

ISO CERTIFICATION: 7 COSTLY PITFALLS TO AVOID

Everything you need to know to avoid costly mistakes while applying for, receiving, and maintaining ISO Certification.

Why ISO?

ISO Certification proves to customers and other businesses that your company has tested, proven, internationally-recognised standards in place to ensure quality and consistency, throughout its operations. Whether you manufacture products, warehouse and distribute items, or market services, the right ISO Certification can prove to outsiders that you are a company that is worth doing business with.

ISO Certification makes a difference – particularly with companies who are looking to expand overseas.

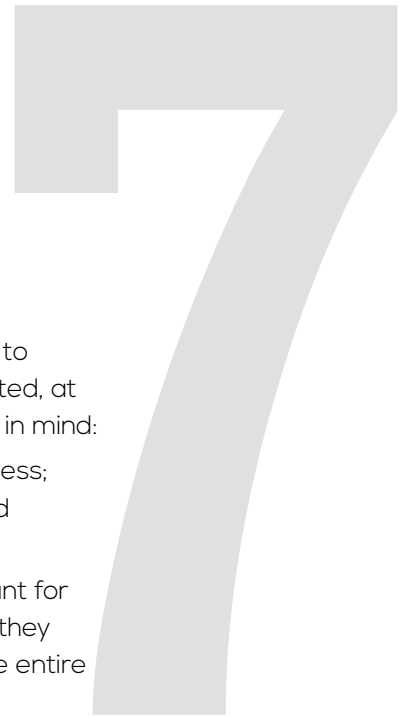
Applying for, receiving, and maintaining ISO Certification is no picnic. It is a rigorous and stringent process that requires input and dedication from your top management, as well as a regular investment of time and resources to maintain auditing and process controls.

ISO Certification is a mark of high quality and tested processes, which in turn gives your company a reputation of consistently delivering a superior product or service. Completing the ISO certification process can give your company an edge over the competition as well as encouraging other businesses to contract your company to do business with them.

ISO Certification is worth the effort – if you have the time.

If you are willing to take the time to complete ISO Certification and uphold the best practice you have established as a result, then you can reap considerable rewards. However, it is important to avoid a few common stumbling blocks. The team at Integrated Compliance Solutions have put together this document to outline some of the common issues, so your ISO Certification can be completed more smoothly and in less time.

Leaving it Late



The single most common problem that companies have when choosing to proceed with ISO Certification is waiting until the last minute to get started, at which point you've likely lost months of potential preparation time. Keep in mind:

- There will never be a "perfect" time to undergo the certification process; however, it is very important to consider the fact that preparing and applying for certification can take several months.
- Most certification bodies want to ensure that your system is compliant for at least a few months on paper prior to awarding certification, and they are booked well in advance. In reality it can take 6-12 months for the entire process to complete.
- Delays and other projects can interfere with ensuring a quality delivery, which in turn can result in a rushed result and poor performance, something that commonly leads to non-conformance issues and can cost you in time and additional auditor fees.

The certification process takes anywhere from 3-12 months, so it is imperative that you start as early as possible.

The Lesson

Don't wait to start the ISO certification process, and don't underestimate the time it takes to complete. Get started now so your company has the best chance of completing the process in time and for the least amount of expenditure.

Did you know?

ICS offers self-paced ISO Certification packages that you can complete at your leisure, so you can work towards certification during quiet periods or after hours.

Hiring Consultants

You've now realised that your company needs to get started on the ISO Certification process, and that it's going to take more time than you have to spare. So why not hire a consultant? While there are certainly many highly skilled, qualified and dedicated consultants out there, unfortunately there are also some who are simply not. Hiring the wrong consultant can not only waste your time and money, it can also set you back months in the certification process.

Prior to hiring an ISO Certification consultant you should, at the very least, commit yourself to:

- Searching intuitively online for reputable companies
- Considering at least 3 different quotes in your local area
- Short listing candidates who are willing to meet in person
- Conducting in-person interviews for your top candidates

Apart from registration with an industry body, there is little regulation of ISO Consultants, so you need to be cautious when hiring outside consultants.

