



Management Systems International, LLC

2890 Pio Pico Dr., Ste. 200
Carlsbad, CA 92008
toll free 888.914.9141
760.434.9141

Selecting an ISO Consulting Firm

*By Diana L. Procter, M. S.,
President of Management Systems International*
www.msi-international.com

October 13, 2010

Contents

Contents.....	2
Introducing ISO Consultants.....	3
Introducing ISO Consultants.....	3
Challenges Companies Face.....	3
The Previous Approach.....	3
How to Find an ISO Consultant.....	4
Qualification Criteria	4
Experience	4
Availability.....	5
Reference Quality	5
Selection Criteria	6
Approach	6
Interpersonal skills	6
Ability.....	7
Consulting Fees to Expect.....	7
MSI's Services	7
System Implementation	8
Summary.....	8



Management Systems International, LLC

Introducing ISO Consultants

Implementing an ISO Quality or Environmental Management System is a critical milestone for your organization. Organizing and assessing your internal team is the first crucial step. This assessment often reveals that internal resources and personnel are insufficient, motivating organizations to seek an ISO consulting firm.

Selecting an ISO consulting firm is a daunting task and should not be taken lightly. This paper explains how to find ISO consulting firms, what qualification and selection criteria to use, what fees to expect and other information you need to critically select the best-qualified ISO consulting firm for implementing your Management System.

Challenges Companies Face

Organizations today are typically required to earn ISO certification. They usually need to achieve ISO 9001 certification through a Quality Management System (QMS), but are increasingly required to achieve AS 9100 Aerospace/Defense certification, a derivative of ISO 9001. Another common

certification is ISO 14001 through an Environmental Management System (EMS).

In certain situations, an organization may need certification to earn a contract or maintain an existing contract. To qualify ISO consulting firms, first determine the standard you desire out of the numerous ISO 9000 variations. Many standards are industry-specific, such as the AS 9100 standard.

While you are investigating the standards for your organization, you will notice that they can be very confusing. To sort through this confusion, first, review your customer or potential customer requirements. Ask key customers for their requirements or review potential customers' past RFQs. Then, approach potential ISO consulting firms with these details to determine your applicable standards. It is important to remember that ISO 9001, AS 9100 and ISO 14001 standards are management system standards, not product quality standards. With an idea of the standard you seek, you will be ready to select the ISO consulting firm best qualified to assist your organization.

The Previous Approach

In the past, most organizations automatically approached the



Management Systems International, LLC

certification process thinking they only needed to train a few key internal personnel to implement an ISO system within a specific timeframe. And voila, they would soon be placing the certification plaque on the reception wall.

Organizations now generally recognize that this approach may not be entirely effective. Your personnel may not have the time to learn or the objectivity to complete the implementation process.

Companies can take approximately two years using internal resources vs. six months with a consultant to earn ISO certification. An ISO consulting firm offers valuable expertise that greatly optimizes this certification process.

How to Find an ISO Consultant

Before you officially take steps to finding qualified ISO consulting firms, understand that you are not buying a standard widget with a stock number. Just like any other professional firm, such as a financial adviser, tax preparer or even a doctor, you above all need to know their approach and capabilities. You really only

get one shot to select the right ISO consultant for your organization, so foremost designate the right personnel to qualify and select your ISO consulting firm.

Choosing an ISO consulting firm is essentially a two-step process:

First, qualify potential ISO consulting firms. Ask for referrals from a respectable company like yours that have already earned ISO certification. Often, organizations search "ISO consultant" online, but more than 12 million firms may appear. To narrow the results, you may review the HTML meta description tags to evaluate the firms, checking out the top few listings. You could also visit registrars' websites, such as QMI.com or NQA-USA.com, to review their consultant directories. These directories usually only list ISO consulting firms that the auditing firm has experienced.

Second, select your ISO consulting firm from your list of potential firms.

Qualification Criteria

Experience

In addition to the consulting firm's experience, consider the experience of the individual who would be assigned to your project. To properly assess his or her experience and background, know your expectations beforehand. For



Management Systems International, LLC

instance, are you looking for an ISO consultant with many years of full turnkey experience that can help your organization quickly yet efficiently earn ISO certification? Or do you want an ISO consultant who will only coach your organization through the certification process? Also, consider the potential ISO consulting firms' experience in your specific industry.

Further, know your budget and obtain preliminary approval before pursuing any in-depth discussion with the prospective ISO consultants.

During the initial phone interviews with the prospective ISO consulting firms, be prepared to clarify the part(s) of your organization that require certification—your entire organization, certain business units or just manufacturing activities? Also, be prepared to provide your number of employees to every potential ISO consulting firm and answer if your company designs their own products or builds them based on customer specifications. Finally, be ready to describe your organization's makeup.

