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## SUCCESS STORY:

# ACS Publications and Vernalis

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Douglas Williamson  
Senior Team Leader, Chemistry at Vernalis Research



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Since the inaugural publication of the *Journal of the American Chemical Society* in 1879, ACS has expanded its publishing operations to encompass more than 60 peer-reviewed journals across the fields of chemistry, physics, and biology. Today, ACS resources are used by researchers at more than 5,000 corporate, academic, and government institutions worldwide—from chemistry departments to drug research and development companies.

With the roots of its research function founded in Cambridge, UK in 1997, Vernalis is a commercial stage pharmaceutical company. Their expertise in fragment- and structure-based approaches to drug discovery has led to a number of fully-integrated, global collaborations with major pharmaceutical companies, to generate lead compounds and candidates for clinical investigation.

Vernalis Research combines fragment-based approaches, structural biology, biophysics, assay technology, and molecular modeling with extensive medicinal chemistry expertise in order for the company to develop new compounds in collaboration with its partners. Douglas Williamson is a Senior Team Leader in the chemistry group at Vernalis. To fulfill the literature needs of researchers, he has to balance anticipated usage (and the available budget) with the various packages available to ensure the most relevant resources are immediately accessible to chemistry teams at the bench.



*Douglas Williamson,  
Senior Team Leader,  
Chemistry at  
Vernalis Research*

## CHALLENGES OF R&D

The sheer number of challenges facing an R&D team these days can be overwhelming. Douglas says, “The commercial challenges are amongst the biggest. Plenty of companies do what we do, but we need to show how we can solve problems more quickly, differently, and better than competitors in order to win new business.”

There are also issues when there is significant literature precedent. “We’re looking for novelty and tractability in the compounds we’re designing and making,” says Douglas, “so we need to make sure we’re up to date with the literature”.

Their researchers keep up to date by consulting the latest and very best in scientific research in the area. “Many of our chemistry team refer to ACS journals most days. They look for synthetic methodology as well as ensuring current awareness of new medicinal chemistry papers,” says Douglas. “Excellence in synthetic organic chemistry is a key component in any drug discovery project, and access to methodology that a chemist can apply to their project is always useful. ACS Publications are an important source of synthetic methodology and information on new discoveries relevant to our business. Our chemists who look at synthetic methodology are heavy users—particularly the *Journal of Organic Chemistry*, *Organic Letters*, and the *Journal of Medicinal Chemistry*.”

When deciding whether to purchase resources, the challenge is a matter of balance. “Quite often we’re driven by perceived or likely usage, which is then balanced against the cost of subscribing and individual downloads. That’s the starkest comparison.” The ACS Publications team have been helpful in assisting Douglas with achieving the best return on investment. “ACS have been very helpful in answering questions and presenting different options for subscriptions to help us decide if we’re getting the best value.”

## ON THE FRONT LINE OF DRUG DISCOVERY AT VERNALIS

Working chemists need to have the latest information right at their fingertips on a daily basis, especially when they’re in the laboratory. “Most typically, our researchers are looking for synthetic precedent and methodology that’s relevant while at the bench. They have something they have to achieve, and they want information as quickly as possible to reach their objective.”

As such, it’s essential to have the most relevant results delivered quickly, reliably, and at a high level of specificity. “ACS Publications journal articles are easy to use: you have the option to download the PDF if that’s what you want, or HTML formats, rich hyperlinked article with figures in text, and references separated out. It’s easy for the reader. But it’s not necessarily just about the platform, rather it’s about the information itself. The less the scientist has to do to get the information they need, the better.” And with ACS journals, researchers can be sure that their searches include the most recent and rigorously peer-reviewed results.

Researchers at Vernalis also choose ACS Publications to publish their own findings, cementing the company’s position at the forefront of drug discovery. “Occasionally we publish as well; it’s a good way of promoting our own discoveries.”

## CRITICAL TOOLS FOR DRUG DISCOVERY

Access to essential, cutting-edge research, such as that published in the *Journal of Medicinal Chemistry* and other ACS Publications titles, helps to streamline the literature investigation process for bench scientists at Vernalis. “The ACS portfolio of journals is an established, prestigious series of titles that cover areas of chemistry relevant to our research,” says Douglas. “It’s a combination of keeping up to date plus answering information needs. The quality and the perceived reliability of ACS journals stands out. They’re trusted, and I would recommend them to other R&D teams.”

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