

Implementing ISO 14001: do you hire a consultant, or Do-It-Yourself?

Should you hire a consultant to help with EMS implementation, or go it alone? What are the advantages and potential pitfalls? How can you get best value for money if you hire a consultant and what are the criteria you should use for choosing one?



by Matthias Gelber

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Matthias, who is German, has comprehensive experience of helping a range of public and private sector clients with EMS implementation. In addition, he has held workshops and delivered presentations on EMS in more than 30 countries worldwide.

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I was asked to write a contribution about selecting and utilizing consultants in the context of ISO 14001 implementation. Having worked as an EMS (Environmental Management Systems, such as ISO 14001 and EMAS) consultant and trainer since the days before the publication of ISO 14001:1996, I was obviously tempted to share some of my experience. However, you might well ask yourself whether you can trust a consultant to tell you about how to select and utilize a consultant!

In order to overcome any temptation to use this article as sales pitch, I would like to strongly recommend you to ask the following two fundamental questions before starting your ISO 14001 journey:

- What is the aim of your ISO 14001 implementation?
- Do you need to use a consultant, or would it be best to use your in-house resources?

The first question about the overall reason for your ISO 14001 implementation is a



critical one to start off with. My experience tells me that if your motives are not starting you off on the right track, then your system might end up as a bureaucratic pain rather than a business and environmental gain!

Main drivers

Obviously, the hope of environmentalists is that many organizations go for ISO 14001 implementation because they want to improve the overall environmental performance

focusing on their organization's activities, products and services. However, in the real world the main drivers tend to be business drivers, such as supply chain pressure or marketing and export opportunities.

Nevertheless, ultimately, success in this context is all about using ISO 14001 as a management tool – or system – to help you manage all critical environmental risks and opportunities in the spirit of continual improvement. It

CONSULTANTS
Choosing and using them

should not really be a surprise that a management system can only be an efficient and effective investment if you use it as a management tool to help you take decisions and decide on strategy and investments!

Unfortunately, in the real world I see too many organizations that are not using

ISO 14001 this way, but rather as a means to get a badge on the wall that confirms that they are certified. Such organizations usually want to do it quick and cheap, but this often turns out to be the very route to a costly system as it is reduced to maintaining a bureaucracy designed to deliver a certificate, rather

than a system to help you manage the issues that really matter.

My strong recommendation is: take the time to work out how to use ISO 14001 as a management tool and how to integrate it with the way you manage your key business processes. Engage employees and identify how you can deliver environmental improvements that are of relevance to your key customers and stakeholders! That way you and your customers – who are critical to your business success – will benefit from it!

The return on investment from your EMS largely depends on how you implement and make use of the system – without proper strategic and measured invest-

ment your chances of positive returns might be limited.

After having got the discussion about the motives behind ISO 14001 implementation off my chest, I can now move on to considerations about whether and how to get consultants involved.

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Scale of the task

You need to get a good understanding of the scale of the task ahead of you, your strategy for implementation and the availability of in-house resources before being able to determine whether you need external support.

Do you want to integrate your EMS with your existing quality system? In many cases, an ISO 9001:2000 system is already in

How to secure funding



If you are in charge of your company's ISO 14001 implementation project, you will need to secure funding for the consultant's fees and other investments. Here is a suggested rule-of-thumb method for calculating the amount required – and justifying it.

How much money could we save if we were to improve the following by 10% in relation to product output through our ISO 14001 implementation?

- energy, fuel and general utility costs;
- efficient use of materials, and
- legal compliance costs (depending largely on location of site).

After you have made an estimate of what you might be able to save – in most cases 10% is quite a realistic objective – then propose to your senior management that you get at least 20% of that figure for you to control as part of your ISO 14001 investment project.



place, however it is not a prerequisite for successful ISO 14001 implementation. Or do you want to focus directly on your core business processes and implement a wider business management system that takes care of you environmental, social, quality and other key business priorities!?

