

IMPACT

ISO 9001 FOR ARCHITECTS ISSUE 1

The proven benefits of ISO certification

ISO certification has a positive impact on businesses of all sizes and in all industry sectors and especially for architectural practices. Far from being a cosmetic marketing tool, the real and proven benefits of certification are plain to see. The fundamentals of ISO certification will make your company more efficient and increase your competitive edge.

In many industries it has already become a basic requirement for doing business. With emphasis on the need for level playing fields to be maintained across national and international boundaries, companies without internationally recognised certification are finding themselves on uneven ground. Some companies may even refuse to do business with you if you do not have the relevant standard. This is particularly true in the architectural and construction industry, for example, ISO certification is proving to be mandatory if the practices

concerned wish to pitch for public-sector projects and avoid losing high-value commissions.

The certification process provides companies with an excellent internal communications' tool, improving employee interaction and motivation, enabling effective interpretation of customers' needs, improving documentation, increasing productivity and, consequently, enhancing inter-company relations. As a result, and certainly with the practices highlighted in this issue, companies with ISO certification are more likely to be innovative and profitable, competing more successfully in domestic and international marketplace and demonstrating their ability to satisfy the customer.

With increased competition can you afford not to consider certification. Don't just take our word for it – the following architect's practices are real proof of ISO's benefits.

CONSISTENCY AND COMMITMENT BACKED UP BY ISO CERTIFICATION

Austin-Smith Lord is one of the UK's top architectural practices, which has maintained this position over many years due to the company's commitment to architectural innovation, environmentally responsible design and by providing clients with a level of design excellence that strives to exceed expectations. Operating as a multi-disciplinary practice, Austin-Smith Lord's diverse portfolio includes many award winning projects across a wide range of sectors throughout the UK, Europe and the Middle East.

Established in 1949 and currently employing around 135 staff, Austin-Smith Lord has

"...being ISO certified has made us more attractive to the public sector and we have expanded as a result."

offices in London, Cardiff, Glasgow, Manchester and Liverpool and has had been ISO certified for an impressive 10 years to date.

Peter Lyon, Partner and Quality Representative said that the decision to seek ISO certification

was originally made to avoid being discounted from work within the public sector. He explains, "In the European Journal where public sector jobs are advertised, it was becoming more commonplace for companies to be asked whether they were ISO certified. Although we had professional indemnity insurance, which meant that we already had a risk management system in place, we needed to fine tune it in order to meet the criteria required for ISO 9000. It has provided consistency across all of the offices, which meet regularly as a group and enables them to operate the same systems and processes. In terms of customer

perception, we feel that being ISO certified has made us more attractive to the public sector and we have expanded as a result."

Prior to implementing the standard, the company's major concern was that they might be expected to start from scratch. Since much of the work had already been accomplished with the insurer to establish a risk management system, they only needed someone with a light touch to identify the few areas outstanding to bring them up to standard. Peter said, "IMSM were happy to do this. They were cost-effective and did exactly what we wanted them to do."

www.austinsmithlord.com

International Management Systems Marketing (IMSM) was founded in 1994 to provide businesses with the practical expertise to add value through quality systems and efficiency. From its base in the UK, IMSM Ltd has developed a strong network in Europe, USA, Canada, South Africa and Australia.

IMSM's fully trained team of auditors hold recognized IRCA (International Register of Certified Auditors) qualifications.

IMSM is itself continually assessed to ensure it delivers its promises and is listed by the North American Quality System and is a Member of the Society of the Plastics Industry.

To date, IMSM has helped more than 5,000 organizations around the world to achieve ISO 9001 certification.

BUILDING BUSINESS WITH ISO 9001:2000

Kennedy O'Callaghan Architects based in Clerkenwell, London, offers a full architectural service within the UK and Ireland, particularly in the cultural and heritage sectors, as well as specialised services in the following areas:

- Helping clients start new projects, developing their brief, feasibility studies, master planning and phasing if appropriate, identifying sources of funding and matching the brief to the funds available, often with challenging briefs or for complex organisations such as museums;
- Conservation, adapting, extending and changing use of buildings, especially listed buildings;
- Heritage lottery applications and
- Designing and submitting applications for planning on tight urban sites and in conservation areas. They work closely with the client and other consultants to tackle all the issues and have been successful in obtaining planning permission where others have failed.

