Contact: Keith Gilbert, 651-633-7148
kgilbert@gilbertconsulting.com
www.gilbertconsulting.com
blog.gilbertconsulting.com

Consulting project case study:
Catalogs with complex tables produced from a database

A company that sells molecules such as "Angiotensis Converting Enzymes" and "Xeroderma Pigmentosum" to research scientists asked me to develop a way for them to efficiently produce a massive 975 page color print catalog from their product database.

I began by working with their graphic designer to set up a clean, bulletproof InDesign template using tables, paragraph and character styles.

Next, I worked with their database administrator. I gave her a sample of what the XML code coming out of the database needed to look like to import properly into InDesign. She then sent me a "first draft" XML output from the database which I imported into the InDesign template, marked up the problems, and sent back. After several rounds of back and forth, debugging and testing, she was exporting XML from the database that imported cleanly into the catalog template.

I wrote custom InDesign scripts that automated some cleanup that needed to be done after the XML was imported. The first script searches through an InDesign file and vertically merges table cells when a certain set of conditions are met. The second script removes the price column from each table and adjusts the other column widths accordingly, since they needed a no-price version of the catalog for international distribution.

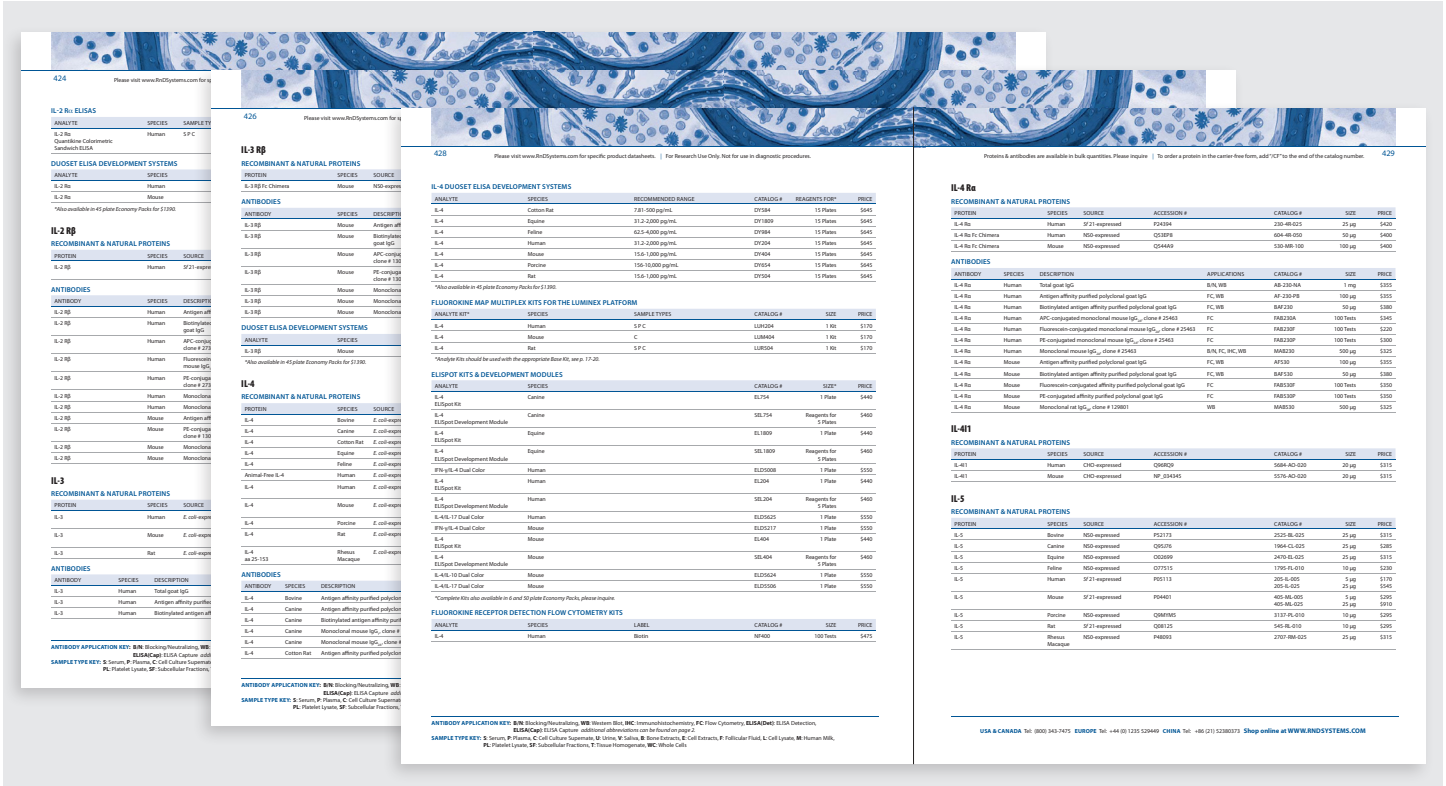
Unique challenges of this project:

- Dealing with the many Greek, superscript and subscript characters that appear in molecular biology notation.
- Formatting InDesign tables with complex formatting from imported XML data. Twelve different styles of tables appear throughout the catalog, all produced from the same data file.

"I can't even begin to tell you how big of a difference it made using XML and InDesign. The amount of time we saved is huge, seriously we cut weeks out of our schedule… It was the slickest process ever."

(quote from the satisfied client)

To discuss *your* data publishing project, contact Keith Gilbert at *kgilbert@gilbertconsulting.com* or *651-633-7148*.



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