Data Center's Lab Is Unusual 'Experiment'

TECH: Coworking Space Part of Outreach to Life Sciences, Tech

■ By BRAD GRAVES

Computer data center, plus wet lab, equals … more business?

That's what the owners of Kearny Mesa-based **ScaleMatrix** are hoping.

Mark Ortenzi and **Chris Orlando** have a sophisticated computer data center. They also had some extra building space, and were casting about for a new way to grow. Taking a clue from the way the San Diego business scene was evolving, they hit on an idea: Add a biotech accelerator and coworking space. Complete with a wet lab.

The owners invested several million dollars to build their Life Science and Technology Launch Center. It includes a laboratory run by **Diagnomics** as well as some coworking space with plenty of comforts for young entrepreneurs. A break room, for example, includes taps for gourmet coffee, kombucha tea and craft beer from **Stone Brewing** (which, incidentally, stores its fizzy data with ScaleMatrix).

Ortenzi and Orlando's hope is that UC San Diego students with promising technology might decide to use the company's Launch Center space for a little while, as they get their startups up and running. During that time, ScaleMatrix will be able to show off its core competency: taking care of data.

The life sciences generate a prodigious amount of data.

Creating Customers

Once the entrepreneurs decide to get some building space of their own, the owners hope that at least some of them will use ScaleMatrix for data and computing services.

To build the Launch Center, Scale-Matrix set aside several thousand square feet for a genome laboratory (certified through the Clinical Laboratory Improvement Amendments program, or CLIA). Tenants can rent spots at the lab bench. ScaleMatrix bills the place as appropriate for early stage genomics, molecular diagnostics, bioinformatics and personalized medicine companies.

The lab includes a sample receiving/preparation room, a pre-PCR room, a cell culture room, a microbial culture room and an autoclave room.

Entrepreneurs can also rent conventional desk space or office spaces.
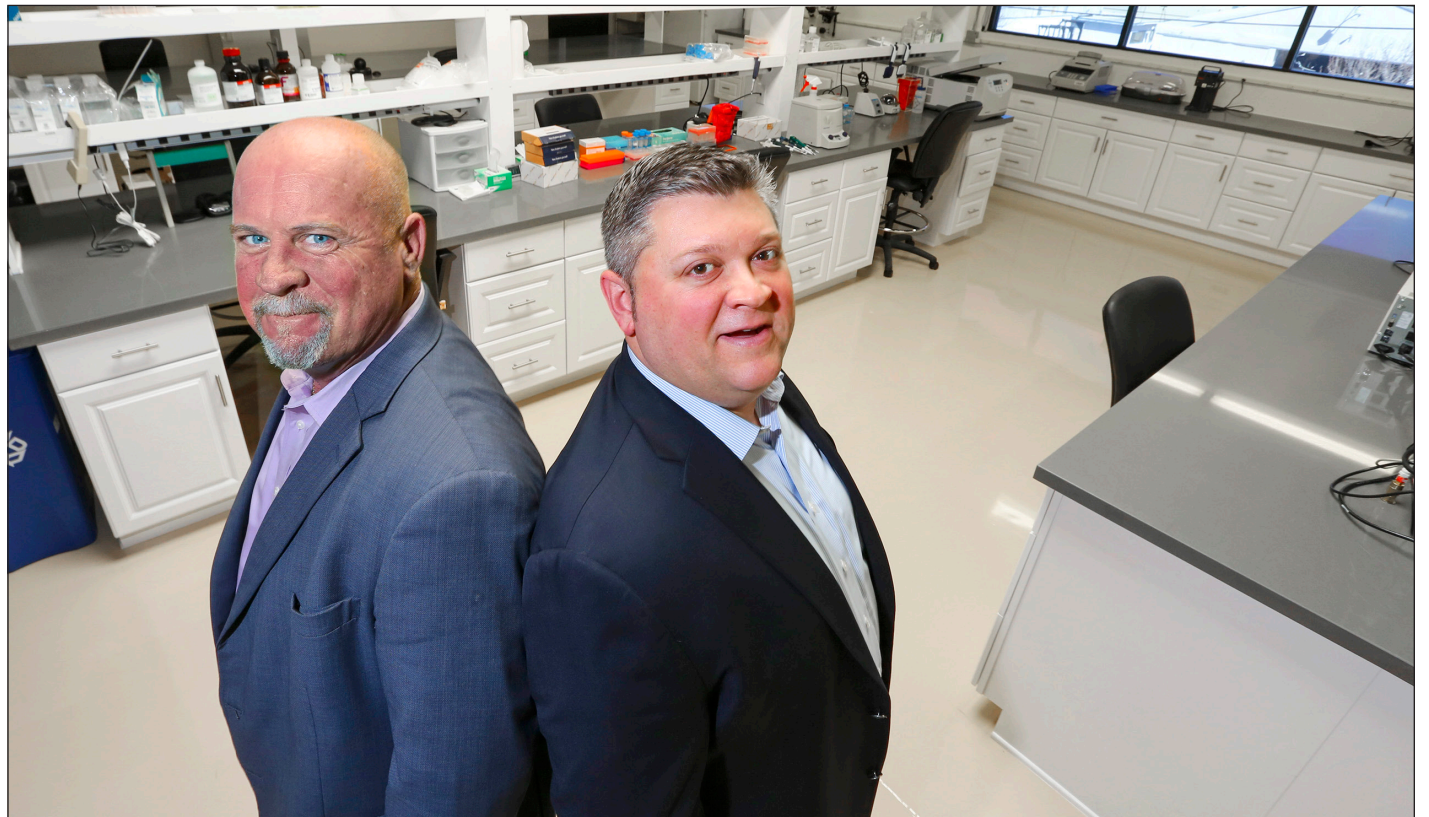
With its lab offering, ScaleMatrix is joining coworking lab providers such as **BioLabs San Diego** and **Johnson & Johnson Innovation**, which oversees JLabs.

