

What it means to be ISO 9000 Certified.

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In today's global economy the barriers of trade have been knocked down. Companies have increased their level of performance in order to survive today's aggressive environment. In order to stay competitive, companies must apply effective and efficient plans. The most accepted plan today is the ISO 9000. It is a set of standards that help companies achieve cost effective and quality assurance methods. This paper will explain what ISO 9000 is and what it means to a company to be ISO 9000 certified.

What is ISO?

ISO is an International Organization for Standards that was formed by technical committees. They provide user-friendly guidelines for a wide range of organizations. Examples of these organizations include manufacturing, processing, servicing, printing, forestry, and electronics (www.connect.ab.ca/~praxiom/into.htm). ISO was established in 1947, in Switzerland, with the purpose of developing intellectual, scientific, technological, and economic cooperation between member countries (Bureau of Business Practice). Later in 1979 the ISO Technical Committee (ISO/TC 176) was formed to make a set of guidelines that would bring together and standardize world industries. ISO has affiliates in more than 90 countries. It is interesting to note that ISO comes from the Greek word "isos" which means "same as." The words "same as" can be implied to mean the consumer gets what the consumer expects. In our quality assurance class we have learned that if the consumer gets what they expect, this is consider quality. Therefore, the root word ISO stands for quality.

What is ISO 9000?

ISO 9000 is a set of five International Standards for Quality Assurance.

- ISO 9000 contains guidelines for the other four standards.
- ISO 9001 is intended for suppliers who do a lot of design or customization.
- ISO 9002 involves standards for both production and installation.
- ISO 9003 is guidelines for final test and inspection.
- ISO 9004 is designed to help managers develop a substantial quality system (Bureau of Business Practice).

The ISO 9000 standards are not rules, but merely a set of guidelines that organize their processes and make it more cost effective (www.isoeasy.org).

How does the series on 9000 work?

As businesses change and become more complex, ISO has adapted to meet these demands. ISO has come up with 9001, 9002, 9003 etc. to cover different aspects of the business.

Selection and Use of the Standards		ISO 9000
Internal Use Within Producer	Quality Management Quality Systems Elements	ISO 9004
External Use For Quality Assurance	Three Quality	ISO 9001
	Assurance	ISO 9002
	Models	ISO 9003

Figure 1: Brief explanation of ISO 9000 series.

The table explains the difference between the series and what they objectives are. Companies choose which series they use based on the scope of their operation (www.asq.org). Even the United States government has adopted ISO standards with the ANSI/ASQC Q9000 series.

What is the difference between ISO 9000 and Other Quality Control Awards.

The purpose behind these awards is to bring total quality to a product. By following the ISO 9000 guidelines, companies will have an excellent start on quality assurance models. For example, companies that have previously received the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award have applied those criteria to their operations. However, those companies who have applied the ISO 9000 guidelines into their operations have reaped additional benefits. By applying both criteria to their operations, companies are able to achieve total quality (Bureau of Business Practice). The foundation that ISO 9000 provides will better prepare companies for those Quality Control Awards.

So, what does it mean to be ISO certified?

Often companies become ISO certified because customers require it. For example, a lot of customers in Europe demand ISO 9000 approval. Where some companies miss out is when they only get ISO 9000 certified for marketing reasons. The ISO 9000 standards improve operating procedure and reduce cost. Being ISO certified means that companies operate using the ISO guideline. When companies advertise the fact that they are ISO certified, it has been proven to be a very powerful marketing tool for them. When customers know that their product is ISO 9000 certified they feel assured that their product is what they expect. These stamp of ISO 9000 approval, lets customers know what to expect, thus they get a quality product. The standards set by ISO 9000 insure a dependable Quality Assurance system. Additionally, any company that

does business in Europe knows that customers are demanding products be ISO 9000 certified. As worldwide customers demand ISO 9000 standards, ISO 9000 will become more prevalent. As more international companies come into the market, this will make companies more competitive. The increase in competition will improve the quality and decrease cost of the product, thus creating a better environment for the consumer.

What are some examples of ISO 9000 uses in Industry?

Measurement and calibration is one of the most important elements in quality assurance. ISO 9001-9003 lay down some procedures to be followed when selecting, using, calibrating, controlling, and maintaining measurement standards for measuring equipment. For instance, ISO specifies that each instrument must have a label to show calibration status, usage limits, and any instrument that has failed or suspected to be out of calibration. If an instrument fails this specification, it must be withdrawn from use and labeled conspicuously to prevent accidental use (Morris 10). The procedures in ISO 9001-9003 can be used to ensure the quality of their products. It also states that all calibration procedures must be documented, all personnel performing calibration function must have adequate training, and adjustable devices must be sealed to prevent tampering (Morris 9). These stated procedures are intended to prevent errors that are caused by operators. The procedures also improve the confidence level of the data. By improving the confidence level of the data, companies will be able to see when a problem appears in production within a short period of time. Fast response time to problems will equal more profit for the company.

What are the disadvantages of ISO 9000?

Many companies are ISO 9000, but there are some companies that choose not to be certified. As previously stated, ISO 9000 is a set of guidelines. These guidelines are implemented into companies operations. However, there are reasons why companies would not be ISO.

- The actual change of operations can be very expensive. Usually designated people have to take classes and be trained as the company's liaison for ISO 9000. These people, as part of their full time jobs, train fellow employees how to implement and use ISO 9000 procedures. As is well known in business and industry, it is difficult to change the habits of longtime employees. New procedures are rarely welcomed with open arms. In fact, new ways are usually resisted by everyone. This resistance cuts into profits and also decreases company morale.

- There are times when companies feel that the existing set of operational procedures is already working well and they do not feel a change is necessary. Frequently, companies will have a customer who demands that they be ISO 9000 certified to continue doing business. Now the company has the choice of losing a customer or implementing ISO 9000. Either way money is lost in the short term.

Even though there may be an initial implementing cost, ISO 9000 has been proven to reduce cost and improve the total quality in the long run. The implementation of ISO 9000 benefits far out weigh any disadvantages.

What are the advantages to having a quality system?

Companies strive for a total quality systems because quality is what the customer demands.

There are other reasons why a company may seek a quality system.

- Ensure that products and services provided meet customer requirements.
- Ensure consistency in the day to day operations.
- Ensure that processes are repeatable and predictable.
- Allow the company to create and retain satisfied customers
- Improve the efficiency, reduce operating cost and minimize unproductive time.

All of these features are important in having a competitive company.

ISO 9000 is not just a badge to be worn, it is a set of standards to be followed. It is quickly sweeping the world as an international standard. Those companies who ignore ISO 9000 will be left behind. The advantages far out weight the disadvantages, if a company follows the ISO 9000 guidelines strictly. So what does it mean to be ISO 9000 certified? It means following the ISO 9000 guidelines to build a competitive company in a global economy.

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