

A Brief History of Direct-to-Consumer (DTC) Lab Testing

Long before remote physician networks existed to write orders for DTC lab testing, **Health Testing Centers** (HTC) was working with only one off-site physician when they opened their first walk-in phlebotomy center in 1980 and began to take orders (*test requests*) and cash payments on West Oakland Park Blvd. in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. The blood samples would then be couriered to the lab at the end of every working day.

HTC operated exclusively as a network of in-person DTC lab test order processing and blood collection centers in Florida for ~15 years before internet access and e-commerce capabilities laid the groundwork for consumers to submit online lab test requests and credit card payments. Patients who lived too far away from the nearest HTC sample collection center were then instructed to go directly to the patient service centers of HTC's affiliated/partner labs to have their blood drawn.

HealthCheckUSA (1987) and others also entered the DTC lab testing market during the pre-World Wide Web (WWW) days. All of these pre-WWW "storefront" DTC lab testing businesses eventually adapted their business models to support online ordering and payment, with most of them gradually phasing out their own collection centers in favor of sending everyone to their partner laboratories' sample collection centers.

John Bell's **Direct Laboratory Services** (DirectLabs.com) was founded in 1993 only a few months after CERN released the WWW software into the public domain to allow free and open access to the internet via graphical interface web browsers like Mosaic. **DirectLabs** was the first consumer-initiated testing enterprise to be built around an online-only business model from day one.

A long list of others with similar models collectively formed what is now a ~\$4 billion DTC lab testing market in the United States alone, with the two largest clinical laboratory corporations in the world vigorously marketing their own consumer-initiated lab testing enterprises, **Quest Health** and **Labcorp OnDemand**.

Editor's Note:

In 1972, when the clinical laboratory (**MetPath**) that would 25 years later be spun off and branded as **Quest Diagnostics** was headquartered in a converted storefront on West Englewood Avenue in Teaneck, New Jersey, I was hired by MetPath to edit MetPath's journal ads, brochures, fact sheets and other marketing material. *I was a college student at the time, and I had just finished editing a brochure for one of MetPath's customers.*

Rick Shalvoy

Founder and President

Consumer Health Education Programs