Waters™

Trade Up: Why Empower Subscription Bundles Are the Right Move for Modern Labs

A guide for laboratory leaders considering the transition from perpetually licensed Empower Enterprise Software to Empower Subscription Bundles

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For decades, perpetually licensed Empower™ Enterprise Software has been the trusted backbone of chromatographic operations across thousands of laboratories worldwide. Its reliability and compliance-ready design have helped scientists deliver results with confidence. But the environment in which labs now operate has changed dramatically. Globalization, digitalization, and evolving compliance expectations are reshaping how data must be generated, reviewed, and shared.

Today's labs face challenges that traditional perpetual software licensing cannot easily address: the need to more easily access and adopt new software functionality as it becomes available, scale operations quickly, and control costs with precision.

Waters Empower Subscription bundles (ES1, ES3, ES5) combine the proven Empower Chromatography Data System (CDS) with modern, cloud-enabled tools tailored for this new reality. These include waters_connect™ System Monitoring for real-time fleet visibility, Empower Data Viewer for secure, browser-based results review, and (within ES5) machine learning (ML)-powered Anomaly Detection that accelerates chromatogram review by flagging deviations automatically.

In this whitepaper, we will explain:

- The advantages of subscriptions over perpetual software pricing models
- How the included technologies improve lab performance and collaboration
- Real-world scenarios where subscription delivers measurable impact
- What the future of laboratory informatics looks like in a subscription-first world

For organizations evaluating whether to remain with perpetually licensed Empower Enterprise Software or move forward with Empower Subscriptions, this guide provides both the strategic rationale and the practical insights to make an informed decision.

WHY LABORATORIES ARE MOVING TO SUBSCRIPTION

1. PREDICTABLE, SUSTAINABLE COSTS

Perpetual licensing requires large upfront investment, followed by recurring annual maintenance. For many labs, this creates budgeting challenges and locks up capital that could otherwise support scientific expansion. Subscription bundles, by contrast, turn capital expenditure into operating expenditure. Costs are predictable, spread evenly, and align with ongoing usage. This makes financial planning easier and supports laboratories in responding to shifting project demands without overcommitting resources.

When considering the real-world implication of the financial flexibility provided by Empower Subscriptions, contract development and manufacturing organizations (CDMOs) running projects for multiple sponsors often find that subscription pricing allows them to align software spending with client projects. Instead of purchasing perpetual licenses that might sit idle between contracts, they can maintain predictable subscription fees tied to active usage.

2. EASIER ACCESS TO INNOVATION

Subscription pricing models can provide easier access to new technologies by including entitlement to the latest software innovations (often included as part of higher subscription tiers). This can eliminate the need for large capital outlays to purchase new software products and simplifies budgeting through predictable subscription fees, reducing barriers to adopting new products as they are released. By making innovation more accessible in this way, laboratories can more easily stay aligned to evolving industry standards and benefit from new product releases without the burden of perpetual licenses for multiple software products.

3. SIMPLIFIED IT ADMINISTRATION

Managing licenses across multi-site organizations can be complex. These licenses are often managed at the site level, making it difficult for an organization to know how many licenses are in use or how many they need. Subscription bundles reduce these burdens:

- Licenses are centralized and flexible, making it easier to allocate access dynamically.
- Cloud-enabled tools provide consistent capabilities across sites, even when local Empower Software deployments differ slightly in version.

This simplification is particularly valuable for global organizations managing diverse laboratories across regions, each with different project timelines and regulatory obligations.

4. BUILT FOR COLLABORATION AND RESILLIENCE

Today's labs rarely operate in isolation. Sponsors work with CROs, pharma companies partner with CDMOs, and teams are increasingly distributed across geographies. Lab expansion has surged in recent years, with more than 35 million square feet of lab space under construction globally in 2024, according to CBRE. Life sciences venture capital investment has also climbed approximately 43% compared to 2019[1].

Combined, this creates an incredibly fast-moving environment, resulting in the need for software pricing and delivery models to be just as agile. Subscription-based solutions should be as flexible as spinning up a new lab, ensuring organizations can adapt quickly to shifting demands. Empower Subscription bundles were designed with these realities in mind.

Tools included in the Empower Subscription bundles like Empower Data Viewer allow chromatographic data to be shared securely in near real time – without relying on emailed PDFs or manual data transfers. With waters_connect System Monitoring, supervisors and lab managers can keep an eye on instrument fleets remotely to identify issues quickly and maximize throughput. By supporting remote-first operations, subscriptions help labs stay resilient in the face of disruption, whether that's from global events, staffing challenges, or the growing need for flexible working arrangements.

