

Case Study



"Now that we have ScheduleLabs up and running, I hear very few complaints about shift changes not being approved or dissatisfaction with the many other scheduling issues I used to hear about daily. It's been a good move for us and we've been very satisfied with ScheduleLabs."

Josh Buessing, Outreach Operations Manager

Case Study Summary:

Faced with common scheduling challenges that limited growth and overburdened supervisors, John Muir Health decided to look for a scheduling solution to solve their problems. After hearing of web-based **ScheduleLabs**, John Muir Health initiated a pilot implementation to try the product and objectively measure time savings. Eighteen months later 450 employees of John Muir use ScheduleLabs; the ROI pays out two months into an annual subscription; time spent scheduling dropped 75%; supervisors are back doing the scheduling; and across the board, the employees give the application rave reviews.

Business Challenge:

Like many complex laboratory systems, John Muir was spending inordinate amounts of time creating and maintaining employee work schedules. As employees were hired and new patient service centers were opened, the necessary task of employee scheduling began to hinder effective growth; supervisors were spending an ever-growing portion of each day coordinating the scheduling process. This focal shift from mission and employee management to scheduling was exacting a toll on the organization.

Solution:

ScheduleLabs from Maplewood Software

Results:

- 75% reduction in schedule building time
- Annual subscription ROI achieved in two months
- 95% reduction in scheduling-related phone calls
- Elimination of paper-based leave requests
- Elimination of scheduling-related office visits and emails
- Employee leave requests are never lost
- Supervisors are able to both schedule and manage
- Team leads are able to train and focus on staff competency
- Employee, lead, and supervisor morale is noticeably higher

ScheduleLabs

Organizational Scalability – Growth Being Hindered by Scheduling

"With Maplewood, we don't even blink when we bring on new staff, we just add them. As we grow going forward, ScheduleLabs increases our efficiency and productivity." – Craig Ruhe

John Muir Health has a large laboratory system with 750 staff members serving two hospitals, one reference laboratory, and approximately 28 patient service centers scattered across 17 communities in the Bay Area of Northern California. We also service 300 skilled nursing homes.

The excellence of John Muir's outreach services was fostering rapid growth, both in the number of employees and Patient Service Center locations. Scheduling had been an ongoing problem; this rapid expansion further exposed scheduling as a soft underbelly of the organization, a weakness common to organizations with multiple small satellite locations. Supervisors were being crushed by the workload of creating and maintaining schedules. Schedule-related tasks began dominating their time and attention as the problematic, established method of using spreadsheets proved incapable of scaling with the organization.

Given the projected growth, the initial response to the problem was to move scheduling responsibilities from supervisors to team leads. Josh Buessing, Outreach Operations Manager explains the thought process behind this decision, "Supervisors couldn't do their jobs. The scheduling load was so time-consuming that I would have had to double the number of supervisors or sacrifice other areas of supervisory duties. The supervisors said they wouldn't have enough time to visit their centers or manage their people."

On the face of it, the approach of having leads take over scheduling seemed reasonable. In practice, they were a little too close; they were part of the group being scheduled. This closeness also created its own problems. Assumed authority without buy-in from the next layer down in the organization started eroding morale. Additionally, scheduling by the leads simply pushed the problem to a different layer in the organization. Buessing notes, "It snowballed, because not only it was difficult to keep the lines of authority separated, but now the leads weren't doing what they were supposed to be doing: educating, training and problem solving."

Regardless of who was responsible for scheduling, the core problem was the excessive time commitment necessary to effectively schedule skilled workers across multiple sites and absorb the day-to-day changes inherent in a large workforce. It became critical to find an effective scheduling solution.

Maplewood Software ScheduleLabs Effective Multi-Site Scheduling on the Web

“The Excel spreadsheet the lead phlebotomists used for the schedule was cumbersome and time-consuming. That’s not even taking into account holiday scheduling or vacation scheduling or day off scheduling, which was even more difficult.” – Craig Ruhe

John Muir Health first heard of ScheduleLabs through an industry advisory board. Craig Ruhe, Lab Supervisor of PSC Operations, remembers bringing ScheduleLabs into his area of the organization, “John Muir is known in the area as one of the best places to work. It is an innovative organization and people really like to work here. Management listens and they’re always willing to take a look at new technology. I came to Josh Buessing and said this ScheduleLabs really looks like a great idea. He said, ‘Let’s take a look at it, see how it works, and see if we can save money and improve things.’”

