

Smart men doing things simple... !

How Clwyd Concrete Products Ltd. used the ISO 9001 certification process to improve efficiency and prepare for post-recession expansion.



When Paul Blanchard and his business partner, James Woodyer bought Clwyd Concrete Products in Wrexham 6 years ago, they were bucking the trend in the concrete block industry. The major players in the market were cutting capacity drastically in the face of a severe construction industry downturn. Convinced that the market would recover Paul and James invested, added Clwyd to their existing plant in Cheshire and significantly increased their production capacity.

For the gamble to work however, they knew that they faced two immediate challenges to ride out the recession; maintaining or growing sales in a flat market and keeping down costs.

ISO 9001 pruned to keep down costs

When the company was bought it was already ISO 9001 registered. However a decision was soon made to allow certification to lapse and many of the existing quality systems and processes to be abandoned. The existing Quality Management System (QMS) was found to be expensive to maintain, over-complex and bureaucratic.

Their experience of operating the Cheshire sister plant and the presence of a highly experienced Operations Manager, Brian Blackmore, led them to develop improved production and quality management processes of their own. In addition, at this time, there was little demand from their core customer base of commercial builders and merchants for them to have the standard.

Potential growth in the house building market brings ISO 9001 back on the agenda

Having addressed the cost issue, Paul then turned his attention to growing the business – not an easy task in a recession. Opportunities for growth were there however, in particular in the house building market. But, to make significant headway in this market, Clwyd Concrete needed ISO 9001 certification.

Paul was determined to avoid creating an over-bureaucratic system this time round, so set about finding a company who could assist him in creating a QMS that would “help make concrete block – not piles of paperwork”.

Keeping it simple and building on what’s already there

The company already had a high quality product and many of the required procedures in place. What was needed was someone who shared the “keep it simple” ethos to help pull together all of the documentation – ISO 9001 consultants HPA fitted the bill.

According to Brian Blackmore, HPA’s approach was focused and jargon-free and broke down the work into bite sized pieces with absolutely no time wasted. HPA provided the guidance required to enable Clwyd to build on their existing procedures and shape a QMS that worked for them and supported business processes not hindered them.

To find out how HPA can help your company benefit from ISO 9001
call **01477 549 116** or email enquiries@hpa.co.uk

Making documents work for you not against you

One of the key elements in delivering a highly usable QMS was the implementation of a simple to use document management and control system. A big problem with the previous ISO 9001 QMS was the difficulty staff had in finding the right documents and maintaining records. HPA supplied Clwyd with their in-house designed ISO Document Management and Control System which is designed to help businesses of all sizes get the best from their Quality and other Management Systems. Using this as the basis, Clwyd Concrete developed a web based version of the system that would enable them to access quality information from anywhere and on any web enabled device. This also allowed them to incorporate their sister plant in Cheshire easily and effectively share the QMS across two sites.

From carthorse to thoroughbred – looking beyond certification to a leaner more profitable business

Progress in the development of new more manageable procedures and the implementation of the document control system created a turning point in the project. Paul who had previously seen ISO 9001 as an expensive exercise in box ticking could now see how, if implemented correctly, it could be used to help do things leaner and better.

With senior management support and enthusiasm now increased, certification to ISO 9001 was achieved in less than 6 months.

Combined with an easy to use QMS that can quickly and easily help staff to create a consistent high quality product this management drive has generated a highly positive quality culture within the organisation.

This in turn has led to the development of a continuous improvement programme that includes on- going Improvement projects and continuous fine tuning of existing systems and processes.

A catalyst for real benefits

As well as these process improvements delivering an improved and consistently high quality product at both plants, the company has also been able to:

- Weed out poor suppliers
- React more quickly to problems
- Improve management control information
- Free up time for more strategic management – more time spent working on the business rather than in the business
- Improve compliance and reduce the cost of compliance
- Expand their customer base significantly and;
- Last but by no means least, since achieving ISO 9001 certification, zero defective products have been shipped delivering customer satisfaction and an improved bottom line.

What is the secret of Clwyd Concretes success?

Last words to Paul Blanchard

“We knew we had good people but they were being hampered by a cumbersome and over complex system. What we have now is smart men (and women!) doing things simple.....”

To find out how HPA can help your company benefit from ISO 9001
call **01477 549 116** or email **enquiries@hpa.co.uk**