

# Case STUDY · MTS OnDemand® Accuflex® at Mercury Pharmacy

**S**teve Boulanger, RPh, purchased Mercury Pharmacy in Mountlake Terrace, Washington, in 2001. When he started out he was providing pharmacy services to 300 beds in Boarding Homes – typically a small home that provides care to four to six residents.

Boulanger recognized significant growth opportunities in the long-term care marketplace and structured Mercury's business to take advantage of those opportunities. Mercury sought to differentiate itself by providing the best customer service possible. Boulanger believes that this can be accomplished in two ways - through regularly scheduled training and consistent facility visits.

“We do extensive training at new homes to show them how the process works first-hand,” says Boulanger. “It’s important that they know the correct procedures right from the start.” The up-front investment in training pays off in the long run for the pharmacy, as trained employees at the facility typically make fewer errors requiring pharmacy intervention. Mercury’s commitment to training doesn’t stop after new facilities are up and running - they continue their on-site training program for new employees at the facilities.

Boulanger also believes that pharmacy staff must be physically present in the facilities they service as much as possible. “We routinely send consultants out to make sure that everything’s running smoothly and help with charting issues,” says Boulanger. “It’s not complicated work but it helps to have someone at the facility to go over issues on a regular basis.”

News of Mercury’s exemplary service levels spread quickly and soon the pharmacy was servicing Assisted Living Facilities and Skilled Nursing Facilities, as well as more Boarding Homes.

Boulanger was eager to continue growing Mercury’s business and began exploring ways to increase the pharmacy’s efficiencies. “I was looking for a better way to do things and not just continue to hire more employees,” he explains. It was then that Boulanger was introduced to the MTS OnDemand Accuflex, which was undergoing Beta testing at Allcare Pharmacy in Arkansas.

The Accuflex combines MTS OnDemand technology with integrated robotics to create accurate and efficient automation that fills a variety of medication packaging systems on a just-in-time basis. “When I saw the Accuflex, I jumped on it immediately,” Boulanger says. “MTS wasn’t even selling it yet but I knew that was the direction the marketplace was going.” He also knew that his



pharmacy was going to continue its rapid growth and he had to be prepared to meet that demand.

Boulanger particularly liked Accuflex's packaging flexibility. Some of Mercury's customers required medications packaged in OptiPak™ – a disposable color-coded 14-day compliance package – while other customers used standard 31-day compliance punch cards. Accuflex offers quick changeovers between varying medication packaging systems, and will also package unit dose box and reclaimable Select Seal™ cards.

Boulanger placed his order and awaited delivery of MTS's second Accuflex machine. It was installed at Mercury Pharmacy in December 2006 and since that time, Boulanger has seen his business grow by approximately 35%. Although it is difficult to credit any one particular factor as the reason for growth during the expansion phase of a business, Boulanger offers his first-hand experience as proof of Accuflex's direct impact on growth.

"Right now, I can bring on new homes without having to hire more pharmacy technicians to hand fill," he explains. "Before Accuflex, even a 30- or 40-bed home had a pretty big impact on staffing."

Mercury cycle fills most of their customers' medications three days before they're delivered, which enables the pharmacy to even out the workflow. "If we've got some busy cycle fill days coming up, we run the machine a little harder a few days in advance so that we meet that demand," explains Boulanger. A large calendar posted near Accuflex provides a visual reminder of which facilities are scheduled to be filled on any given day.

While the pharmacy also uses Accuflex to fill daily prescription orders, it has virtually eliminated their pre-pack work. Boulanger states that Accuflex has

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considerably improved the pharmacy's inventory efficiencies. "We keep fast-moving drugs in the Accuflex and keep very little of those drugs on the shelf. With Accuflex, we know which drugs we're going to need on what day, and order accordingly." Mercury Pharmacy has also found Accuflex to be an effective marketing tool. According to Boulanger, potential customers are always impressed when they see the Accuflex robot in action. "Customers love the fact that we've invested in robotics so that we can fill their orders more quickly," he says. "They know we can fill a lot faster with Accuflex than a pharmacy with 20 employees filling by hand."

For Mercury Pharmacy, Accuflex has proven to be the right piece of automation equipment to help the pharmacy grow. "There's not a lot more we need to do other than expand our hours and do a great job," says Boulanger.

He offers a simple philosophy to ensure Mercury's continued success. "My goal is to provide good service first and foremost. If we can do that, we're going to grow," Boulanger says.