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Average time to complete: 6 weeks. Range 4 to 12 weeks

All Digital 3

Evaluation checklist

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Evaluation checklist

This evaluation checklist will help you to gather information and make the decisions you need to move into the next phase of choosing an ELN system. The order of the steps is about right, from our experience, but don't let that worry you. You may follow a different order, and go back and forth iteratively, but we do underline the value and importance of the actions in each of the steps. Try to gather as much information as possible before you write the user requirements. Some organizations have tried to write the user requirements first, and that just never works!

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1 Goal for this phase

Identify two or three ELN vendors from which to choose in the next phase.

2 Know your own organization first

Does any other lab or department in your organization already have an ELN? Check now, because independence is overrated and cooperation is grand.

Meet with each of the existing ELN sites in the organization, learn, and establish bonds.

Does your organization hope/plan to standardize on a single ELN product and vendor?

Contact your procurement department to obtain the organization's acquisition policies.

Contact information technology and security for hosting and software security policies.

Many organizations require the use of internal servers for security. A must know!

3 Establish an ELN project team

Set up an ELN project team, because you have unique needs to meet. Make sure that representatives of all stakeholder groups are included.

IT may not participate in the team until later, but invite them at the outset. Leaving anyone out can delay or sabotage the project.

Try to keep the team to six people or less, for effective functioning.

Keep the meetings short, make an agenda, and focus on practical issues.

Actively intervene to make sure everyone is free to speak, and that no one dominates.

Expect everyone to deliver on their promises. Be clear and forthright.

Email out brief, action-focused meeting notes of one page or less, on the same day.

4 Interview ELN users

Interview everyone you can find who works with an ELN system, or has recently.

Colleagues in your company or university will share their experiences and suggestions.

LinkedIn, industry associations, and vendors can also provide potential interviewees.

Make a spreadsheet of interviewees, and keep it up to date with actions and additions.

Start with a list of questions and add to it with each new conversation.

Take notes, and ask if you can record the interview in case it gets too fast for note taking.

Ask each interviewee to recommend others, and don't forget to send a thank-you email.

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5   Conduct a market survey of ELN vendors

Research the vendors mentioned in the interviews with ELN users

Find lists of ELN vendors like this one

View presentations, videos, manuals, and product descriptions on ELN websites.

Use vendor resources to learn more about your own requirements.

6   Write a User Requirement Specification

Define the current and future scope of the ELN—single lab, department, or organization.

Describe end users, such as group leaders, lab managers, technicians, and students.

Estimate the number of end users and speak to growth or shrinkage in future.

Describe the software functions - lab notebook, inventory & protocol management, etc.,

Distinguish between "must have" and "nice to have" requirements and features.

Describe funding for the ELN: central organizational budget, individual groups, or a mix.

Confirm with the IT department and information security for their specific requirements.

Describe hosting-cloud, private cloud, or on your organization's own secure server.

7   Develop a shortlist of 2 or 3 vendors

Consider positive and negative remarks about vendors and products from interviews.

Evaluate the structure, coherence, and clarity of vendor communication.

Every vendor should offer a demonstration, tailored to your URS and needs.

Every vendor should offer a free trial of its software. You will take them up on it!

The more organized and professional the vendor is, the better its likely performance.

Carefully evaluate the ability of each vendor to meet the requirements of the URS.

Ask for reference sites and call them without fail.

8   Establish working relationships with shortlisted ELN vendors

The ELN vendors are an extremely valuable source of information and advice.
They have experience that no amount of planning can match.

If a selected vendor is not amazingly responsive, drop it immediately and get another.

You have limited bandwidth, so work exclusively and closely with the shortlisted vendors.

Meet with them in-person or online to start with.

Vendors expect to work with you, and to help in every way we can. That's our job.

Expect a lot of help from the selected vendors as long as they have a fair chance to win.

Brief the vendors on the process and schedule for the next phase.

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About eLabJournal

eLabJournal offers an intuitive and flexible solution to manage information in your lab. The all-in-one Electronic Lab Notebook also includes modules for sample tracking and protocol management. eLabJournal improves efficiency when documenting, organizing, searching and archiving data, samples and protocols. The software is suitable for any lab ranging from small academic laboratories and strart-up companies to large academic institutes and globally operating companies.

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All of our product specialists have a scientific background and are happy to discuss your needs. Schedule a demo for a free, no-obligation product demonstration.

CONTACT US

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