Availability

The timeframe you designate to the certification process will highlight the ISO consultants available to meet your requirements. The greater your organization's flexibility, the greater your choices of ISO consulting firms. Ask the firms their size and how they will complete your project by your deadline. Also, consider whether you want an ISO consulting firm that has been in business for years, or an individual ISO consultant who has only been operating for a year or so and may not be available to complete your project.

Reference Quality

By familiarizing yourself with ISO consulting firms' past projects, you will know the types of hurdles they have successfully overcome. This knowledge can show you if they can handle your project's level of difficulty. To measure this difficulty, consider your organization's weaknesses. For example, does your organization ever operate bureaucratically, resist change in certain areas or slack off on performing a majority of its processes?

Note that you do not need to explicitly reveal these weaknesses to the prospective ISO consultants. Rather, indirectly learn if each consultant could handle your



Management Systems International, LLC

project by asking how they helped other organizations with similar weaknesses. You want an experienced ISO consultant proven in working through a wide range of implementation challenges.

Selection Criteria

During the qualification stage, you hopefully narrowed your list of qualified ISO consulting firms to a small number of options. Beyond technical capabilities, evaluate the consultants' approach, interpersonal skills and ability to address your organization's complexities to select the right ISO consultant. Meet with the ISO consulting firms in person to optimally determine if they satisfy these criteria.

Approach

When an ISO consultant properly approaches a project, you can be confident it will successfully lead your organization to ISO certification.

Every ISO standard requires developing certain procedures, which is by far the most burdensome demand of achieving ISO certification. At the same

time, your organization should take this opportunity to formalize your processes. Yet, you cannot dedicate the time fully demanded by this development while running your organization and filling customer orders. So how does an ISO consultant perform these tasks without disrupting your operations?

To effectively determine the ISO consultants' approach and confirm that it will not disrupt your operations, conduct interviews with the key personnel who would perform the implementation including the overseeing manager. Ask for their overall consulting style; if they consultatively present many available options, and the pros and cons of each option; and if they determine the best project approach with you. Also, consider if the ISO consultants are creative and effective in describing your processes and ask them to formally agree to the discussed approach.

Interpersonal skills

An ISO consultant's relationship and communication skills are the crux to facilitating ISO certification for your organization. As roadblocks inevitably occur throughout the project, you will need to trust the ISO consulting firm to drive through them while building relationships. As you assess the ISO consultants, consider if they will see roadblocks



Management Systems International, LLC

coming and be able to work through them by communicating the situation to the proper managers. Also, consider if they will listen to your viewpoint and effectively explain occurrences without using ISO jargon to bridge the gaps. Finally, will the ISO consulting firms let you know their activities in advanced, and how will they communicate their progress?

Ability

Learn the ISO consultants' technical capabilities in detail. Then, you can determine if they offer the capabilities your organization needs.

Consulting Fees to Expect

Most ISO consultants base their fees on the organization's scope of work, number of employees and operational complexity.

Note that you could save significant fees with any ISO requirements you have already defined and routinely meet. Any ISO standard can be purchased at ASQ.com or Global.IHS.com. ISO consulting firms should provide an estimate of the number of days they will take

to fulfill your scope of work and see your organization through to certification. Daily rates commonly range from \$600 to \$1,500. On average, a firm with 15 to 45 employees charges \$25,000 to \$52,000 for consulting projects.

Price is an important factor, but not the only one. You may contract with the lowest bidder and never earn certification.

MSI's Services

Since 1998, MSI has comprehensively provided consulting, training and software on international standards to **Power Business Forward**. In true partnership with you, our expert consultants leverage years of experience with ISO 9001, ISO 14001 and AS 9100 standards, advanced tools and highly effective procedures. We have amassed an impressive string of successes using our proven methodology. More than 60 organizations have adopted our SurePath™ approach and been registered on their first attempt to meet ISO 9001, AS 9100 or ISO 14001 standards. Not one of our clients has ever been rejected for certification. MSI attends every audit, allowing us to continually improve our approach.

MSI's Vision is to innovatively develop and maintain management systems that deliver strategic and



Management Systems International, LLC

continuous improvements for all types of companies.

System Implementation

To efficiently select an ISO consulting firm, experts recommend drafting a scope of work featuring your organization's project scope, desired ISO standard, duty expectations of the ISO consulting firm, timeline and any other critical factors.

As you evaluate ISO consulting firms, this scope of work may change—so make sure to update it as well as all involved in the final selection.

Summary

In the end, you want the ISO consulting firm you believe can successfully implement your organization's Quality or Environmental Management System while developing your ability to effectively maintain it.