

Maximize your budget and increase throughput – Frequently Asked Questions about Refurbished Equipment



Companies often find themselves in a situation where a new piece of equipment would be very useful to increase throughput, reduce manual labor burdens, or replace an older or troublesome machine in their existing workflow. However, there are times when budget constraints or lack of supply may prevent immediate purchase and implementation. One alternative solution is to purchase refurbished equipment from a reputable supplier.

Equipment that has been refurbished properly and comes with good customer service and a maintenance program can provide an instant and affordable solution. Increasingly we are hearing that companies need to maximize their budget and keep costs down, so we thought a discussion around refurbished equipment would be helpful. We interviewed scientists, lab managers/directors, and facility managers with experience purchasing refurbished laboratory equipment to gain insights on their experiences and recommendations on what to look for in refurbished equipment suppliers and products.

Why buy refurbished?

Panelists had several reasons for buying refurbished, but the most common was price. Most were looking to add efficiency without the cost of new equipment. Right behind cost was customer support. Many companies said that they needed either local support that they couldn't get from new equipment suppliers, or they needed regular maintenance that couldn't be obtained cost-effectively with new equipment.

Replacing a broken piece of equipment in an existing workflow rather than adjusting the entire process and retraining staff was also cited as a reason to buy refurbished. Lastly, buying refurbished equipment represents accessibility and convenience. Long wait times for new equipment, particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic, and being able to receive the refurbished equipment quickly was also an important consideration.

How does buying refurbished stretch a budget beyond the purchasing price?

The purchase price for refurbished equipment is obviously lower than new equipment. But adding just one piece of equipment that enables automation can further lower costs by reducing manual labor steps.

One panelist told us that they were in need of a high-throughput microplate reader to increase throughput, however they could not afford a new system. They were able to purchase a refurbished instrument from [Black Dog](#), a refurbished equipment supplier, at a significant discount. This allowed them to add the equipment that they needed to reduce their drug discovery timelines at a price that was within their budget. In addition, Black Dog offered them the customer service that they needed to get the equipment running as well as a comprehensive service plan. It ended up being a great alternative to going without the equipment because it was too costly.

In addition, if a piece of equipment in an existing workflow breaks down and repair costs are costly, it may make sense to replace it without the investment of a new piece of equipment. Panelists mentioned that buying refurbished when outfitting a new lab can be a great way to save money and purchase more equipment.

How does refurbished equipment add throughput?

Panelists stated that purchasing refurbished equipment can be particularly useful for high throughput applications. For example, in preclinical work where there is a need to run hundreds of samples, the addition of liquid handling units, increased robotics and automation is critical. Panelists were clear that equipment doesn't have to be the latest technology to add significant throughput to a workflow. Panelists were often able to purchase two pieces of refurbished equipment for the cost of one new unit, thereby doubling their productivity. At one CRO, their refurbished high-throughput screening system also provides a low-cost back-up unit should

a primary piece of equipment require service or to meet additional throughput demand.

What should you look for in a refurbished equipment supplier?

It is critically important to trust the supplier that you are purchasing from and also recognize the distinction between "refurbished" and "used" equipment suppliers. There are many suppliers of used equipment, but all are not "refurbished" equipment suppliers. Refurbished equipment is also "used" equipment; however, it is also serviced and typically tested to meet the original manufacturer's standards. Quality refurbished equipment suppliers will also typically offer a warranty and service contracts for the equipment. These are critical considerations, particularly when purchasing higher cost and technical instrumentation.

All of our panelists commented that it is important to ask for references and make sure that the supplier is living up to their refurbished and customer service claims by talking to their other customers. How quickly can they service the equipment, and do they have access to the parts that are required to do the job?

Another area to explore is whether they can support the equipment remotely. This was an important point, especially with the Covid-19 pandemic. The ability to guide installation, troubleshoot and advise on servicing the equipment remotely is very important in keeping the equipment running and avoiding downtime.

What other questions should you ask the supplier?

