

Lab focus



There are benefits and pitfalls to using used dairy analysers, according to Simon Nickols of QuadraChem Laboratories

With many dairies consolidating, merging and rationalising, more used and refurbished dairy analysers have come on to the market via internal company transfers, auctions or as traded in or bought back equipment offered by instrument distributors.

Used or refurbished equipment is tempting because it is often a fraction of the cost of its new equivalent. However, there are quite a few considerations to be taken into account. In today's lean environment laboratory analytical equipment needs to be reliable as well as accurate as significant down time can be costly.

Support should be the primary consideration. Most instrumentation manufacturers offer full support for seven years after the model ceases manufacture. It is important to find the individual company's exact policy. Some companies start the seven year clock running from the day the model stops manufacture, even if the replacement model is only cosmetically different. Others are much more flexible.

Most auction sites and companies will pass on the model and serial number, this will allow you to contact the manufacturer or its official distributor or support organisation. It is important to deal with the instrument manufacturer's official representative as it can give the best advice on any future support. For internal company transfers of equipment it is preferable to transfer any service support or contracts with the equipment to keep continuity of cover, but still ask advice on length of future support.

History

Another thing to consider when acquiring a used or refurbished laboratory analyser is its history. It is not uncommon for companies who have acquired a used analyser to find it has not been used for many years prior to its previous owner disposing of it. This can lead to expensive upgrades being required to bring them up to current specification or even worse find it is beyond economical repair.

Most auctions are "sold as seen" so take time to do some homework. Unfortunately laboratory analysers do

not have a service history book in the same way a car would. However, many companies do keep full service records of analytical equipment they have supplied. QuadraChem Laboratories Ltd (QCL) will be able to supply the complete history of an analyser if a person can supply the instrument model and its serial number. If the serial number is not available, QCL will try to trace the analyser from the information available. Other instrument suppliers may offer a similar service, but it is always preferable to go to the official representative of the analyser manufacturer, rather than a third party sales and service company, which would not have full information on manufacturer recommended upgrades and so forth.

Lastly, it is important to ask "Is this analyser right for my company going forward?" It can be a false economy to acquire a used or refurbished laboratory analyser if in quite a short time you discover that you need to upgrade. Over time new analytes and tests become available and these can save time and money in a laboratory, while older analysers may not have the capability of performing these tests. Once again it is advisable to contact the instrument suppliers, as they should know trends and what ways tests are going.

In summary used or refurbished laboratory analysers may be a cost effective way to upgrade a laboratory's capacity as long as the right questions are asked and the right checks made:

- Do contact the analyser manufacturer or their official representative
- Do check if it is of current specification and meets current statutory regulations and check any costs involved to bring it up to the required specification
- Do check the analyser's service history
- Do look at the support available for the future
- Don't be forced into a snap decision
- Don't forget to look at the new analyser alternatives.

They may be cheaper in the long term. **DII**

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