

HOW FAST CAN WE GET ISO CERTIFIED?

Mark A. Randig

As a consultant that specializes in helping small businesses to achieve ISO 9001:2000 certification, I'm frequently asked by potential clients "*how fast can we get certified?*". The typical reason behind this question is a business opportunity that's recently arisen, meaning that the answer the client hopes to hear is "*right away...if not sooner*".

Obtaining ISO 9001:2000 certification is a significant achievement and it's going to take a considerable amount of work. There are certain variables however, that will facilitate the certification process, just as there are others that will extend the duration, relatively speaking.

When asked by a client how long it will take to get certified, I typically base my estimate on their answers to the following questions:

- How much time can be allocated to this project based on your busy schedules?
- What is the proposed scope of your certification?
- How large is your organization and/or how complex are your processes?
- How well-defined and documented are your existing processes?
- How much knowledge does your organization possess relative to the ISO 9001 standard?
- What is the planned degree of consultant involvement?
- Once a registrar has been selected, what's their availability?

From the list above, it is likely that preparation time will increase with the size of your organization, the complexity of its operations and the scope of the proposed certification. In contrast, preparation time will be inversely related to the knowledge level of your personnel, the degree of compliance that already exists within established systems and the resources made available to get the job done.

There is one final note however, and this is in addition to whatever preparation time is necessary to implement your Quality Management System (QMS); your ISO registrar will require several month's worth of objective evidence to review as part of your certification audit. This evidence is necessary to verify that your QMS is meeting the requirements of the standard.

Now, back to the initial question of "*how fast can we get certified?*" - we've helped organizations achieve certification in as little as 4 months and we've also had projects take up to a year or more. It really is up to the organization, and their level of commitment to obtain certification.

There's no question about it however, obtaining ISO 9001:2000 certification is a significant achievement, and it is going to take a considerable amount of work.

Mark Randig is the President and Founder of MAS Solutions LLC., a Houston Texas based consulting firm that specializes in helping companies achieve breakthrough performance by focusing on Quality Enhancement and Productivity Improvement. To get your FREE copy of Mark's newsletter "The Quality Specialist", go to <http://www.masquality.com/newsletter>.

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