

CASE STUDY

CUSTOM FAB SOLUTIONS

Custom Fab Solutions (CFS), LLC earned certificates to both ISO 9001:2000 and ISO 13485:2003, seeking these industry standards in order to expand their customer base. The result was an increased effectiveness throughout the organization.

Background

“CFS is a Minneapolis-based fabricator of plastics, Teflon® and PFA,” according to a corporate news release. “The company offers metal fabrication, electro-polishing services and is a systems integrator serving technology markets. The company combines its capabilities with its customers’ needs to integrate customer-specified instrumentation and controls into a ready-to-use product. CFS primarily serves the semiconductor, photovoltaic, disk drive, electronics, medical, pharmaceutical and aerospace industries, where precision and contaminant-free material/products are required.”

The company’s motto plays off the corporate initials or acronym of Custom Fab Solutions, saying the company is about Customer Focused Success. CFS’s mission is to provide “exceptional value to our customers” by focusing on “quality, cost and schedule. We strive to develop long-term customer loyalty based on complete customer satisfaction,” according to the company Web site (www.CustomFabSolutions.com).

Customer needs

The biggest driver to pursue both certifications was a sincere desire to “improve overall effectiveness of the company,” said Gary Gelhaye, CFS Quality Manager. “Most importantly, we wanted to broaden our customer base. In particular, ISO 13485 will open doors to the medical community.”

CFS is focused on quality, but it is one thing to say it and another to demonstrate it, he said, noting that having the system audited and certified by a third-party certification body demonstrates to current and prospective customers that CFS is really all about quality.

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Benefits

The biggest benefit is the increased focus on quality within the overall company, Gelhaye said, noting CFS is tracking several aspects of its business to ensure improvements are realized. For instance, CFS has a set of metrics that it tracks monthly that tie into the company's quality objectives, such as on-time customer delivery or vendor rejections.

Although this honor predated the company's certification, Custom Fab Solutions has won Supplier Excellence Awards from one of its global customers. One reason CFS won the award in 2006 was that it maintained 100 percent on-time delivery from September 2005 to August 2006, according to a CFS news release. It also averaged a quality performance of 99 percent for lots and parts during the same year.

THE SYSTEM

Custom Fab Solutions is a relatively small company with 50 employees, but implementing management systems still requires coordination to ensure everyone is on board. CFS uses a software package to make the information available to everyone in the company. The software serves as a quality toolkit that helps CFS employees track and log non-conformances and take corrective actions. Gelhaye said this electronic toolkit provides CFS with the ability to track metrics.

Another step CFS took involved a pre-assessment audit to see where CFS stood as the company embarked on implementation.

Gelhaye said that quantifiable benefits of ISO are not possible because the company began tracking these areas prior to implementation, but that the management systems make it easier to do so.

BSI's role

Gelhaye said CFS is exceedingly happy with BSI as its certification body. After looking at several other certification bodies, CFS chose BSI, and he said the third-party verifier feels like part of the company. BSI emphasizes teamwork, and they have formed a true partnership, he added.

In particular, he is impressed with BSI's consistency in terms of its auditing services. In various roles, Gelhaye has worked with about five different BSI auditors, and they all took the same basic approach to things. In other words, BSI models the very process-oriented approach it evaluates in other companies.

"The money for pre-assessment was well worth the expense," he added.

He said CFS was able to secure complete employee buy-in because the commitment to certification came from top management.

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