About ScheduleLabs

ScheduleLabs is a web-based scheduling application that addresses the specific needs of laboratory scheduling. ScheduleLabs requires no IT staff or additional hardware. ScheduleLabs presents employees and supervisors different views into a single, shared, up-to-date version of the schedule. Employees can view the schedule and submit vacation requests and shift change requests to their supervisors. Supervisors maintain the schedule and can automatically create new schedules according to known rules. They also approve or deny requests, add and remove employees, or update shifts as employees call in sick.

The Complex Nature of Outreach Laboratory Scheduling

“With multiple sites it is simply not possible to have a master paper schedule posted on the wall. If you also want this schedule to reflect vacation request/approval cycles, shift swaps, and sick leave across hundreds of employees and multiple supervisors, it moves even further out of reach. Yet we consistently see these to be the requirements for most outreach laboratory schedules.” – Nancy Janzen, Chief Executive Officer, Maplewood Software

John Muir Health now uses ScheduleLabs to schedule about 450 employees. Craig Ruhe’s schedule is typical for an outreach laboratory, “Our schedule has about 90 employees split into three different sections for each of the different supervisors. We have the ability to add people wherever we want into the schedule. If someone moves from my territory to another supervisor’s territory, all we do is place them where they need to be in the schedule and now we all see them in their correct sections and locations. It’s also easy to move people around and organize them into logical sub-groups by Patient Service Center.”

Professional Training and Site-Specific Implementation

“I found ScheduleLabs to be a mature product, intuitive and uncomplicated from the user’s point of view. It is basically bug-free we haven’t had any user problems at all. At first it was a little frightening for the employees. It was something new with the online time off requests, but they took to it rather quickly. It’s almost seamless for us now.” – Craig Ruhe

Training is conducted over a Web-based, shared desktop between the customer site and Maplewood Software. This avoids both travel costs and appointment conflicts. Maplewood uses a common sense approach to training and implementation: give their experts your current schedule; they will import the information, ask some questions, and then use it as the foundation for training and implementation.

Starting with a familiar schedule is an effective method, as Craig Ruhe can attest, “The training went great. Their trainer divided the material into five modules, he introduced us to the product and talked us through possible options. He took our spreadsheets and made up a preliminary schedule; we then talked about how it looked and the shift options. From there we began changing the setup and became familiar with modifying the schedule. We eventually got into the more advanced parts where we learned shift changes, vacations and holidays, and building a recurring schedule. With the Cycle Editor, we can automatically generate a schedule over and over again, nearly infinitely, until we want to change it and make it replicate in a different way. We captured the rules during training—that’s a huge time saver; it was not difficult and now we only deal with the exceptions.”

Training and the transition to ScheduleLabs is straightforward, the application is stable and the interface is easy to use. Additionally, Maplewood Software knows scheduling, top to bottom. This deep expertise is reflected in the product feature set, the organization of the administrative workflow, the employee interface, and the competence of its training and support staff.

Phenomenal, Tangible ROI

“The time savings on schedules has been phenomenal. The way we were stuck with doing it before was unacceptable. The time spent managing that schedule was very stressful to everybody.” – Josh Buessing

Web-based, Software as a Service (SaaS) applications are intrinsically cheaper for an organization to operate than desktop applications. They have an inherent simplicity: no extra computers to manage, no backups to make and verify, and no fundamental infrastructure. The inherent constraints of a browser-based web interface enforce a simplified, task-oriented user interface. Not only is the application easy to use, it can be run anywhere. This means regardless of where it runs work, home, or one of many Patient Service Centers, every user sees identical, up-to-date information.

Shared access and simplicity translates into cost savings. After collecting usage data for 18 months, John Muir Health performed a detailed ROI analysis of ScheduleLabs. They knew how many hours they spent the old way every month generating schedules and handling leave request tasks, including fielding phone calls, answering emails, processing paper forms, and office walk-ins. Using a pilot group of 90 staff members over 18 months of daily use of ScheduleLabs, they found a dramatic difference:

- Scheduling-related emails fell 100%
- Scheduling-related office visits fell 100%
- Paper-based leave request processing fell 100%
- Scheduling-related phone calls fell 95%
- Total time spent scheduling fell 75%
- ScheduleLabs pays for its annual subscription in two months

This amazing ROI speaks not only to the utility of ScheduleLabs, but to the brokenness of doing scheduling using spreadsheet and paper. A geographically scattered organization does not have a central place to post a constantly evolving, redlined schedule. The Internet supplies a virtual central office that never closes, and ScheduleLabs from Maplewood Software provides the schedule.

