



Agilent creating a 'Center of Excellence' in Mill Creek

In hope of gaining clients, tech company builds demonstration lab

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As a way to showcase their products and woo clients, the world's biggest maker of scientific equipment is building an 8,000-square-foot, state-of-the-art demonstration laboratory in Mill Creek.

Agilent Technologies Inc., which employs about 800 people in Delaware, will open its Center of Excellence on Centerville Road in November, where potential and existing clients will have an opportunity to see its latest machines, run sample tests on them and have a one-on-one opportunity to discuss them with the company's scientists.

The Santa-Clara, Calif.-based company makes equipment used in a variety of ways and range from drug testing athletes in the Olympics to analyzing petrochemicals at oil refineries to identifying molecules in disease research.

Delaware's Center of Excellence, the eighth in the world constructed by Agilent, is expected to revamp the way the company markets its products on the East Coast.

"In most cases, today we are going to customer labs and having seminars or we are doing it in demo labs," said Sam Raha, Agilent's life sciences and chemical analysis vice president and general manager of field operations in the Americas. "We are changing our approach."

Instead of bringing clients like DuPont Co. and AstraZeneca PLC into a 1,700-square-foot, cramped, noisy lab, the Center of Excellence will create a lab space three times as big, in addition to special conference rooms and a lobby area to discuss projects with clients. Glass dividers between rooms in the center can be fogged for privacy or turn into a wall for projectors. The center also will have room to host seminars for clients.

"It's going to make a huge difference," said Bert Woods, an application chemist who works in the current demo lab at Agilent's office near Greenville. "I will have my own work area, my own sink. If you and the customer wanted to go to a table and discuss what you are working on, you can go to a conference room and have coffee. It's not just a lab."

Agilent hopes the new set up will boost sales. In Santa Clara, Agilent has seen a 25 percent to 50 percent increase in customers who have decided to purchase products following a pitch in the Center of Excellence.

"What we are seeing is relationship marketing," said Meryl Gardner, associate professor of marketing at University of Delaware. "You are showing your company in a very positive light and part of what a company buys when they buy a product in the business sector is reliability, knowledge, you want to make sure that when you order a machinery it's going to be there."

Several day-long seminars, specially designed for customers, also are expected to take place at the Center of Excellence. Not only will Agilent use the center to sell its product, the facility is expected to help foster better relationships with clients.

Modern lab settings as marketing tools are not unique to Agilent. Dade Behring in Glasgow earlier this month renovated its Customer Solutions Center where it will showcase diagnostic medical equipment and act as a "center of excellence." The state provided the company a \$1.3 million grant because it added 90 jobs as part of its overall project.

Agilent, which had a net revenue of \$5 billion last year, would not disclose how much it is spending on its Centers of Excellence. The company's new center in Delaware is not funded by public dollars and isn't expected to add new jobs in the short term.

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