During the on-site interview look for candidates who:

- Are willing to spend at least one hour discussing your needs and concerns
- Offer useful information and demonstrate a passion for their field
- Does not use scare tactics or offer unrealistic promises ("You'll have your certificate by the end of next week!")
- Are able to provide at least one reference that you can call

Hire the consultant who offers you the best blend of expertise and budget.

Did you know?

ICS provides CVs and references for all of our consultants, as well as proof of registrations and qualifications, so you know you are working with a professional.

Poor Body Choice



There are over 35 ISO Certification bodies to choose from, which means you need to seriously consider which body is best equipped to serve your company and which “logo” is best going to enhance your marketing. Here are a few suggestions:

- Start by researching your competitors and similar industries to see which ISO Certification body they have chosen.
- Consider whether an international certification body will better serve your company, particularly if the majority of your product is shipped overseas or you are looking to expand into international markets.
- A local certification body will be easier to work with, especially if they are willing to meet with you in person.
- Ensure the body you choose specialises in the areas your business is in.
- Request a CV (and ideally referees) for the auditor who will be assigned to you, as not all auditors are equally proficient. You also have the right to request a different auditor if you are unhappy with the one who has been assigned to your firm.

Important: Ensure that the body you choose is accredited by JASANZ – otherwise your certification may not be worth the paper it’s printed on.

Keep in mind that ISO Certification is a for-profit business, and many ISO Certification bodies are focused on profits. Beware high-pressure sales techniques, “too good to be true” deals, or companies with little to no track record.

Did you know we offer a *Best Choice Certification Body* service?

We research and find 3 highly relevant certification bodies with detailed reviews, insights and quotes relevant to your needs so you can make an informed decision.

4 Unrealistic Expectations

Applying for ISO Certification has become far more streamlined in recent years; however, it is important not to underestimate the time and work involved in achieving certification. Make sure you have realistic expectations about the process before you begin.

You are essentially developing procedures and practices for your company from scratch, which will hopefully serve you well for decades to come. And while it may seem easy to slap together some policies and procedures, in reality you have to consistently be able to show auditors that your system works for you and is implemented throughout your organisation.

Without outside help, you will need to plan to meet with senior management to discuss ISO implementation for at least a half day each week for a minimum of 6 months, up to 12 months. There is also a major learning component in understanding the ISO standards, which can take time to master, and often people feel uncertain whether they are on the right track.

Meeting with an ICS Consultant to discuss your requirements can help you put together a realistic timeline, as well as uncover ways to speed up the process.

It can be good practice to at least check in with a consultant at the beginning, middle, and end of the project to make sure you are on track. At ICS, we are often called in by companies who have unsuccessfully tried for over 12 months to put in a system themselves and subsequently failed the audit. Just a short time with a consultant would have saved them this unnecessary expense and disappointment.

The ISO Certification process requires a significant commitment of time, resources, and capital. Before you jump in, it's a good idea to ensure that you fully understand what will be required.

Trusting Templates



An expert consultant can do much of the work required for successful certification in a fraction of the time it would take you. However, you and your senior managers will still have to make time for regular meetings with the consultant in order to make approve critical decisions about the business system structure and content.

Why not just buy an online template for ISO Certification? While this sounds like a simple solution, and it's certainly the cheapest option in the short term, the problem is that templates don't take into account the idiosyncrasies of each business, leaving gaps where you could encounter non-compliance, which could set back the certification process by months. Consider:

- These templates are designed to cover several industries, so they may include far more paperwork than you would need to complete if you had a system customised to your business.
- Templates tend to focus purely on meeting ISO standards, (usually clause by clause - the worst possible design!) not what is necessarily going to help your business grow and be more productive.
- Templates can provide you with a decent "starting point" for your ISO Certification, AS LONG AS you customise them from there.

If you have decided to start with a template, look for an Australian-developed template - NOT based on clauses of the standard, and which is easily customisable.

Templates may speed up certification initially, but in the long run you are better served by creating customised processes based on what you are already doing.