Established in 1998, the company is aiming to expand its business, which currently employs a 2 partners, 1 employee and 2 freelancers. They are hoping that becoming ISO certified will help them to achieve this expansion by enabling them to compete for publicly accountable projects, such as those under the OJEU (Official Journal of the European Union) tendering procedure, particularly Heritage Lottery funded projects and local authority frameworks etc.

Partner Janie Price said, "As a small architectural practice, we felt that one of the benefits of implementing ISO 9001:2000 would be to compete with larger



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organisations, but still be able to offer a more personal service. Since we already had all the processes in place with RIBA guidance, it hasn't affected the way we operate except for more checks and balances. We feel that larger clients in particular view us more favourably."

At the time that IMSM were working with Kennedy O'Callaghan, they were tendering for a large contract, which was subsequently achieved. Janie said, "We successfully swam through the OJEU procedure for The Tank Museum which gained £9.6m from the Heritage Lottery Fund and I'm sure IMSM added weight to our credibility. In fact I think it was a prerequisite. Since then, we have successfully been added to a Museum organisation's framework. It was easy for them to tick boxes as all our procedures were in place."

The company's prior concerns were that the ISO documentation had to be largely re-written to make it comprehensible to the architectural sector. However, their assessor Eric Armfield worked diligently to achieve a document that is fairly digestible.

Janie concluded by saying, "IMSM approached us when we were about to set up the RIBA system, but RIBA did not offer the personal talk-through service that IMSM did, which we found very helpful."

www.kocarchitects.com

BIDDING FOR SUCCESS

London-based Levitt Bernstein was formed in 1968. Housing and urban renewal projects make up 50% of architectural projects undertaken, with 25% covering the Arts and Education sectors and the remaining 25% covering health, retail and community based projects.

The company currently employs over 100 staff with designers throughout the EC, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and USA. Although most projects are carried out within the UK and, more recently, the Republic of Ireland, one of the company's directors carries out commissions for the DFID (Department for International Development), overseeing projects throughout the developing world.

Explaining the company's decision to pursue certification, Technical Manager Andy Jobling said, "When Quality Assurance was first introduced in the 1990s, it was heralded as an essential business requirement. Consultant organisations believed they would lose clients and commissions if they were not QA Accredited, particularly if they were working for Government Agencies, Healthcare, Local Authorities or MOD. In the event, only the MOD insisted on certification. However, larger practices saw the benefit of implementing their own Quality Management Systems. Levitt Bernstein's system has been working effectively for 10 years."

In 2006, the practice decided to opt for ISO certification, which was largely due to a change in the way that Expressions of Interest / Bids / Tenders are being dealt with by its (largely public sector) clients. Bids are no longer being assessed by personnel in the client organisation, but are sent to external agencies for assessment and these agencies just tick boxes. Levitt Bernstein felt there was a risk of losing commissions if it didn't have a tick in every box. It also felt that certification with the consequent internal and external audits would add weight to the existing QMS

procedures and ensure these were applied by staff across the board.

IMSM were chosen because they offered a fixed price contract to cover all stages leading to certification. Their price compared favourably with Levitt Bernstein's previously budgeted estimates.

Andy Jobling's main concern was to have an assessor who was not a process engineer, or from some other far-flung corner of industry who had no idea how architects worked. He admits he took a lot of reassuring and he visited previous IMSM clients to assess the work done. In the event, the assessor was experienced at working with consultants and was able to pick up the business processes from their existing manuals and procedures.

As a result of implementing ISO 9001:2000, the company foresees increased efficiency and profitability, more work from the public sector and fewer professional indemnity claims, in addition to an improved perception of the Practice by existing and potential clients.

Speaking about the service provided by IMSM, Andy said, "IMSM helped Levitt Bernstein to obtain QA Registration. They were not dictatorial and were prepared to work within the confines of our established Quality Management System. We were able to blend our knowledge of the business with their knowledge of Quality Assurance Standards to achieve certification with a minimum of adaptation of the existing working practices. We would be happy to talk to other practices about our experience."

www.levittbernstein.co.uk

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