

The Intelligent

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Role of international standards to meet global challenges

Quality never comes accidentally, but can be achieved through effective management systems, explains *Dr. Sameer Kumar*.



Gone are the days when companies enjoyed a monopoly in their marketplace. In the current scenario, irrespective of the growth of economies, business sustenance and survival for existence are some of the biggest challenges for companies, especially for companies in the small and medium business sector.

On the other hand, a customer is much more aware and seeks not only quality in a product or service, but also value for money spent. Therefore, companies are focusing on customers, while adopting international standards for quality, products, and management systems in order to get an advantage over their competition.

A large number of decision makers in SME companies are, today, aware of the importance of choosing the right international standard for the growth of their companies. However, many companies do not have the know-how to implement and execute successful certification.

What is ISO?

The International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO) was set up in 1947. Presently headquartered

at Geneva, Switzerland, the ISO is the world's largest developer of international standards. Between 1947 and the present day, ISO has published more than 18,500 international standards for business and commerce, ranging from standards for activities, such as agriculture and construction, mechanical engineering, to medical devices, and the breaking information technology developments.

Although ISO's primary activity is the development of technical standards, ISO standards also have significant economic and social impacts worldwide. ISO standards make a positive difference, not just to engineers and manufacturers for whom they solve basic problems in production and distribution, but to all society as a whole.

The most popular and most widely used Standards are ISO Management Standards, such as ISO 9001.

Management standards

Management standards are based on the accepted and proven best practices implemented by the most successful organisations in the world. Some of the key management standards are for quality, environment, information security,

Most governments, public sector agencies and local authority tenders and contracts now usually stipulate ISO management standard certification as one of the key criteria for selecting contractors.

food safety, among others. There are many other technical standards for specialised sectors.

Compulsory or not?

ISO Management Standards, such as ISO 9001, are very generic in nature and is applicable for all types of organisations, whether manufacturing or service regardless of its type of business. They are not compulsory standards, rather best practices for all organisations that seek to consistently and successfully manage their operations. This in turn, results in quality products and services, with a focus on customer satisfaction.

Benefits

Independent research clearly shows that ISO standards give organisations a clear competitive advantage over rivals. Consistence in quality, increased customer satisfaction, added sales and profits, customer retention, lesser wastage of resources, and a defined system to manage are just some of the advantages. Moreover, an international standard result in better trained staff and gives each resource, clarity in responsibility and authority.

Companies gain certification to ISO Standards for various reasons: Firstly, to gain immediate competitive advantage over their rivals, leading to more contracts, sales and profits; secondly, to enhance their reputation with their customers, suppliers and staff and thirdly, to better meet their legal requirements. Certification to ISO standards is perceived by SMEs as an inexpensive and fast way to enhance a business, resulting in more growth, sales and profits.

Most governments, public sector agencies and local authority tenders and contracts now usually stipulate ISO management standard certification as one of the key criteria for selecting contractors. The same is now the case for corporate sector tenders and contracts and especially within most supply chains.



Dr. Sameer Kumar CEO, Universal Consulting FZE, is a quality professional with an experience of working in more than seven countries. He has provided consultation and training to more than 400 clients in UAE, UK, Thailand, Singapore, Hong Kong and India. He has completed his MBA, PhD and is a six sigma champion by qualification and lead auditor of ISO 9001, ISO 14001 and OHSAS 18001.

However, having a standard is only the first step. Certification is a constant process that requires updating. Certified companies should have their management systems externally audited by a certification body each year. Organisations are also required to undertake an annual internal management system audit. ■