The Lesson

A purely customised system will cost you more time (and more money if you hire a consultant) in the short term. However it will save you time and money in the long term because your system will be tailored specifically to your needs, making it much more efficient and integral to your business, rather than a "compliance only" system which can become a constant drain on your financial and human resources to maintain.

2 Delegating

"I'll just get my assistant to do it." – This is probably one of the biggest errors that companies and CEO's make when deciding to proceed with ISO Certification. A few reasons why:

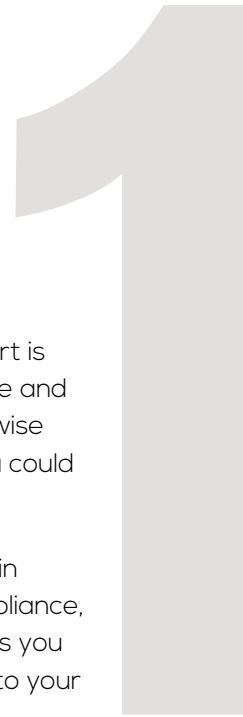
- Remember that you are creating a business system here, one that has to meet the needs of your company as well as ISO Certification auditing practices. In order to do this, the person (preferably people) who develops your processes must have intimate knowledge of how everything works – from ordering to payment, as well as packaging, delivery, and quality control.
- Support and admin staff members simply do not have the insight or mandate to change systems within the company, decide business objectives, set job descriptions or determine the structure of management and authority levels.
- In order to successfully develop and maintain ISO Certification, each manager within your company needs to make a commitment to actively provide information and be willing to meet regularly to discuss progress and changes to your system and practices.

Developing new standards and business practices is a task that is best left to qualified senior managers and experienced consultants – not handed off to entry-level staff.

The Lesson

The majority of ISO Certification tasks will need to be handled by top management, not support staff. If you don't have much time to dedicate to the ISO Certification process, consider hiring a qualified consultant to help. But be prepared that top management WILL need to be involved and committed if the project is to be a success.

Short Term Gain



Once you have achieved your ISO Certificate it may seem like the hard part is over, which it is to an extent. However, you still need to dedicate some time and energy to upholding the business practices outlined in your system, otherwise your certification isn't worth the paper it's printed on and what's more you could fail your next audit and risk losing your certification.

While ISO Certification will help set you apart from competitors and bring in more business, the fact is that if your sole objective is to just achieve compliance, then ISO Certification is unlikely to give your company any improvement, as you are not applying the good business principles promoted in the standards to your everyday business practices.

A quality ISO-compliant business process should include the following:

- Clear documentation about your company, what it does, and how it does it
- Consistent procedures and practices
- Crystal clear, measurable objectives
- A culture and practice of continuous improvement
- Robust processes for meeting customer needs.

Certification is important, but so is maintaining the practices outlined in your documentation, to ensure ongoing conformance to ISO standards and to provide a better business experience to your clients.

In a nutshell, if you choose to proceed with a customised ISO certification approach (either completed in-house, or by qualified consultants), you will achieve greater results by improving the way your company does business, instead of just aiming for a certificate on the wall.

Did you know?

Besides assisting with ISO Certification, ICS can help create customised business practices and procedures.

Do You Need Help?

It is perfectly understandable that you are busy successfully running your company and ISO Certification is something that you would like, but don't have time for.

However, if you consider how much business you could be potentially losing by not being ISO compliant, then completing the process sooner rather than later makes much more sense.

This is why Integrated Compliance Solutions has a team of qualified consultants – to help you get through the process of ISO Certification with a minimal expenditure of your time and effort and money.

We know your time is valuable, as well as the fact that a customised system is going to serve your company better by meeting your specific needs and optimising your processes to prepare your business for growth.

So, if you have been putting off getting ISO Certification, now is a great time to get started! Please feel free to contact us at 1300 132 745 or visit our website to learn more, or to request a quote.

We look forward to the opportunity to help your company succeed at obtaining ISO Certification.

Yours sincerely,

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