Software as a Service (SaaS) – Immediate and Unambiguous Feedback

“Changes are reflected right away inside ScheduleLabs. Employees can see the request process and they’re confident the change is in place. Not only is it an issue of immediacy, but also one of certainty.”

– Craig Ruhe

We have become accustomed to the Internet. It is firmly woven into the fabric of everyday living. The ease of use, the accessibility, and the ability to keep a shared resource up to date trumps traditional alternatives. We readily embrace the convenience of Internet applications. As a SaaS application, ScheduleLabs can be run from work, home, or anywhere there is a web browser and a connection to the Internet. ScheduleLabs presents employees and supervisors different views into a single, shared, up-to-date version of the schedule.

Before ScheduleLabs, the process at John Muir was labor intensive for both employees and supervisors with a potentially incomplete paper trail. Vacation requests were faxed in with little feedback on whether the request actually made it to the correct person. It was not uncommon for the fax to be lost or incorrectly filed. Josh Buessing recalls, “With the old system you often had to go back and research requests that were denied or approved. Several times people said they put a request in but didn’t receive a response. With ScheduleLabs there is a clear and accurate record for each request, we can go back and see what was submitted and see if it’s been approved or denied. Employees really have confidence in the fact that their requests weren’t going to be lost or ignored or dismissed.”

It is important to know the status of pending vacation requests. For an employee planning their personal life, a mix up in paperwork has potential repercussions in a family. Convenience and unambiguous feedback on vacation requests have made employees fans of ScheduleLabs. Craig Ruhe explains, “The employees love it. They completely love it. It’s so much easier for them than filling out forms, making sure they send the forms to the right place, and following up with the leads to determine the status of the request. Now it’s easy for them to see. They submit it to the supervisors, the supervisor approves their shift change or vacation request, and it comes back to them.”

ScheduleLabs from the Supervisor’s Point of View

“ScheduleLabs has certainly helped me keep a good handle on what’s going on in my territory. I don’t have to guess anymore. I can log on in 20 seconds and answer a lot of questions without asking where a particular person is working.” – Craig Ruhe

Blood draws tend to be an early morning activity. With a large staff of phlebotomists the day often begins with a scheduling scramble as workers call in sick. An inefficient scheduling system can turn this initial flurry of activity into a negative experience that sets the tone for the entire day for schedulers and employees alike.

At John Muir Health, ScheduleLabs has eased the burden of responding to sick calls and staffing all Patient Service Centers. “It used to be a lot of guess work,” says Craig Ruhe. “Now with ScheduleLabs we see the big picture and respond more quickly. Each territory in our schedule contains a pool of float people—per diems, fill-ins, and vacation relief people—who are in the schedule, but also cover for specific locations. My lead comes in at 5:00 every morning to take sick calls. Using ScheduleLabs she immediately knows exactly which location everyone is set to work, who is available, and who is scheduled for vacation or long-term medical leaves. That’s very important. If someone calls in at 5:00 for a 6:00 or 7:00 shift, there is little time to make the adjustments.

My lead pulls up the schedule, places the calls, and makes the decisions on where to move people. Using ScheduleLabs, she makes sure everyone is in place when they need to be there. She can do this quickly because even though we have 90 people covering 28 Patient Service Centers, everything is in one place and demarcated as to what is going on.”

The scheduling process now supports activities that were unimaginable with the old system. Two supervisors in real time at separate locations can log in and shuffle employees quickly in a single phone call. Craig Ruhe provides a case in point, “Today, just before I left my office, one of the other supervisors called. He currently has several people on medical leave while some of my per diem people aren’t completely busy. He asked for some shifts from my available per diems. The old printed spreadsheet at the end of a two week cycle would have been so scribbled on with changes it would have been unrecognizable. With ScheduleLabs all we do is pick people up and drop them into a new slot.”

