



ISO 9001 is by far the most recognized management system standard in the world

FOAM ENGINEERS HIGHLIGHTS ITS CONTINUED COMMITMENT TO QUALITY MANAGEMENT WITH ISO 9001:2015

CASE STUDY

BE THE BENCHMARK



Foam Engineers is a technical foam fabricator that provides a range of solutions for its diverse global customer base. Having recognized the potential for operational improvements, the company worked with SGS to successfully transition from ISO 9001:2008 to ISO 9001:2015 and is now benefiting from improved quality standards including enhanced levels of effectiveness, efficiency and profitability.

Formed in 1928, Foam Engineers has pioneered the use of foam in various specialized markets including aerospace, motorsport, electronics, performance packaging, military, environmental and healthcare. Having built up a position of leadership and recognized as an outstanding manufacturer, the company appeared in the prestigious Parliamentary Review Manufacturing and Services Edition 2017.

EXCEEDING CUSTOMER EXPECTATIONS

Always prepared to innovate and adapt to change in a highly competitive sector, Foam Engineers' products are tailored to meet individual customer needs. Thanks to an unrivalled level of technical excellence and precision engineering infrastructure, it provides a fast turnaround services and can undertake assembly and hand finishing work where required. The company also occupies a unique position in the technical foam conversion market by being able to source and supply polyester, polyether, polyurethane (PU) and polyethylene (PE) foam grades.

Company director, James Wiles, takes up the story and says, "Manufacturing takes place at our purpose built 4000m² production facility in High Wycombe. Over the many years that we have been cutting and shaping foam, we have utilized every conceivable process, which we carry out under one roof. Having total control over our manufacturing means that we can offer clients unbeatable flexibility and cost effectiveness."

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James Wiles
Company director

SAFETY RELATED PRODUCTS

Many of Foam Engineers' products are used in safety related applications. Therefore, to achieve the highest levels of quality the company had to implement an effective and certified quality management system (QMS) – initially to BS 5750 and latterly to ISO 9001. By formalizing its business processes, together with associated risks, resources had to be provided and effectively managed to ensure effective and efficient outcomes, with key performance indicators that are continually evaluated.

Just as importantly, its QMS provides the impetus for Foam Engineers to strive for continual business and operational improvement. James Wiles comments, "The QMS is an important tool that helps all stakeholders realize the strategic intention and direction of the business through short, medium and long-term objectives. Although we were already certified to ISO 9001:2008, it became clear that we needed to do more to drive the business forward. Having conducted my own research I was confident that making the transition to ISO 9001:2015 would help realize my vision for the organization and elevate it to a more advantageous trading platform."

NEW AND IMPROVED

The ISO 9001:2015 standard introduced a number of new features requiring organizations to assess risks, identify opportunities for improvement, and effectively manage performance across all business levels. As such, senior management must now demonstrate a greater level of leadership and commitment to ensure required outcomes from the implemented QMS.

Working alongside an external advisor, Foam Engineers initiated a comprehensive review of its QMS to reveal any weak points and areas for improvement that would help it comply with the new standard. This was a complex process, however, as a result of extensive employee consultation, training, sheer hard work and strong leadership, the QMS was reconfigured.

Mike Swanson, lead auditor at SGS, was then invited in to audit the QMS, which led to successful certification to ISO 9001:2015. He comments, "The standard's requirements were exceeded in many areas and Foam Engineers' QMS not only demonstrates compliance to recognized methodologies but enhances the organization's efficiency and profitability. It also significantly reduces risk by having everything mapped out in terms of actions and their consequences – what we term a risk index – which helps avoid dangerous situations."

ENHANCING CAPABILITIES

Manufacturing is constantly evolving and Foam Engineers has invested heavily in cutting edge, autonomous equipment for specialized processes that enable the company to produce intricate shapes. CNC based machinery produces amazing definitions and a consistent high level of accuracy in various foams. Foam Engineers also has a moulding and heat laminating department for shapes that cannot be cut mechanically, and where surface facings and densification are required. The use of 2 and 3D CAD software works in tandem with this equipment, creating a state-of-the-art production process.

After analysing market trends and carrying out competitor analysis, it was decided that the identification, design and supply of niche products of higher value would be a beneficial strategic direction. "I felt there was huge potential in going down this route but we also recognized that additional quality controls would be required for supplying more demanding customers," states James Wiles. "Strengthening the design process and streamlining the overall operation has enabled faster and smoother running projects. Crucially, employees have been actively engaged in training and skills development, and the whole project succeeded due to their commitment and sense of collective responsibility."

SENSE OF ACHIEVEMENT

The successful transition to ISO 9001:2015 was an impressive result considering the significant changes the organization went through. Foam Engineers' James Wiles concludes, "ISO 9001:2015 gives us credibility, highlights our operational credentials and has improved integration with all stakeholders through defining a standard of operation that is designed to exceed customer expectations – something that we monitor through our Voice of the Customer initiative. I am confident that certification to this robust standard will be invaluable during the next chapter of Foam Engineers' long and illustrious history."

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