

CASE STUDY

AFFORDABLE, COMPACT AUTOMATION FOR EVERY TYPE AND SIZE OF PHARMACY

Adding Efficiency at Point City Drugs



Wendy McMullen, CPhT
Certified Pharmacy Technician
~ Point City Drugs

A PATIENT-FIRST, LOCAL COMMUNITY PHARMACY

Point City Drugs, a small, locally-owned pharmacy in West Point, Mississippi, has been a cornerstone of its community since it opened in 2013. With a mission to serve as a trusted healthcare resource for patients, the pharmacy focuses on building relationships and ensuring timely prescription services. Serving the town's population of approximately 10,000, as well as several surrounding communities, Point City Drugs is located near the local hospital, children's clinic, and urgent care centers — making it a convenient stop for many patients.

THE CHALLENGE: UNEXPECTED GROWTH

Until early 2024, Point City Drugs was one of two independent retail pharmacies in West Point. However, when their competitor closed its doors, prescription volume virtually doubled overnight. This sudden increase in demand posed significant challenges. Pharmacy Technician Wendy McMullen, at Point City Drugs, recalls, "We hired more techs, but we knew we also wanted to simplify our workflow so pharmacists and techs would have the time we needed to spend with customers."

The pharmacy wanted a solution that would allow them to handle the increased volume without compromising customer service. Point City Drugs turned to McKesson, a diversified healthcare provider working with pharmacies, manufacturers, and other stakeholders in the industry to support the needs of patients throughout North America.

THE SOLUTION: COUNTASSIST TECHNOLOGY

Like many smaller pharmacies, space constraints and the objective of using staff time efficiently were major concerns. To meet Point City Drugs' needs, McKesson recommended its CountAssist robot — a compact, affordable solution that automates up to 35% of countable prescriptions.

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The one-sided cabinet design can fit into a pharmacy's existing layout, including at the end of a bay or against a wall. Pharmacies can start with just one or two cabinets and add on over time to operate as many as 10 simultaneously. Individual cabinets feature 18 canisters, each of which holds a unique medication. This means the technology is completely customizable and scalable — making it perfect for growing with pharmacies as needs change. At the same time, because of its size, it doesn't require a lot of space or extensive modifications to the pharmacy like some larger robotic systems might.

Point City Drugs opted to install two cabinets, allowing them to automate the counting of 36 distinct medications. McMullen says they began by running a drug report to identify what they call their fast movers. “These are the medications we fill most often, so felt that prioritizing them in the CountAssist would add the most efficiency to our workflow.” They ended up automating 35 medications, with two canisters dedicated to the same pill due to its larger size.

“From a space perspective, we were concerned about how we were going to accommodate everything — the influx of new patients, drugs we might need to add, and new techs as well as new technology,” says McMullen. “It took a bit of reorganizing, but we found the perfect spot, a kind of cubby, and now it all just flows like it's always been there.” The pharmacy keeps extra stock for filling the canisters on a shelf right above the CountAssist — so everything is at hand, she adds. Each canister also has an indicator that blinks when a medication needs to be replenished.

CountAssist features a user-friendly interface and software that integrates seamlessly with existing pharmacy management software, making it easy to learn and use. Point City Drugs' pharmacy software system flags the medications stored in the canisters. That means when pharmacy technicians start filling a prescription in the software, they immediately see that the drug is in one of the canisters. Once the prescription is filled, it's sent directly to the CountAssist. When technicians scan the label barcode at the CountAssist, the robot recognizes it, counts out the pills needed, and fills the vials.

MCKESSON SUPPORT: ALWAYS ON POINT

“Getting up to speed took a little bit,” says McMullen. “A McKesson field tech came onsite to show us how to change out and clean canisters, measure pills going in and find a crown that fits.” While canisters are all a uniform size, she explains, the crowns — which automate the pill counting — vary in width and depth depending on the size and shape of the pills.

“We've hit a few bumps along the way,” McMullen notes. “But someone is always available to help.” As an example, at the beginning there was a problem with a couple of the canisters. When McKesson's field tech couldn't resolve a problem, the company flew the department head out the next day to fix it. McKesson's head programmers even spent time on the phone with Point City Drugs' pharmacy software provider to work through some challenges they were experiencing.

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“If we have drugs that are normally in the CountAssist on backorder, we like to fill the canisters with another medication so it’s not sitting idle,” says McMullen. “We try to find a pill that’s a similar shape and size — but that doesn’t always happen.” When she was having trouble finding a crown that would fit a replacement drug, she called McKesson, and they sent out a variety of sizes to try. “I know if none of those had worked, all I’d have to do is send them the measurements of the specific pill, and they would get us what we needed.”

THE RESULT: EFFICIENCY GAINS

CountAssist has significantly improved the efficiency of Point City Drugs. The pharmacy now fills an average of 400 prescriptions every day. McMullen highlights the impact on customer service: “We can count more and faster, so our customers spend less time waiting for prescriptions.” The technology has also helped the pharmacy manage space more effectively.

One of the key advantages of CountAssist is its ability to handle rush requests without disrupting ongoing tasks. “Before the CountAssist, if I were counting out another prescription, I would have to stop and clear my tray to handle the rush request,” says McMullen. Then, when she was done, she’d have to start her count on the previous prescription all over again. “Now I can just leave it, fill the prescription in the pharmacy software system, and run over to the CountAssist to scan the barcode. Then, I can go right back to finish my other counting while the robot fills the prescription. It’s just that much more efficient.”

The technology also helps get Medicare patients out the door faster. “A lot of people with Medicare come in usually on the first or third of the month to fill their maintenance medications,” says McMullen. “Let’s say a patient needs five maintenance meds, and all five are in the CountAssist. Well, they’re all getting counted at once. There’s no way we could do that quickly by hand.”

CONCLUSION: A WIN-WIN

The implementation of CountAssist at Point City Drugs has been a game-changer. The technology has allowed the pharmacy to handle the increase in prescription volume without compromising customer service or efficiency.

“We’re filling twice as many medications in the same amount of time as we were without the CountAssist,” McMullen says, summing up the pharmacy’s experience. “It’s made our workflow so much more efficient and has allowed us to spend more time with our customers, which is what we’re all about.”

**AUTOMATION FOR
ANY PHARMACY.**

ANY FOOTPRINT.

ANY BUDGET.

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