Poor Scheduling Blurs Lines of Authority – ScheduleLabs Frees Leaders to Lead

“I believe the schedule belongs in the hands of the supervisors. They just need to manage it without having to dedicate a large part of their day to the schedule. That is one of the problems ScheduleLabs solves.” – Josh Buessing

“The supervisors are doing all the scheduling. It’s fast and we now have control over all aspects of the schedules.” – Craig Ruhe

People are hired according to individual skills, attitude, and potential. Traditional scheduling squanders a significant portion of that potential on a necessary, but painful administrative task. Prior to ScheduleLabs the scheduling was so time-consuming and complicated the supervisors lacked the bandwidth to both create schedules and do their job.

John Muir Health attempted fixing the schedule by giving it to the team leads. Josh Buessing reflects on the shortcomings of that solution, “With the leads working the Excel spreadsheets, the staff started going to the leads and asking them to make supervisor-level decisions. The communication line often bypassed the supervisors. It got to be a jumbled mess, the staff was getting confused as to who should be making which decisions. Leave requests were mixed up; they tried to figure it out and sometimes called in a supervisor complaining that someone was playing favorites. It was chaotic, department morale was plummeting, and scheduling was a big piece of that.”

Next Steps – InspectionReady

The success of ScheduleLabs has proved to John Muir the utility of SaaS in general, and Maplewood Software specifically. It is affordable and solves a long-standing, significant problem shared by multi-site organizations. John Muir Health is now working with Maplewood Software beta testing their InspectionReady application. InspectionReady ensures individuals are up-to-date with policies, procedures, certifications, and competency. It also builds an auditable electronic paper trail to back it up and notifies supervisors of gaps in employee readiness.

InspectionReady is browser-based, uses the same underlying engine as ScheduleLabs, and can be jumpstarted from the ScheduleLabs employee and skill set data. John Muir Health is excited about this next step, the time savings, the peace of mind, and the assurance of always having a current snapshot of employee readiness for inspections.

Success Creates Growth, Expansion Fosters Chaos, Maplewood Resolves

“People think doing the schedule is just a mechanical thing, but there’s a lot of power behind the schedule. It controls people’s lives, so it has to be in the proper hands.” – Craig Ruhe

Now Craig Ruhe spends only a few minutes each day on the schedule. He can focus on his staff, visit the Patient Service Centers, meet with them one-on-one, and generally spend time with them. While difficult to measure, this shift in focus away from scheduling problems and back to staff interactions is most certainly beneficial.

About John Muir Health

MuirLab, the Outreach Laboratory Service of John Muir Health, has begun a new era in laboratory medicine. With the opening of our new 56,000 square foot state-of-the-art testing facility in 2008, MuirLab has better positioned itself to accommodate the ever changing needs of our customers and the overall medical communities of Northern California. Based in the East Bay area, our new facility features the most recent innovation in total lab automation and clinical lab equipment.

These key investments will result in improved efficiency and accuracy in specimen handling, enhanced turn-around-time for test results to all our clients, and ultimately—better patient care.

In addition to MuirLab’s investment in its new infrastructure, we remain focused on quality through the continued recruitment of talented personnel and the advancement of process improvement. The MuirLab laboratory services team now exceeds more than 650 highly-trained professionals in a variety of laboratory disciplines which include support staff, phlebotomists and technicians, clinical laboratory scientists, and pathologists who are backed by extensive quality assurance programs and accreditations by the College of American Pathologists and the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations.

For additional information visit www.johnmuirhealth.com

About Maplewood Software

Founded in 1996, the company is noted for working with some of the largest reference, outreach and medical center laboratories in the country. Maplewood Software’s online, skill-based, staff scheduling and inspection compliance solutions are recognized as solving real-world laboratory problems. Over 150 medical centers and laboratories utilize one of their **ScheduleCore** or **Inspection Ready** solutions.

ScheduleLabs and Inspection Ready are part of ScheduleCore, a suite of scheduling, credentialing and competency verification products. Other ScheduleCore products include ScheduleRx, ScheduleRad and ScheduleRn, all solutions designed specifically to meet niche markets within the healthcare industry. All ScheduleCore products, including ScheduleLabs, were designed collaboratively with key healthcare institutions already committed to finding leaner solutions for the unique workflow challenges facing their industry. For additional information visit www.maplewoodsoftware.com

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