



ISO 14001 tools on the web: Changing the
game of ISO 14001 implementation



WHITE PAPER

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Until recently, only two methods existed to gain certification in ISO 14001: either scouring the internet for each piece of documentation and piecing them together haphazardly, or hiring an outside consultant to handle the project. Problems exist with both – the first option is inexpensive, but time consuming and often ineffective; the second method is very expensive, and the consultant will take along all that expert knowledge and information with him when he leaves.

With the advent of custom-designed tools available online, the game has changed forever. Now environmental managers can keep an eye on the budget, while finding all the quality educational materials and support they need to implement ISO 14001 – together in one place. The cost of implementing this international standard can be a fraction of what it once was, while efficiency continues to go up.

The advantages that these tools bring to the table are as follows: huge savings in both time and money, customizable templates, retention of knowledge and education, instructions, guidance, and expert advice – making this new method of ISO 14001 implementation worth a second (and third) look.

Introduction

The tools that are now available online to help organizations in their ISO 14001 implementations are stronger, sleeker, and more robust than ever before. In fact, there's little a consultant can do for a company that the right tools can't do just as well.

The do-it-yourself method is not likely to end in disaster, as it once was. The new reality is that this is now a fast, easy, inexpensive option that is quickly gaining in popularity. This white paper examines all available options in greater depth, offering clear comparisons for easier decision making. The first option we'll look at is the old school method.

The old school method of ISO 14001 implementation

Up to now, there were two basic options for implementation of ISO 14001: comb the internet for individual documents and information to assemble your project in a piecemeal manner, or bring in an outside consultant to hold your hand throughout the project and make sure it's done correctly.

1. Try the implementation all on your own (no support)

Traditionally, before we had all the tools and resources we have now, it was a long, arduous job to piece together all the documentation data from multiple websites and sources. And unfortunately, though inexpensive, the final result was often poor-quality, inconsistent documentation that was difficult to follow. Specifically, problems included:

- **Low-quality documentation** – Without one good source for document templates, people had to explore lots of different websites and other sources, which often did not have the consistent, high-quality documents necessary for a good result.
- **No plans or direction** – When there was no logical structure or defined plan for an ISO 14001 implementation project, it was difficult to maintain control and stay within budget.
- **Project managers were on their own** – If the project manager got stuck, which is bound to happen with such a challenging project, their only option was consulting assorted online forums, with no guarantee of credibility.
- **It took forever** – We all know that when we aren't quite sure what we're doing, it's going to take much longer. This means that even though the project started out as inexpensive (compared to hiring a consultant), the wasted time would often become much more costly than anticipated.

To top it off, this method can be so very frustrating. Just think about being unsure of what comes next, or even how to get started, and never quite knowing if the documentation is even correct – and all this without anyone to talk to for support or advice.

2. Hire a consultant

If you want to get the job done quickly and correctly, then hiring an expert consultant with lots of experience implementing ISO 14001 is one option. But, this option does come with a very high price tag, which can be out of reach for many small and mid-sized businesses.

When you consider the increased availability of online tools, which can practically replace a consultant for a fraction of the cost, then the option of hiring that pricy consultant becomes even less appealing. In short, issues that can arise when hiring a consultant are the following:

- **They cost a lot of money** – Like any expert professional, their time is valuable – and the bill they send you will certainly say so. Considering the amount of time that's usually necessary for an implementation project of this magnitude, that invoice could be shocking.
- **Knowledge is not shared** – A consultant can definitely make the ISO 14001 implementation faster (of course, since it is ultimately still the responsibility of the organization, that's not

guaranteed). Unfortunately, when it's time for that consultant to leave, he'll take his know-how and skills along with him. There's really no motivation for the consultant to share what he knows, because that's what makes him money; he wants to make sure he's needed again later. It would be more beneficial to the organization if all that knowledge that comes from the ISO 14001 certification process stays right there inside the company.

- **Certification is never guaranteed** – No one – not even the most talented and experienced consultant – can guarantee that you'll pass the ISO 14001 certification audit. The reality is that, even though they can be very helpful through the process, their job is only to advise. Success or failure of the implementation and certification processes rests firmly on the shoulders of the organization itself.