At this stage, some external input might indicate a fruitful avenue, but remember that customers, business partners or regional support networks can often also be a source of help and inspiration. Alternatively a consultant, project manager or facilitator from outside of your organization might be able to provide value for money by supporting or facilitating your process of figuring out what direction you want to take and how big the job is!

Success is all about using ISO 14001 as a management tool

Let's stop here for a moment and dispel the common perception that every ISO 14001 implementation is more or less the same job. No, it is not! To make ISO 14001 work in an organization is all about making it relevant and real to that organization.

Therefore, watch out for the consultant who wants to sell you his "one size fits all" manual! Too often, that has led to systems that are not sufficiently relevant or appropriate to the organization in which they have been implemented. Creating



What to ask a consultant before you make a hiring decision

Before making a decision to engage a consultant, you should ask for the following information:

- *evidence that he or she has provided ISO 14001 consultancy to other companies in the relevant sector and region;*
- *name and CV of consultant(s) who will work on the job;*
- *scope of proposed input (you might yourself define the scope for which you want input);*
- *generic and tailored training available;*
- *fees for services, clarification of which services have a fixed price and which depend on workload – it is difficult at the outset of a project to predict how much input is needed for certain activities and you might even realize as your staff become more confident that you want to do more work internally;*
- *training materials and documentation that will be available for your in-house use;*
- *whether remote support by telephone and e-mail included in the quote, and*
- *examples of systems the consultant has developed for other companies – study the documentation and ask if you can also have a site visit to gain an appreciation of his or her work.*

generic procedures that are lengthy and not related to your business processes will only lead to frustration and extra cost of maintenance.

However, common templates can be useful as a means to provide some direction. In

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many large international organizations, they have also been used to establish a common framework with aligned processes. If a consultant is able to help you link your activities, products and services – this is the scope of what ISO 14001 wants you to consider – with the main environmental risks and opportunities, then your system will take shape as a tool that is able to support management in making the right decisions at the right time.

Business opportunities

This could help to avoid long-term liabilities, such as site contamination, support you by turning more of your expensive raw material into product output – which reduces material purchase and waste disposal costs – or even support you with the identification of new business opportunities linked to innovative, environmentally efficient products and services.

A very practical way of identifying whether you want to use

external input would be to set up an "ISO 14001 strategy day" where you should have senior management, the person(s) responsible for systems, environment, sales and human resources all present to decide on your ISO 14001 strategy. You could invite three consultants to give you a 20-minute presentation each, focusing on an introduction to ISO 14001, success factors for ISO 14001 implementation and how they could help you.

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After the presentations, you should do a brainstorming session about your strategy for implementation and then determine which roles should be fulfilled by internal and external staff. If you are convinced that external input is needed, then provide the consultants with some terms of reference and ask them to come back with a proposal.

In addition to the question of whether and what kind of consultant you might want to choose, the issue of selecting an appropriate certification body is a critical challenge. It is also my experience in the market-place that the interpretation of ISO 14001 varies substantially between different auditors.

Therefore, beside price, reputation and verifying that the certification body is accredited for your business sector, you should ask the third party firm

for the name of the lead auditor that they will use, that he or her has a relevant CV and the opportunity to speak to the lead auditor. Getting an idea of his or her approach to ISO 14001 and the related interpretation will help you with figuring out whether you are on the same wave length! Avoid auditors that are only interested in documentation as evidence that a system is in place.

Pieces of advice

Finally, I would like to finish off with the following pieces of advice:

- Remain in control of your ISO 14001 system and in charge of the implementation project – it must result in your system! And remember that it is you who will be running it once the consultant's input is finished.
- If you are offered a consulting and certification package, do not buy it as it is not in line with the requirement for independence with regard to consulting and third party certification!
- Do not measure the success of the implementation – and the consultant's input – by the size of the documentation that has been developed, but rather by the involvement and commitment of the organization and the related competency that has been developed during the project.
- Ensure that all of the specific outputs of the project are owned by your organization!

