



Implementing ISO 9001:2015 with a consultant vs. DIY approach

WHITE PAPER

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Executive summary

Before now, there were only two ways to become certified against [ISO 9001](#): one could either track down dozens of resources and patch them together, or bring in an expert consultant to do all the work. While the first method cost less, it did not always work very well. The second option, on the other hand, was quite costly and allowed all the information and education acquired during the implementation to walk out the door – along with the consultant.

Now the landscape of ISO 9001 implementation has fundamentally changed. Custom-built online tools now provide budget-savvy Quality Managers and ISO 9001 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 benefits these tools bring (large cost savings 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 9001 implementation a compelling option.

Introduction

One of the goals of every company is to create a bigger profit and avoid losses and financial mismanagement. Among other benefits that ISO 9001 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 deciding to implement ISO 9001 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: [Six Key Benefits of ISO 9001 Implementation](#).)

At the very beginning of ISO 9001 implementation, you are probably overwhelmed with various approaches on how to start and finish such a project successfully. One of the biggest problems is the fact that the company does not even know what to expect from the implementation, what the deliverables are, or how much work it takes. 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. In this option you hire an expert from outside (usually, this is a local consultant) who has experience with the implementation of the standard – this person then performs the analysis of your company, does the interviews, writes the documentation, and everything else – basically, he is implementing the whole standard on your behalf. 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.
- The consultant reviews and corrects all the documents, making sure you are compliant with ISO 9001.
- A consultant can show you the ISO 9001 certification criteria, and tell you what you need to get ready for certification.

Cons. Consultants obviously cost money, so this is the most expensive option. Further, you are opening access to almost all of your company secrets (e.g., how the company is organized, its main processes and key competitive advantages, who the most important people are, etc.) to an outsider. Finally, when someone from outside is writing the documentation, the employees might feel those policies and procedures are imposed on them, so often they look for ways to bypass them. In addition to this, here are some of the most common weaknesses of this approach:

- A good consultant is expensive, due to the time they have to spend onsite 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 do not 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 do not like his work, you will still probably have to pay for his services.

The Do-It-Yourself implementation

This is when you decide to implement the standard 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 is far from ensured. However, there are [online solutions](#) that can guide you and help you along the way, ensuring a safe path to the certificate.

This method might not be right for every business, every time – and it is not a magic bullet. Actually, there is no one solution that will do everything for you. Still, online tools are a valuable resource for the efficient completion of ISO 9001 implementation without the high price or high stress.

Pros. This is probably the cheapest option because online tools are far cheaper than hiring consultant on site. You are also not allowing anyone from the outside to learn anything about your internal processes or documentation. Finally, writing your own documentation increases the commitment of your employees towards the required changes. Additional benefits of this approach are:

- Online tools have a broader set of experiences incorporated in them, since 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 learn about the implementation, so this is not the quickest way to implement the standard. In addition, 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, online solutions come in different shapes and sizes, 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 contain all mandatory documents? Furthermore, does it contain documents that are not mandatory, but are useful for the implementation and operation of the QMS?

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

Additional helping tools – Need for such tools emerges later in the implementation process, and it is easy to overlook this 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 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 benefits from ISO 9001. Do your providers offer online courses so your employees can learn about ISO 9001 [foundation](#) and the [internal audit](#)? Are there any articles or webinars that explain different parts of the standard?

Personal interaction – The online solution cannot completely replace the insight from an expert. Does the online solution include expert help in 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, since it enables you to get the consultant's knowledge and advice at the moments when you need them 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 to 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 “one size fits all” phrase, it is time to move away from such product. Although the requirements of the standard are the same for every company, the way in which those requirements are met will depend on the size of the company and the complexity of its

processes. Using documentation created for a big company in a small one will cause problems, and vice versa. See if they have [different packages for different purposes](#).

Having all these criteria in mind will prevent you from buying something that will not help you or would not fit your needs. Make sure you get good value for your money and avoid wasting it on a product that does not work for you.

Which implementation approach is best for you?

Which path you take to ISO 9001 implementation depends on your unique situation. Therefore, 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 do not 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 are 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 do not want everyone's daily routines to be overly impacted.

You want the knowledge of ISO 9001 implementation to be retained in-house.

Conclusion

Where once the most likely route to a successful ISO 9001 implementation was to hire a consultant, the options available to you have now expanded. Instead of having to locate all 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 embarking on an implementation project, it is vital to choose the method that best suits your needs. Moreover, that very much depends on your unique situation. For some, hiring a consultant will be the best option; for others, the new online tools provide an attractive choice.

One thing is for sure: the rise of online services has changed the landscape of ISO 9001 implementation.

Useful resources

Here you can download a free preview of the [ISO 9001 Documentation Toolkit](#) – in this free preview; you will be able to see the Table of Contents of each template, as well as a few sections from each document.

In addition, the online [ISO 9001 Foundations Course](#) that will explain the basics of the standard, and the implementation steps.



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