WHAT'S INSIDE THE EMPOWER SUBSCRIPTION BUNDLES

Waters offers three tiers of Empower Subscriptions, each designed to meet different operational needs. ES1 is ideal for core productivity, ES3 for collaboration, and ES5 for enterprise-scale analytics.

ES1

Essentials for every lab

Boost lab efficiency and cut manual work with tools to automate your workflows and simplify data management.

- System Suitability option
- GPC option
- Dissolution option
- Sample Set Generator
- waters_connect System Monitoring
- License visability
- Phone support
- Access to software updates

ES3

Enhanced solutions for comprehensive support

Automate workflows, enhance method development and validation, and enable cloud-based data sharing and collaboration, all backed by on-demand training.

Includes everything in ES1, plus:

- Online E-Learning: Empower Fundamentals Pro Interface track
- Chemical Structures option
- Empower Method Developer App
- Empower Method Validation Manager
- Empower Data Viewer
- Dedicated Success Manager

ES5

Innovating the enterprise experience

Lead the future of innovation with AI-driven insights and seamless global collaboration.

Inludes everything in ES1 and ES3, plus:

- Empower Data Viewer partner connections (2)
- AI/ML anomaly detection

By structuring the bundles this way, Waters ensures that every lab, from single-sites to global enterprises, can adopt the subscription tier that best matches its current needs, with the option to scale as requirements evolve.

REAL-TIME INSIGHT INTO LABORATORY SYSTEMS

Instrument downtime is one of the most costly inefficiencies in any laboratory. With waters_connect System Monitoring, subscribers of any bundle can access a clear, real-time view of system status across all Empower and waters_connect software-controlled instruments.

Supervisors and lab managers can instantly see whether instruments are running, idle, or in error, without leaving their desk. When issues arise, notifications ensure that staff can respond quickly, reducing downtime.

With waters_connect System Monitoring (in all subscription bundles), you can:

- **Improve throughput**: By reducing idle time and ensuring instruments are used efficiently, labs can process more samples without adding new equipment.

- **Accelerate troubleshooting:** Engineers or on-call staff can triage issues remotely, often arriving prepared with the right tools or parts.

- **Optimize scheduling:** Historical data on system utilization highlights bottlenecks and informs decisions on workload balancing.

REMOVING DATA ACCESS BARRIERS

In many labs, reviewing chromatographic data means exporting files, generating PDFs, or relying on local Empower Software installations. These processes are inefficient and prone to delays.

Empower Data Viewer provides secure, browser-based access to view-only chromatographic results. Users can view data in near real time from any location, reducing delays in decision-making.

With Empower Data Viewer (included in bundles ES3 and ES5), you can:

- **Collaborate across organizations:** For pharmaceutical sponsors working with multiple contract labs, Empower Data Viewer creates a single, consistent view of results, regardless of which Empower software version generated the data. This accelerates communication, improves transparency, and reduces the friction of working with external partners.

- **Support hybrid environments**: Because Empower Data Viewer supports data from multiple Empower Software versions (FR4 SR3 and higher), organizations can consolidate results across sites even during phased migrations. This flexibility makes it easier to adopt subscription bundles without requiring every site to upgrade at once.

A GROWING REVIEW CHALLENGE

As data volumes grow, manual chromatogram review becomes a bottleneck. Analysts may spend hours scanning files, even though most chromatograms follow expected patterns. This slows product release and consumes valuable expertise.

The ML Anomaly Detection feature (ES5 subscription bundle only) uses advanced algorithms to automatically flag chromatograms that deviate from expected results. Analysts can then focus only on the exceptions, with the software highlighting which aspects, such as retention time shifts or unusual peak shapes, drove the anomaly.

With ML Anomaly Detection (only in ES5), you can:

- **Accelerate turnaround:** Review cycles shrink from days to hours as analysts only inspect flagged files.

- **Improve consistency**: Machine learning applies rules uniformly, reducing variability in human judgement.

