

Case Study: Vaccine & Gene Therapy Institute of Florida Uses MaintiMizer to Meet Its Maintenance Mission

Situation

“Our mission is to protect the research.” That’s how Jim Rizzi, director of facilities at Vaccine & Gene Therapy Institute of Florida (VGTI Florida), describes the critical job facing him and his team. VGTI Florida is a nonprofit research institute dedicated to the study of the human immune system, and many of the institute’s research projects are conducted over a period of years or even decades. Power outages, equipment failures, or other facilities problems all have the potential to interrupt—and actually jeopardize—years of valuable, painstaking work.

The mission of Jim and his team is made more difficult by the complexity of VGTI Florida’s facility and equipment. Located in Port St. Lucie along Florida’s “Research Coast,” the 100,000 square foot building features three floors dedicated to research and a roof-top mechanical penthouse. The mechanical systems—chillers, air handlers, generators, and the like—are all backed by redundant systems designed to handle any interruption to the primary systems. Further, all the scientific and laboratory equipment, ranging from 80 freezers and a number of cryogenic tanks and incubators to the specialty equipment found in each individual lab, must be monitored and maintained to ensure uninterrupted performance.

As a former maintenance worker and long-time facilities manager, Jim knew that the only way to effectively and efficiently manage VGTI Florida’s complex facilities and maintenance operations was through a computerized maintenance management system (CMMS). When he joined VGTI Florida in time for the building’s groundbreaking in 2010, he made it a priority to find the CMMS that would best meet the institute’s needs. After researching and web-demoing three systems, Jim chose MaintiMizer from Ashcom Technologies. As he recalls, “When I worked as a facilities manager at a hospital, I used an in-depth system that was specifically designed for health care. I wanted to find a more general CMMS that would still have the features and flexibility I knew we would need. Of the three systems I demoed, MaintiMizer was the one that had the value and capabilities I was looking for.”

Solution

For Jim, much of the value of a CMMS lies in its ability to efficiently and effectively handle preventive maintenance. He believes that “preventive maintenance is the key to keeping the building and equipment up and running,” and he uses MaintiMizer to manage the 400 PMs his three-person maintenance team handles each month.

Every piece of equipment, both plant and scientific, is on a PM, and the PMs have been built to provide the maintenance team with one-stop access to all available information: “Each PM includes a copy of the manufacturer’s manual along with standard operating procedures, parts lists, manufacturer’s recommendations, and a detailed maintenance history. Even for those pieces of scientific equipment where we contract out the maintenance to biomedical engineers, we scan in their maintenance report so that we have a complete history.” Jim also uses MaintiMizer’s PM function to track tasks like picking up

trash in the yard or to remind him of when contracts are due so that he has time to renegotiate the best agreements.

Having easy access to equipment information makes the VGTI Florida maintenance team more productive and boosts morale as well. Jim describes how his team uses the system: “The maintenance guys access MaintiMizer through iPads and iPhones. From wherever they are, they can look up a piece of equipment before they go work on it, which allows them to have everything they need once they get there. They can also see what parts are needed and call the manufacturer on the way.” As a former maintenance worker, Jim knows how frustrating it is to have to ask permission to do your job, which is why all his guys have some level of spending authority. As he notes, “My guys are licensed and highly skilled. They know their mission and what’s allowed. They come into work every day and use MaintiMizer to just do what needs to be done.”

Jim also notes a number of other benefits from using MaintiMizer’s PM function: “Because the PM lists standard operating procedures directly from the manufacturer’s manual, my guys are always maintaining our equipment according to best practices. This covers us with the manufacturer in the case of equipment failure and keeps our equipment running more efficiently. In fact, our energy usage is 50% below what we expected, and part of that is due to the fact that our equipment is running more efficiently than we anticipated.” He continues, “Our building is certified LEED Gold because of the energy efficient equipment we use, and we want to keep it that way. It’s also the responsible thing to do—keeping our energy costs down keeps our carbon footprint low.”

Using the PM system is also critical in maintaining good clinical lab practice, a National Institute of Health standard necessary to qualify for certain grants. As Jim describes it, “Every year we are audited by the NIH, and we use MaintiMizer to show that we’re maintaining our scientific equipment appropriately so we can be sure our research results are accurate and there’s nothing in the environment that can lead to a false result. I can show the auditor the details of our maintenance log so he can see the machine is operating as it should—we’ve calibrated it properly, we’ve done preventive maintenance, and we’ve tracked any corrective actions.”

Jim reports that the Ashcom team was vital in getting MaintiMizer up and running quickly and continues to help him and his team use the system to its fullest potential: “From the beginning, Ashcom has supported us. They populated the system by importing our Excel data and trained us over the web using our own equipment so that we didn’t have to travel. They continue to support us through phone training, and they can make the things we need happen. For example, if we want a particular report for our senior management or need something to look a certain way, they can easily modify it for us. We appreciate that the system is flexible. It can be customized to any industry and help you accomplish whatever goal you have.”

Going forward, VGTI Florida is considering adding another facility. Because the system is web-based and can support multiple locations, Jim is confident that MaintiMizer can handle the institute’s expanded operations.

Jim concludes by describing some of the bottom-line benefits of using MaintiMizer: “My department is a cost center, and a good PM program is key to keeping my costs down. With MaintiMizer, we have

very little (if any) downtime, we save money, and we know our equipment is constantly being looked at so it performs at its best. That benefits me as a facilities manager and it benefits VGTI Florida as a whole. I don't know how anyone could manage without this kind of system.”