad file distribution, such as the distribution of software updates and major new releases. By pointing Lotus Notes to shared files, Labware can easily use existing distribution lists to efficiently deliver updates to customers and their distributed workforce.

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SUMMARY

Labware has been able to rapidly convert their unwieldy file transfer environment, which is based on FTP and email attachments, into a powerful document collaboration environment that has enhanced productivity, streamlined the technical support process, and facilitated collaboration with partners, consultants, and customers.

To summarize their experiences with SRT's solution, Jeremy Upole says, "The more we use it and the deeper we dig, the more we keep discovering productivity features."

