

CRO Gains Competitive Advantage with Merge Healthcare Software Solutions and Technology Transfer Program

Most Contract Research Organizations can grasp the potential benefits of designing and managing clinical trials in-house, but few can actually acquire the technology, training and competence to do it. That is, unless they have the right partner. Such was the challenge facing Omnicare Clinical Research, a Phase I to IV contract research organization providing drug development services to pharmaceutical, biotechnology and medical device companies in 30 countries.

An early adopter of eClinical and electronic patient diary technology, Omnicare is a forward-thinking company with a proven 3-year track record of success partnering with Merge Healthcare for electronic clinical trials — often at the insistence of their sponsor clients. Merge Healthcare planned studies for Omnicare that used Merge Healthcare's fully-integrated platform of technologies including electronic data capture (EDC), electronic patient diaries (eDiaries) and interactive voice response (IVR).

Out of that success and trusted partnership grew Omnicare's desire to own the trial development process and technology themselves by licensing it from Merge Healthcare. This licensing approach represented a tremendous undertaking and commitment for Omnicare that they hoped would pay off by enabling direct communication with their clients to work out a study's specifications and develop the CRFs, instead of being a middle man between their client and Merge Healthcare. In addition to having a closer dialogue with their client, they hoped an in-house approach would allow them to offer clients faster time to start for their trials and allow Omnicare to keep a greater share of the trial revenue. Omnicare also liked the idea of being able to use inhouse the same Design and EDC applications that Merge Healthcare had so successfully used for their trials in the past.

Omnicare signed up for the Merge Healthcare Technology Transfer program, a software in-licensing option for Merge Healthcare subscription clients who want to build their own studies. Unlike some EDC vendors that approach a technology transfer as a mere software handover complete with limited training, the Merge Healthcare process for technology transfer provides all of the elements needed to make a technology transfer successful, including a standardized transfer process, tools to ease development and testing, a comprehensive training program for internal and external use, and an expert team to adapt the technology to Omnicare's clinical trial process.

With Merge Healthcare, Omnicare could select what capabilities they wanted to transfer in-house to meet its goals. Omnicare wanted to bring design, quality control, project management and administration tasks in-house immediately. Other tasks it wanted to have the option to add later, and still other tasks it never planned to take on in-house. Omnicare decided its technology transfer should include Merge Healthcare Designer and Merge EDC.

Through its technology transfer strategy, Omnicare realized greater data transfer as well as reporting and training efficiencies

Designer would let Omnicare develop the electronic Case Report Form (CRF) pages and build a complete study according to their client's specifications. The tools that go along with Merge EDC would let Omnicare monitor the clinical data and oversee the project itself. Omnicare knew that down the road, after they mastered the EDC and Design tasks, if they wanted they could work with Merge Healthcare to take the eDiary or IVR functions in-house as well.

The two companies worked in true partnership to achieve a seamless technology transfer. They started by developing a training plan crafted specifically for Omnicare based on the tasks that Omnicare want to take in-house and the pace at which they wanted to learn the Merge Healthcare applications that support those tasks. The training plan defined the training format, structure and duration to best meet Omnicare's needs, including how many hours Omnicare could dedicate at a time to training, homework and practice. With a training plan in place, the Merge Healthcare Technology Implementation department joined with Merge Healthcare subject matter experts and developers to conduct the training sessions. Sessions were held at Omnicare and online per the training plan. The training program provided a structured format for teaching Omnicare developers every aspect of how to use the Merge Designer and EDC software. It included required homework where the developers had to create studies. After successful completion of the program the Omnicare developers were certified on the use of the Merge Designer and EDC applications. Omnicare and Merge Healthcare were able to complete training and attain certification in the four months allotted in their training plan.

After the Omnicare developers learned the software and documented processes around the use of the software, Merge Healthcare and Omnicare jointly evaluated their progress. They knew that future study sponsors would audit Omnicare on the technology like they would audit Merge Healthcare. After verifying that nothing about the people, processes and technology involved in the transfer was overlooked, the two companies agreed that Omnicare was ready to take on the tasks in-house. Omnicare began realizing the benefits of its in-house design strategy right away. The company won two studies over other CRO's within a couple of months of completing the technology transfer. Winning this business was possible in large part because they were able to design the trial themselves and handle its quality control, administration, and project management in-house, without the need to coordinate with third-party vendors. Being able to offer clients this level of control also meant they could design studies faster than other CRO's who were still outsourcing.

As Omnicare began developing the first two studies that would use the in-house systems, they weren't left to figure things out on their own. To ensure the efficient use of Merge Healthcare technology within Omnicare's structure, the same Merge Healthcare developers that assisted with the training and practice study homework provided continuing support to Omnicare developers for another 8 months after certification was complete. Today, Omnicare still receives 24x7 help desk support provided by Merge Healthcare employees.



In addition to ongoing support, Omnicare also enjoys all of the benefits of their Merge Healthcare solutions without any of the headaches that would come along with building and maintaining such a sophisticated system. For example, Merge Healthcare maintains the documentation for system development and validation, and keeps up with technology advancements and system updates as needed. As updates are released, Merge Healthcare trains Omnicare developers on the updates. This leaves Omnicare free to take advantage of the new versions and functionality in-house with minimal distraction or downtime. Today 70% of clinical trials still use paper, but it is expected that demand for electronic trials will continue to increase, especially for certain clinical trials such as Phase 3 trials with 1000+ patients, which can gain huge benefits by collecting and managing trial data electronically. Through its technology transfer strategy, Omnicare is positioned to standardize the use of electronic data capture across multiple projects, realizing greater data transfer, reporting and training efficiencies. With these added efficiencies, Omnicare expects to continue winning business over other CRO's.

About Merge Healthcare

Merge Healthcare is the leading provider of enterprise imaging and interoperability solutions. Merge solutions facilitate the sharing of images to create a more effective and efficient electronic healthcare experience for patients and physicians. Merge provides enterprise imaging solutions for radiology, cardiology and orthopaedics; a suite of products for clinical trials; software for financial and pre-surgical management, and applications that fuel the largest modality vendors in the world. Merge's products have been used by healthcare providers, vendors and researchers worldwide to improve patient care for more than 20 years. Additional information can be found at www.merge.com.

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