Before purchasing you should talk to the supplier about their customer service, maintenance, and warranty policies. What are you getting with your purchase and how does that compare to purchasing a new unit? Panelists were clear about the need to understand the supplier's level of qualifications to service the equipment that is being purchased. Lastly, ensure that the supplier has fully refurbished the equipment. Ask for details about the work that

was done prior to sale. As one of our panelists said, "it isn't enough for them to just clean and dust it a bit." You can also ask the supplier if they have the history of the equipment. Do they know what issues the equipment has had in the past and have they addressed all the issues during the refurbishment?

Additional considerations:

Panelists had good advice and some additional tips for those considering buying refurbished:

- If you are spending more than \$1,000 for a piece of refurbished equipment, it is a good idea to ask if you can inspect the equipment in person or talk to those familiar with the equipment before purchasing to see if it is generally reliable without many servicing issues. Perhaps the supplier can also provide a demonstration of the equipment.
- If the technology is changing quickly on a piece of equipment, then it may be best to buy new as it may not be cost effective to buy refurbished, especially if the technology improvements will force you to buy a new piece of equipment sooner. If the equipment is highly technical and requires training then buying new from the manufacturer may come with advantages of training; however, keep in mind that the right refurbished equipment supplier might also provide training and advanced support. It's important not to dismiss refurbished equipment as an option for more technical equipment, as long as you do your homework and the supplier can provide the support you need.
- Refurbished equipment is great for some types of equipment, but not all. For instance, equipment that increases automation and reduces manual labor is a great purchase. Simple, reliable equipment, like hoods, are also great because they last a long time and are not likely to go through major technological changes.
- Whether you are buying new or refurbished equipment, consider the total cost of

ownership. This is not only the purchase price but the maintenance cost, repair costs and the energy consumption cost as well.

- Put some equipment on your wish list and keep an eye out for refurbished units. This way you can increase productivity without having to wait until a new piece of equipment is within your budget.

Some final thoughts on buying refurbished

There is sometimes a misconception that refurbished equipment is inferior to new. It's important to remember that when maintained properly, quality lab equipment can have a very long service life, even at high duty cycles.

There are many reasons why a lab chooses to sell equipment to a refurbished equipment supplier or at auction, and often not because the instrument is damaged or malfunctioning.

- The goals of the lab have changed and that type of equipment is no longer required.
- The lab purchased a newer version of the equipment.
- The lab decides to outsource some of their work.
- The instrument has reached the end of its financial life and the lab is ready to buy again.
- The company has restructured the lab as a result of acquisition or downsizing and no longer requires the equipment.

There are a host of reasons why used equipment ends up in the hands of a reseller; therefore, they key to buying refurbished often comes back to the supplier. A reputable refurbished equipment supplier will not purchase poor quality or damaged equipment, particularly if they provide warranties and service. Quality refurbished suppliers will source only the best quality equipment to refurbish.

For many applications, even early generation instruments can meet a lab's needs, perform well, and last for years. It's all about the application and your specific needs. If your research demands a particular feature that only new technology offers, refurbished may not be an option. In other situations, a manufacturer's new instrument may differ only slightly from a previous generation or include a new "bell and whistle" that just costs more and will not benefit your research; in this case, refurbished may do the job perfectly and save your budget at the same time.

Lastly, choosing refurbished equipment when it meets your research needs is better for the environment. It helps to reduce carbon footprint by saving landfills from non-degradable waste and also reducing manufacturing of new equipment.

For more information about refurbished equipment, please see [Black Dog Technical Services](#)

About Black Dog Technical Services

Founded in 2005, Black Dog has built a reputation in the life science community for providing quality refurbished instruments and complementary consumables at affordable prices, as well as delivering exceptional service for refurbished fluorescence imaging plate readers and high-throughput cellular screening systems. Black Dog also provides quality complementary laboratory consumables, helping to ensure that their customers obtain superior results from their refurbished fluorescence readers and high-throughput cellular screening systems. Black Dog has longstanding partnerships with exceptional product manufacturers to provide customers the highest quality laboratory consumables at competitive prices.

Total customer satisfaction has been the company's focus from the start, which is reflected in the company's mission: to deliver the highest quality service and laboratory products to their customers and guarantee honesty, integrity, and respect in their offerings.