

A Brief History of the Direct-to-Consumer Lab Testing Industry

Although **Health Testing Centers** (HTC) was founded in 1978, the company was not fully operational until 1980 when HTC's first lab testing specimen collection center began to accept in-person, consumer-initiated lab test requests at the HTC walk-in center on West Oakland Park Blvd. in Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

HTC operated exclusively as an in-person, direct-to-consumer (DTC) lab test order processing and specimen collection center (*and later a network of 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 payment. Patients who lived too far away from the nearest HTC collection center were then instructed to go directly to the patient service centers of HTC's affiliated/partner labs for blood and other specimens to be collected and sent to the laboratory.

HealthCheckUSA (1987), **AnyLabTestNow** (1992) and others also entered the DTC lab testing market during the pre-World Wide Web (WWW) days. All of these pre-WWW walk-in lab testing market participants eventually adapted their business models to include online ordering and payment.

John Bell's **Direct Laboratory Services** (DirectLabs.com) was founded in 1993 only a few months after the WWW software had been released 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 platform to be launched with an internet-only business model.

A very long list of competitors with similar business models would soon follow these early entrants and pave the way for what has now become a ~\$2 billion per annum DTC lab testing market in the United States alone. Indeed, the two largest clinical laboratory companies in the world are vigorously marketing their own patient-initiated lab testing enterprises: **QuestDirect** and **Labcorp OnDemand**.

Note: When the laboratory (**MetPath**) that would ultimately become **Quest Diagnostics** was operating out of a converted storefront in Teaneck, New Jersey in 1972, I was hired by MetPath to developmentally and structurally edit the content of MetPath's journal ads, brochures and other marketing material.

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