

A photograph of a male scientist in a white lab coat and safety glasses, wearing blue gloves and looking through a microscope. The background shows a laboratory with computer monitors and various lab equipment.

Case study:

How Soft Cell Laboratories contributes to the advancement of research that impacts human health while earning direct revenue through Ovation Research Network

Soft Cell Laboratories is a Utah-based reference laboratory specializing in high-complexity molecular diagnostic testing, including urinary tract infection (UTI), gut microbiome, and COVID-19 testing. The state-of-the-art laboratory is known for using advanced technology (next-generation sequencing) to run unique tests that provide high-quality results.

Soft Cell serves a range of clients, including physician practices and long-term care facilities. They also offer direct-to-consumer testing so patients can find answers about their health and then work with their healthcare provider to identify the appropriate treatment plan.

The Opportunity

In early 2021, Soft Cell Laboratories expanded its partnership with Ovation and joined the Ovation Research Network (ORN). The ORN provides labs with the infrastructure and scale they need to mobilize the value of their remnant samples for an extensive variety of research projects—while generating additional revenue. Soft Cell was eager to join the ORN because it was another opportunity for their lab's work to go from a one-to-one patient impact to a one-to-many patient impact.

“I was excited when I heard about Ovation having a research network,” said Priestly Penda, MLS, General Supervisor at Soft Cell Laboratories. “Our lab is passionate about research. Working hand-in-hand

with a LIMS company that has the same mindset and can bring us significant research opportunities is very valuable.”

As soon as Soft Cell joined the Ovation Research Network, they implemented Ovation's suggested consent language into their requisition forms and added consent tracking to Ovation LIMS to ensure they could identify which remnant clinical samples were eligible to be used for research. They started shipping consented, de-identified remnant samples to Ovation's biorepository for use in research and found the process was smooth. Ovation always sent the supplies they needed, and they were excited to have these valuable samples used for research rather than discarded.

In general, Soft Cell has found working with the Ovation team to be streamlined and smooth across both the Ovation Research Network and the LIMS. “When we have encountered any difficulties with biobanking, the team has usually already addressed them by the time we ask,” said Penda. “And when we’ve had issues with the LIMS, we just contact Ovation Support online and we get a reply in a matter of minutes. Within two to three hours, the problem is sorted.”

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Itoe Penda Priestly Njume
General Supervisor, MLS



NIH Project Participation

As an Ovation Research Network lab, Soft Cell was provided the opportunity to participate in the National Institutes of Health’s Rapid Acceleration of Diagnostics (RADx) Tech Variant Task Force (VTF) by performing variant identification on remnant positive COVID-19 samples.

The NIH RADx VTF has published a recent study in the [Journal of Clinical Microbiology](#) highlighting that known COVID-19 variants can be identified within one to two days using genotyping for a fraction of the cost of next-generation sequencing. Several news outlets, including [GenomeWeb](#), have highlighted this effort.

While research has always been one of the driving forces of Soft Cell Laboratories, including groundbreaking work in L-form bacteria, participating in a project through the ORN was the first time Soft Cell contributed to infectious disease surveillance efforts. The lab was eager to participate in this research because it allowed them to contribute information to help public health officials curb the spread and treat infectious diseases.

“There were times when we ran 10,000 samples a month, and the positivity rates were so high,” said Penda. “It’s empowering to not only get individual patients the results they need every day but to also contribute information that will help reduce the spread and identify how infectious disease is rapidly changing.”

Soft Cell found it straightforward to get started with the NIH RADx VTF project. Ovation research experts worked with Soft Cell to bring in the protocols, and “it’s been smooth sailing ever since.” Soft Cell was already using Ovation’s LIMS system for clinical testing, so there was no need to learn new software. “Every week, we run our samples, and the interpretation goes smoothly,” said Penda.

Soft Cell can easily accommodate sending samples to Ovation’s biorepository on top of their clinical testing; it’s efficient and streamlined. “We’re already using Ovation for clinical sample testing. We’re used to the interfaces, so taking on extra research work through the ORN doesn’t affect our clinical workflow or turnaround times,” said Penda.

The Benefits

For Soft Cell Laboratories, the most significant benefit of participation in the Ovation Research Network is the contribution to research that will impact human health. The ORN supports Soft Cell's core mission of running a quality clinical molecular laboratory with a built-in research component. Working with Ovation is a way for Soft Cell to meet both clinical and research needs simultaneously.

The ORN has also allowed Soft Cell's medical laboratory scientists to level up their technical skills as this project requires working with different, sensitive assays at minute volumes.

By participating in the NIH RADx VTF project, Soft Cell has also been able to promote its research expertise which helps them compete with other prominent research reference laboratories in the area. In addition, Soft Cell has earned over \$20,000 in direct revenue annually from its participation in the Ovation Research Network: performing research testing, biobanking labor, and sample usage fees.

"It's been a massive joy to work with Ovation to contribute knowledge that will help us better prepare for the next infectious disease pandemic," said Nejume. "This mission energizes my entire team and powers our day-to-day work."

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To learn how Ovation can help your lab, visit www.ovation.io or reach us at sales@ovation.io