

Ping Takes a Quality Swing at ISO 9004 Certification



When John Solheim took the helm at golf equipment maker Ping in 1995, he had a legacy to protect and improve—that of his father, Karsten Solheim. When the employee handbook was written in 1993, Karsten wrote: “It is the customer who keeps us in business, and we must always be sure to give each one first-class treatment. The role of each employee is also very important because dedication to quality assures the success of the company.”

The family business was founded over 42 years ago and is based in Phoenix. Today Ping is best known for its custom fit, custom-built golf clubs and competes in a highly innovative and competitive \$4 billion golf equipment industry. John wasn’t satisfied with the existing standard of quality and set about to find a way to measure the company business against an internationally accepted standard, ISO 9004. “By embarking on this journey, we hoped to measure ourselves against recognized criteria that would reassure us we were doing business appropriately,” says Solheim. “We also believed such an accomplishment might help identify areas where we could advance.” Both of Solheim’s hopes were fulfilled.

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The Implementation and Registration Process

After conducting some research, John Solheim decided to pursue registration to both ISO 9004 (quality management system standard) and ISO 14004 (environmental management system standard). This decision was based on several factors:

1. The ISO (International Organization for Standardization) standards are internationally recognized.
2. Attaining registration would provide Ping with a competitive advantage in the marketplace. Ping would be the first competitor in the golf industry to be registered to both ISO 9004 and ISO 14004 standards.
3. Ping wanted the benefits of implementing the management systems such as improved quality, increased environmental awareness, customer satisfaction, and continuous improvement.

Ping began the implementation process in November 1999. The first step was to develop documentation, identify and improve processes, and provide training to all personnel involved in the implementation. A pre-assessment audit acted as a dress rehearsal for employees and heightened their understanding of the requirements as well as identified opportunities for improvement in the existing system.

During this process Ping faced many challenges. First, its workforce consisted of over 1,000 employees who spoke at least six different languages. Additionally, company processes, documentation, and policies were very informal. Many hours were spent training and developing valuable manuals that are used as reference resources. "The registration process helped me see how everything in the company ties together and our processes really interrelate," said Solheim. "I thought I was fairly well-organized, but the registration audit taught me to dot my I's and cross my T's."

Benefits

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Ping's steering committee identified many benefits of the ISO 9004 and ISO 14004 registration.

1. Enhanced internal communication and increased focus on customer requirements throughout the organization.
2. The generation of useful information to allow more strategic decision making by all levels of management.
3. Better measurement of the processes that are responsible for quality and the ability to continually improve product quality.
4. Improved customer satisfaction and the continued reputation for quality, innovation, and service in the golf equipment market.
5. Development of a new customer service call system that improved customer response time.
6. Improved environmental performance resulting in reduced emissions.
7. Improved cycle times to meet our customers' demands.

Ping officially achieved registration on October 17, 2000. Ping is now in the process of implementing ISO 9004 and ISO 14004 in its sister company, Ping Europe Ltd., in Gainsborough, United Kingdom. This registration will include the Gainsborough Golf Club, a private 36-hole facility with a driving range and modern clubhouse. Ping believes this will be the first country club to ever be registered to international standards.

Now registered, the company is continuing to focus intensely on continuous improvement of the quality of its systems, operations, service, and products in a highly competitive worldwide market. "We continuously hone our ISO 9004 and 14004 systems, strengthening our quality and environmental objectives while looking for improvement opportunities. No one asked us to become ISO registered," Solheim says. "We raised our standards because golfers ultimately decide the fate of our products. Customer satisfaction will be the program's greatest benefit."

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