



Implementing ISO 14001 with a consultant vs. DIY approach

WHITE PAPER

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Executive summary

Up until now, companies had only two methods for implementation of [ISO 14001](#): one could either track down dozens of resources and patch them together, or bring in an expert consultant to do all the work. Although the first method was more cost effective, it didn't always work very well. The second option, on the other hand, required a significant amount of money and allowed most of the know-how acquired during the implementation to walk out the door – along with the consultant.

The situation with ISO 14001 implementation has changed significantly in the last couple of years. Custom-built online tools now provide budget-savvy environmental managers and ISO 14001 implementers with the high-quality information and advice they need in one place. This is drastically reducing the cost of implementation, while ensuring a project is completed quickly and effectively.

The advantages of online solutions (greater cost effectiveness compared to hiring consultants, high-quality, ready to-use document templates, retained knowledge in the business, step-by-step guidance, and community support) make this new approach to ISO 14001 implementation a compelling option.

Introduction

Enhancing its reputation is one of the goals of every company, and this is often achieved through demonstrating care for the preservation of the environment. Among other benefits that ISO 14001 brings to the company, it can be one of the tools that will help companies to enhance their image and expand their market by being qualified to apply for tenders and meet customer and legal requirements. For those reasons, more and more companies worldwide are driven toward ISO 14001 implementation, and the number of certificates is growing every year, but the road toward the certificate is not always easy. (Read this article to learn more: [6 Key Benefits of ISO 14001](#).)

When making the first steps toward ISO 14001 certification, you're probably puzzled by the various approaches on how to start and finish such a project successfully. The first big set of questions for companies is what to expect from the implementation, how it should be conducted, what to expect, and how much it will cost. Even before the implementation project starts, the company must become familiar with the standard to get some idea of what to expect at the end of the project. There are two basic options to implement these standards: (1) use a consultant, or (2) implement the standard with a Do-It-Yourself approach – but taking advantage of external know-how.

The implementation with a consultant

Pros. This option implies hiring an expert from outside of the organization (usually this is a local consultant) with experience in implementation of the standard – this person then analyzes your company, conducts the interviews, develops the documentation, and everything else – basically, the role of the consultant is to implement the standard on behalf of your company. Here are some benefits of hiring a consultant:

- A consultant can do all the work for you, so it seems like you save your time for other things.
- A consultant can define the steps in the project, what should be avoided, and what you should focus your efforts on.
- The consultant reviews and corrects all the documents, ensuring compliance of your system with ISO 14001.
- A consultant can present you with the ISO 14001 certification criteria, and tell you what you need to get ready for certification.
- Because your ISO 14001 consultant will also perform the check before the certification, you are assured compliance.

Cons. Consultants are undoubtedly expensive, so this option requires the most financial resources. Also, it requires great confidence in the consultant, because you will be sharing almost all of your sensitive company information with him (e.g., how the company is organized, its main processes and key competitive advantages, who the most important people are, etc.). Finally, having an outsider writing the documentation can make your employees feel unfamiliar with the documents, because of the different style and way of thinking that will be imposed on them. So, here are some of the most common weaknesses of this approach:

- Engaging a high-quality consultant is costly, considering the time they have to spend on site in your organization; unfortunately, a bad consultant costs even more.
- An on-site consultant learns your weaknesses, knows your strategies, and has easy access to company secrets.
- At the end of the project, the consultant leaves – and takes all that expert knowledge with him. Often, employees don't even understand how to maintain the documentation, leading to declining use and eventual abandonment of all those documents you paid for.
- Consultant fees are usually fixed and encompass the entire project. If you don't like his work, you'll probably still have to pay for his services.

The Do-It-Yourself (DIY) implementation

Deciding to implement the standard by yourself means relying primarily on the knowledge and the capacity of your own employees. In this option, your employees are doing all the analysis, performing all the interviews, writing the documentation, etc. This sounds scary, and eventual success might seem far from ensured. However, there are [online solutions](#) that can guide you and help you along this route, ensuring a safe journey to the certificate.

This method might not be right for every business, every time – and it's not a magic bullet. There is hardly one solution that will do everything for you. Regardless of this, online resources are a valuable tool for the efficient completion of ISO 14001 implementation without the high price or high stress.

Pros. This is probably the most cost-effective option because online tools are far cheaper than hiring a consultant on site; you're also preserving the confidentiality of your sensitive information, because you are preventing anyone from the outside from learning about your internal processes or documentation; finally, writing your own documentation increases the commitment of your employees toward the required changes. Additional benefits of this approach are:

- Online tools have a broader set of experiences incorporated into them, because they are available worldwide and get feedback from their customers all over the world.
- You keep all that knowledge inside your organization. Employees learn how to maintain the documentation, improve upon it, and use it on a daily basis.
- You pay only once, only for what you need, and you can use the templates as many times as you like.