The purpose of this white paper is not to criticize the job of consultants – there are lots of efficient, highly experienced consultants who can enter a company and effectively guide it through the whole implementation and certification process.

Rather, the point is that in this day and age, innovative businesses are realizing that they can have the same successful results for a small fraction of the cost of paying a consultant. While they can't do your job for you, these latest tools are a welcome alternative to conventional options.

How can online tools make ISO 14001 easier?

The first question is: What's a tool? Well, what this white paper refers to are online resources that offer everything required for ISO 14001 implementation: document templates, support, guidance, advice, etc. These tools exist to allow for easier implementation of the standard without the need for a consultant.

This method might not be right for every business, every time – and it's not a magic bullet. Actually, there is no one solution that will do *everything* for you. Still, online tools are a valuable resource for the efficient completion of ISO 14001 implementation without the high price or high stress.

What can these online tools give you?

Required information – A good set of online tools should give you a variety of resources and templates for required documentation, along with advice, guidance, and full support for your implementation. Since this saves you the headache of searching all over the internet, you can save a lot of time and stress.

Help and support – Unless you've implemented ISO 14001 before, you will probably need a little help along the way. Quality online tools should handle most of the functions of a live consultant – like step-by-step guidance throughout the project – and may even offer live, online consultations with an expert in the field. It can't be just like sitting across the table from a real-life consultant, but you should have access to the support you need, when you need it.

Clear guidance, even for beginners – The guidance provided should be able to lead a beginner all the way through the implementation – start to finish. Previous ISO 14001 experience or qualifications shouldn't be necessary for the project (even though it's nice to have!). A well-structured process with

clear, easy-to-understand instructions will get anyone to the finish line, as long as they have the motivation to succeed.

Document templates that can be used out of the box – Having templates for all the documents required to implement ISO 14001 can be a terrific head start. An online service needs to offer templates that are ready to use, mostly filled in, and customizable to meet the unique needs of every business.

Peer support – Though speaking with experts is invaluable in the course of implementation, it can also be very helpful to talk with others who are in a similar situation. A good toolset should allow for communication with both expert professionals and peers to facilitate the sharing of new ideas and novel solutions.

Extra perks – Above and beyond all the templates, advice, and support, top-tier websites will provide extra tools to help make those important decisions along the way. Examples include tools that can help figure out how long an implementation project will take, establish exactly what's needed for the implementation, and determine what data and documents are missing from existing processes.

The million-dollar question: What's right for you?

The right choice for your implementation of ISO 14001 will depend on many unique factors. If you still aren't sure, here are some basic guidelines to help you decide:

Find a consultant if:

- You don't have much time to devote to the project. An expert consultant can help you effectively implement in the shortest amount of time.
- You don't have the luxury of a team of people available to work on the project. An outside consultant can come in and be that go-to person.
- Money is not a major issue.
- You know how to find a high-level consultant, because those with less experience and knowledge won't be as helpful.

Go it alone if:

- You have plenty of time to devote.
- Money is a major concern.
- Your project is small – if not, it will be too complex.
- You have some people in your organization who have some experience with ISO 14001.

Do it yourself with online tools if:

- You want to finish relatively quickly.
- Your project scope is large or fairly complex.
- You don't have anyone in your organization with experience or knowledge of ISO 14001.

- You have a little time to spare, but you don't want to tie up several people indefinitely.
- Money is a concern.
- You want to keep the knowledge learned during the implementation inside your organization.

In closing

Once upon a time, if you wanted to successfully implement ISO 14001, you needed to go out and hire an outside consultant. Now, the game has changed. With the full range of online tools and resources, you can find all the information you need in a single place – making the new do-it-yourself an attractive choice.

With the increasing availability of these online tools, self-implementation no longer strikes fear in the hearts of those who wish to become certified in ISO 14001. Still, even though all the documentation, guidance, and support are readily available to you – it may or may not be the best option for your company.

Before beginning your project, it's important to research your implementation options and determine the best choice for the needs of your organization – and that “best choice” will depend heavily on the specifics of your situation. Some companies will find that bringing in a consultant is the right path for them, while others will select self-implementation with lots of help from online tools.

No matter what you choose, one fact remains: the emergence of online tools and services has completely changed the game of implementing ISO 14001.



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