- **Scale more effectively**: As projects expand or sample volumes increase, review processes can scale without proportionally increasing headcount.
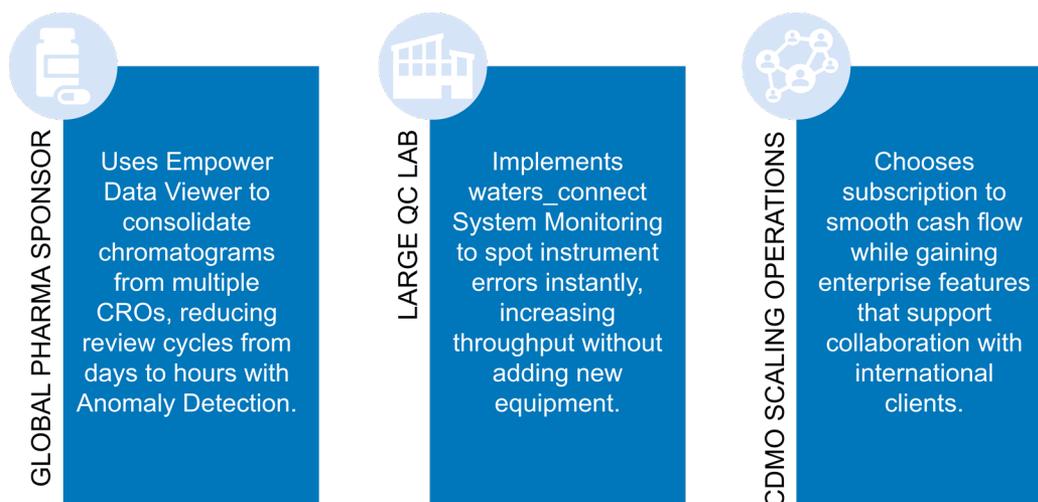
PLANNING YOUR TRANSITION

Migrating to Empower Subscription bundles does not need to be disruptive. Many organizations adopt a phased approach, starting with a single department or site before expanding.

A practical path to success includes:

1. **Assessment** – Document current Empower Software versions, instrument fleets, and workflows.

2. **Bundle selection** – Align subscription tier with your operational needs: ES1 for core productivity, ES3 for collaboration, ES5 for enterprise-scale analytics.

3. **Stakeholder engagement** – Involve laboratory managers, IT, and compliance teams early to align expectations.

4. **Pilot implementation** – Run a pilot to demonstrate benefits and validate processes in a controlled environment.

5. **Gradual rollout** – Expand across sites once pilot results are confirmed, supported by Waters training and resources.

This structured approach minimizes risk and builds confidence across all stakeholders.

GLOBAL PHARMA SPONSOR	LARGE QC LAB	CDMO SCALING OPERATIONS
Uses Empower Data Viewer to consolidate chromatograms from multiple CROs, reducing review cycles from days to hours with Anomaly Detection.	Implements waters_connect System Monitoring to spot instrument errors instantly, increasing throughput without adding new equipment.	Chooses subscription to smooth cash flow while gaining enterprise features that support collaboration with international clients.

These examples illustrate how the bundles deliver measurable improvements in speed, quality, and efficiency.

LOOKING AHEAD: THE FUTURE OF LAB INFORMATICS

Subscription models are not just a pricing change, they represent a shift towards a new way of developing, delivering, and using laboratory software that more readily supports the digital transformation of the laboratory.

In the coming years, subscription platforms will increasingly integrate:

- **AI-driven insights** that go beyond anomaly detection to suggest optimizations in methods and workflows.

- **Connected ecosystems** linking chromatography with mass spectrometry, laboratory and scientific data management system (LMS/SDMS), electronic laboratory notebooks (ELNs), and inventory systems in unified cloud environments.

- **Greater flexibility to scale licenses** up or down based on project demand, further aligning costs with operational realities.

Empower Subscription bundles position laboratories to take advantage of these future innovations as they become available, ensuring long-term competitiveness.

INVEST IN THE FUTURE OF LABORATORY INFORMATICS

Perpetual software licenses have served laboratories well for many years, but the demands of modern science call for a new approach. Empower Subscription bundles deliver the same trusted Empower CDS alongside powerful, cloud-enabled tools that improve productivity, collaboration, and compliance. With predictable costs, continuous updates, real-time monitoring, global data access, and ML-powered review, subscriptions provide both immediate and long-term benefits. For laboratories seeking to maximize efficiency and remain agile in a rapidly changing environment, transitioning to Empower Subscription is not just an upgrade – it's an investment in the future of laboratory informatics.

To explore which Empower Subscription bundle best fits your laboratory, visit Empower Subscriptions overview or speak to your local Waters representative for a demo.

References

1. https://www.cbre.com/press-releases/rapid-expansion-of-international-life-sciences-markets-with-strong-growth-in-china#:~:text=CBRE%20analyzed%20many%20of%20the,last%2 year.

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