Cons. Your employees will still need to put a lot of effort into it and learn about the implementation, so this option is more time consuming and takes more time to implement the standard; also, this option does not resolve the problem if your employees are completely overwhelmed with other projects and have absolutely no time for anything new.

What does a good online solution include?

Just like consultants, there are a variety of online solutions and it can be hard to determine which solution is the best for you. The first thing to be considered is what you get for your money – are you

getting only a bunch of folders with documents, or does it include some additional support? Here are some examples of criteria that can help you determine whether the solution is right for you:

Content of the documentation package – This is the first thing to look at. Does the documentation package include all mandatory documents? Furthermore, does it contain documents that are not mandatory, but are useful for the implementation and operation of the EMS?

Quality of the documents – This doesn't usually come to mind until you start filling in the documents and tailoring them to your needs. Is the document formatting consistent throughout the entire package? Are the documents appealing? Do the documents include comments to help you navigate through each document and help you fill them in?

Additional helping tools – The need for such tools emerges later in the implementation process, and it is easy to overlook it at the moment when you are buying the package. Are your providers offering some additional tools that might help you when you get stuck, or when you want to make an estimate of the timeframe? Such tools might include a [GAP Analysis tool](#) or [video tutorials](#) that will help you fill in the documents.

Know-how for the implementation – This is a fundamental criterion, because the knowledge is what remains in the company and will ensure that you yield the benefits from ISO 14001 implementation. Do the providers offer online courses so your employees can learn about ISO 14001 [foundations](#) and [internal audit](#), are there any [articles](#) or [webinars](#) that explain different parts of the standard?

Personal interaction – A good expert can hardly be completely replaced by an online solution. Does the online solution include expert help at critical stages in the process? Can you ask a question via email or schedule an online consultation? Can they review your documents so you are sure that your documentation is compliant with the standard? This element of the online solution can have a great impact on your decision, because it enables you to get a consultant's knowledge and advice at the moments when you need it the most, and to get the consultant's help only when you really need it.

Availability in your language – Using a solution that is not translated into the language that the employees use might significantly expand the timeframe for the implementation. What every company wants to avoid is translation of the documents, especially when it comes to some professional matter where translation mistakes can have a profound effect.

Scalability of the online solution – Once you hear the phrase “one size fits all,” it is time to move away from a product. Although the requirements of the standard are the same for every company, the way those requirements are met will depend on the size of the company and the complexity of its processes. Using documentation for a big company in a small one will cause problems, and vice versa. See if they have [various sizes of packages](#). Also, do they have some packages that deal with particular parts of the standard in case you do not need the entire package? Some examples are [internal audit](#), or the [transition](#) if you only need to make the transition to the 2015 version of the standard.

Having all these criteria in mind will prevent you from buying something that won't help you or wouldn't fit your needs. Make sure you get good value for your money, and avoid wasting it on a product that doesn't work for you.

Which implementation approach is best for you?

Which path you take to ISO 14001 implementation depends on your unique situation. So, to help you decide which approach is best for you, here is a quick guide to your options:

Hire a consultant if:

- Time is a major concern for you. Hiring a consultant will help you achieve success in a short timeframe.
- You don't have people who can allocate time to an implementation project. A consultant can act as that person on the ground.
- Cost is not your primary concern.
- You're sure you will get a top-level consultant, as this is the best way to ensure they bring added value to the table.

Do it yourself if:

- You have enough time to put into your project.
- You want to cut the implementation expenses.
- You have some spare time, but don't want everyone's daily routines to be overly impacted.
- You want the knowledge of ISO 14001 implementation to be retained in-house.

Conclusion

Previously, the most successful route to ISO 14001 implementation was to hire a consultant, but the options available to you have now expanded. Rather than searching for the information you need from a range of online sources, you can now use dedicated one-stop-shop online services.

The rise of these new online tools has, for the first time, made the do-it-yourself approach to implementation a feasible one.

Before setting out on an implementation journey, it's imperative to pick the strategy that best suits your needs. What's more, that particularly depends on your one-of-a-kind circumstance. For some, hiring a consultant will be the best choice; for others, the new online tools provide an appealing option.

One thing is without a doubt: the ascent of online solutions has changed the scene of ISO 14001 implementation.

Sample Documentation Templates

Here you can download a free preview of the [ISO 14001 Documentation Toolkit](#) – in this free preview you will be able to see the Table of Contents showing each of the templates, as well as a few sections from each document.



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