'Very Aggressive' Storage Fees

ScaleMatrix is offering "very aggressive" data storage fees, Orlando said during a tour of the facility. On top of that, ScaleMatrix can also offer fiber optic access to the **San Diego Supercomputer Center** on the UC San Diego campus.

Orlando said the Launch Center is in its first phase; more construction could follow if demand warrants. So far the company's total investment in the center has been between $3 million and $5 million.

Dan Thompson, who covers the data center space as a senior analyst with **451 Research**, has seen a lot of data centers. But he has never seen one with a wet lab. "It's a pretty neat approach," he said. Helping life-science startups is a good

Photos by Jamie Scott Lytle
Top: Mark Ortenzi, left, and Chris Orlando of ScaleMatrix have been called 'gutsy guys' for taking an unusual approach for a data center to develop new customers. They have opened a biotech accelerator with a wet lab and a coworking space.

way to gain further access to the broader life sciences community, he added.

Thompson praised Ortenzi and Orlando's initiative and creativity. "The owners are pretty gutsy guys," he said.

A trip to ScaleMatrix is not complete without a look into its data center, with its green server cabinets and the company's proprietary, high-capacity cooling system. At one point, Orlando opened a cabinet and had to shout over the roar coming out of it.

The business serves life sciences customers including the **J. Craig Venter Institute**, **Human Longevity Inc.**, **Synthetic Genomics Inc.** and **Dexcom Inc.**

Cooling Capacity

A customer sequencing genomes needs "considerable computational capacity," Orlando said in a 2016 interview, adding that it is "not commodity type computing." Computer servers running data analytics or deep learning programs use a lot of power and generate a lot of heat. A ScaleMatrix cabinet has 10 times the cooling capacity of an average cabinet, Orlando said.

Life science and genomics companies prefer ScaleMatrix because of the security at its facilities as well as high audit standards, Orlando said in the 2016 interview. People visiting the data center must check in with an armed guard. Rooms are locked tight. Visitors must touch a thumb to a biometric reader more than once before gaining access to server rooms, and then again to get into individual server cabinets.

ScaleMatrix has a redundant data center in Houston, and has talked about new locations in Chicago and on the Eastern Seaboard.