

Interviewing A Registrar

Basics

- I want to remind you that choosing a registrar is like choosing a **life partner**. While it may not be ‘Until death do us part’, it is quite close.
- The intent herein is **not** for every question to be asked, but rather as a sort of check list to jog your thoughts with respect to **YOUR** company’s requirements.
Do remember that anything not discussed early is subject to interpretation later!
- **Some important starters:**
 - Who (e.g.: RAB) is the registrar approved by?
 - Will the registrar provide client names and references?
 - How many Man days and how many Auditors? (Registration vs Surveillance)
 - How do they conduct surveillance visits? Scheduled or unscheduled?

Note: There is some redundancy of questions within this presentation.

Inform & Discuss

- **Plant Layout** - Have a copy to give them for planning.
- **Number of shifts and employees per shift** - What shifts will be audited? What hours?
- **Preassessment Audit?** - If so, **Scope**. I prefer the preassessment to be limited to an in-house document and systems review (**Quality Manual, all tier [level] 2's and any related documentation**). My concern is less **'are the folks following documentation'** than **'is the documentation and are the systems acceptable'** to the registrar. We can assure the folks are following documentation internally. **Note: One company I spoke with charged for a Pre-assessment whether you had one or not. I was told that if they did not do a pre-assessment they would have to spend more time during the registration assessment.**
NOTE: Documentation failure is the most common registration failure mode.
- **DoD and other Sensitive Areas** - Make sure everyone agrees on how they will address the **'Secret' / 'Top Secret'** aspects of your company's business. This will probably be a function of scope.

About The Auditors

- What are the registrar's qualifications requirements for auditors? (for hiring or using an auditor) Are the auditors trained and certified under ISO 10011 (guidelines for auditing quality systems)?
- How many organizations has the typical auditor certified? (Audits per year)
- How many assessors does the registrar have?
- What is the turnover rate for assessors in the registrar's company? If there is high turnover that will affect the consistency of the assessment service they provide.
- How are auditor substitutions handled?
- Does the company provide training for auditors and other personnel to keep them abreast of developments in their specific discipline? Are there training records? Frequency of training?
- Will he/she/they (auditor[s]) be available for an interview for your company to assess their suitability? (I doubt you will really want to do this, but many big companies do this.)

Questions & Thoughts 1

- What are your requirements as a registrar above and beyond ISO9001?

Request hard copy of their 'Contract Requirements'

Ask if there are any requirements not on their 'Contract Requirements' listing.

- Are the registrar's auditors **direct hire full-time** employees or are they **contract**?

- Will your company have the **same** Lead Auditor **every** audit (a **Project Lead Auditor**)?

NOTE: Most registrars 'appoint' a specific person as a project manager (project lead auditor or what ever the registrar calls it). Ask about how the registrar you are interviewing structures their projects.

- Will the registrar send the Project Lead Auditor on each audit or will a substitute be assigned for surveillance audits?
- Will only the Lead Auditor have experience in the industry or will every member of the audit team?

Questions & Thoughts 2

- How far in advance do they **notify you of an impending audit**, and **provide you with an audit schedule**. This will help you prepare for the audit easily if they provide **at least 6 weeks**.
- How many **hours per day** is planned during an audit? **Some companies consider a day in-plant as 6 hours** saying the other time is 'report writing' time.
- Ask the registrar to explain the **details of their billing**.
- Are there any **extra charges** and **tie this down in a written quote**. **Are travel and lodging expenses covered by the bid? Rental car(s)? There are stories of some companies charging extra for each non-conformance report.**
- What quality system does the registrar have in place? **Request a copy of their Quality Manual**.
- Will they provide you with **their** internal audit schedule and results of audits and corrective and preventative action?

Questions & Thoughts 3

- How long will it take them to issue you a certificate once they have recommended you for approval?
- How long has the registrar been in business, and do they have any European affiliates in the registration business?
- If you will one day be going for ISO14000, does the registrar support this standard as well, and would they be able to combine (thereby reducing the man-days at your site, and \$s) the ISO9000 audit with the 14000 audit?
- Who does documentation assessment and who does the audit? What is their experience / qualifications?

The Audits

- How many **Man Days**?
 - Registration Audit
 - Surveillance Audits
- How many weeks in advance do they provide the **detailed audit schedule**?
- Is there a '**Complete**' **reaudit** every three years? Or do they audit on a '**continuous**' basis?
- **Surveillance Audits**
 - Frequency - Every 6 months or yearly? (Ask their thoughts)
 - How much is audited in each surveillance audit?

Communications

- I want to address this briefly, but note it can become very important. One registrar I dealt with took over a month to respond to questions. A week maximum is appropriate. I've seen phone calls to be returned forgotten. This area can be critical to your company. You want a **responsive** registrar.

How long does it take their office to respond to questions (typically)?

If it becomes necessary to speak with the Project Lead Auditor, how is that done and how soon after the request will the Project Lead Auditor contact your company?

Specification Interpretations

One of the biggest complaints with ISO9001 is **interpretation of the standard**. Each auditor has his/her own paradigm and thus expectations. This is one of the reasons why having the same auditors is preferred. This is also the reason why I prefer the pre-assessment be limited to an on-site document review where the auditors set up in offices or a conference room. There they review the Quality Manual against the level 2's in interviews. Level 3 documents are reviewed and objective evidence provided as requested - however, this is all done in the conference room, NOT on the floor. In short - Are our systems acceptable.

This type of audit is a **Verification** Audit as opposed to a **Validation** Audit which is where they actually hit the floor. Now - the 2 big questions:

- 1) How are disputes with an audit finding handled? Ask them to explain their system. **(Request a copy of their procedure!)**
- 2) How does the registrar **ensure consistency of interpretations** within their company? Some companies have weekly in-house meetings, some have conference calls, some do nothing. **THIS IS IMPORTANT!!!**

What's In A Contract Anyway?

- When you get a copy of the registrar's contract, **read every word** and try to **imagine the worst possible scenario**. Some time back when I was casting about for a registrar, one sent me a contract which stated the following for audit costs:
- XXXXXX "reserves the right to increase charges during the certification period".
- Another said: "...approximately 45 days prior to the anniversary date of certificate issuance, XXXXXX shall notify the client in writing of the annual costs to maintain the certificate."
- These appear to me to be licenses to steal. It would seem prudent to get these things tied down in your initial contract.
- Remember: **Contract Review!**

Audit Nonconformance Questions

- How shall we be notified of non-conformancies or deficiencies?
- What is the **typical response time allowed** for initial response to a nonconformance identified during an audit:
 - **Major nonconformance**
 - **Minor nonconformance**
- Will a nonconformance during the initial assessment require a partial or **follow up assessment** to verify corrective action? If yes, what shall the **cost of follow up audits** be?

NOTE: Typically if there are 1 or more MAJOR nonconformances, they have to make a return visit. Minors are typically followed up by mail, FAX, etc.
- Can we be recommended for certification if there are still some minor open non-conformancies? Determine details.
- How many months of internal audit records do you require before scheduling an audit?