

1. IQNet is the International Certification Network established in 1990. What do you consider the most important achievement of yours?

IQNet is an expansive international Network of 36 partner certification bodies incorporating over 200 subsidiaries worldwide. One third of all management system certifications issued globally are estimated to have been delivered through IQNet partners (over 320,000 certificates in total). Approximately two thirds of our IQNet partners hold the number one market position in their geographical region.

IQNet partners commit themselves to rigorous membership criteria for which a Peer Assessment System and a Best Practice Evaluation scheme are used to regularly assess partners' performance and to enhance innovation and progress for the benefit of our clients and the users of their certificates. This results in more customer confidence for our certifications because the adopted IQNet harmonized approach towards assessment and certification is implemented, effective and progressive.

From the beginning (1990), all IQNet partners have recognized the importance of an effective Peer Assessment System to ensure consistency among partners. The system is a key element in the mutual recognition process between the partners and allows IQNet partners to recognize each other's certifications. In this context the introduction of the IQNet certificate and certification mark has been an important milestone and an additional value offered to all clients.

A further advantage is the established IQNet global auditor pool which numbers more than 17,000 experienced auditors and experts. This pool incorporates a broad spectrum of technical competences supplemented with local cultural, legal and other knowledge. It gives partners access to global resources and assists them to serve clients in the most competent and cost-efficient way. For clients having access to specialist management system auditors working under the IQNet umbrella in more than 150 countries reflect a high service focus. It makes the global competence locally available.

IQNet has also recently implemented its global Auditor Certification Scheme, which is a new tool and a step forward for enhanced IQNet cooperation. It further enhances auditor competence management for existing and new management system schemes.

IQNet and its head-office are located in Bern / Switzerland where a team of specialists is taking care of the Network activities and performs the business operation.

2. What is the clue to make your mark a synonym of quality?

IQNet's mission is to support clients to improve enterprise quality aimed at sustainable success. We achieve this together with our strong partners, an effective worldwide network cooperation and through the provision of value added assessment services as well as credible certificates.

Certifications and independent third party assessments are used today in almost all economic and public sectors and for an increasing number of management disciplines. These include among others product quality, safety, security, risk assurance, environmental protection, social accountability, privacy, corporate governance. They encompass a number of international standards and recognized codes of practice reflecting current and new stakeholder requirements.

Our partners are well prepared to help clients advancing enterprise quality in a direct, clear and practical manner with appropriate services in all public and private sectors and for all important management disciplines where conformity assessment is requested.

Using independent third party assessment and certification from an IQNet partner will give the client effective support in appropriately responding to its respective market requirements. Our approach is to facilitate the implementation of unbureaucratic and integrated management systems solutions. It supports the management system effectiveness, produces credible results and increases client loyalty. Our clients therefore see it as a cost-effective approach to improve.

There are three key benefits which IQNet brings to the clients if they get the IQNet certification.

First of all it is the broad international recognition and high reputation of the IQNet and partners certification documents. Secondly it is the global access to a broader spectrum of innovative specialist products which satisfy new requirements. Thirdly it is the advantages an organization can earn from the IQNet harmonized approach towards added-value auditing.

In addition to that all clients certified by any IQNet partner are allowed to use the IQNet certification mark for the respective scope of certification. The mark stands for global credibility of the certificate and trust in the certified organization.

3. What are the ambitions and future plans for such a powerful association, having so wide scope of activity and number of clients?

As mentioned in the previous part, it is IQNet's aim to assist clients to improve enterprise quality. In doing so and in order to provide meaningful support and services IQNet and its partners will continue to focus on those factors and needs which will be of future concern for entrepreneurs and leaders. This is part of our common strategic planning process.

Clients are increasingly faced with new competitive aspects such as sector specific quality requirements or a broader spectrum of management disciplines which have to be incorporated into their process management. Such aspects also include the requests to communicate credibly and actively about the organization's non financial achievements and performances. This raises the need to introduce efficient information, training and conformity assessment tools, helping clients to advance.

It is the primary goal for IQNet and its partners to timely respond to such changing needs.

The IQNet strategy therefore promotes innovative specialist product sharing and respective IQNet service offerings as well as the progressive integrated use towards assessment and certification.

Various programs and mechanism have already been implemented. E.g. the Best Practice Evaluation, the IQNet Auditor Certification Scheme, training offerings for specialist programs and the Commonly Accredited Services from our certification unit IQNet Ltd.

IQNet which continuously expands its service portfolio offers now also certification and/or assessment services related to SA8000 and BSCI (the business social compliance initiatives). New programs e.g. for Allergen management, Supply chain safety and Business risk management are in advanced development stage and implementation will take place shortly. These services together with other specialised programs offered under the website www.iqnet-ltd.com show the new IQNet service capability.

Also I would like to mention the new global client service mechanism of IQNet. Starting from this year international clients can use IQNet for their global certification programs in an easy way. The new service is a globally introduced web based certification management approach which responds in particular to global client needs. It offers the advantage of global project leadership, one-stop shopping and includes all the Network advantages such as recognition, local resources and competence, costs, etc.

IQNet's approach to serve global clients is unique. It allows partners to act as principal CB for a given global certification project under the IQNet umbrella and to involve other partners' resources and specialist products.

4. More and more companies make an effort to receive the certificate, confirming their quality in different fields of activity. What is the source of this popularity?

Indeed third party assessment and certification is steadily growing and more broadly applied. The reason for that lies in the behavior of buyers and the growing needs and requirements coming up in markets and societies. This certainly has been imposing stronger quality assurance regimes and favored the recent development and implementation of international management system standards with a stronger focus on sustainability issues. Suppliers in competitive markets therefore had to increase quality performance and to intensify communication to buyers as to explain why their products and services are better and of more value and why the conditions under which manufacturing and delivery takes place are credible and trustworthy. Such aspects would include much more than product quality, e.g. also health & safety for consumers and workers, environmental protection, social accountability, risk control, security, business continuity, information and data protection etc.

Ongoing globalization of economies and globalized supply chains are only two factors which emphasized the need for conformity assessment and certification in the mentioned fields.

5. How does the certificate help the company to build the success in the terms of marketing and promotional strategy?

As mentioned above the most important precondition is to continuously develop the quality performance level of a business organization and to reach a highly competitive level as to achieve the requested results.

The use of a business process management model and therefore the application of the concept of ISO 9001 complemented with further criteria to enhance sustainability is very appropriate to achieve this goal and reaching expected results. To be done successfully, it also requires a strong strategic focus of the management system and stakeholder needs have also to be considered.

Marketing and promotion should make use of an active and credible

communication about an organization's qualities and achievements. Independent third party certificates established under international accreditation play an important role as credible proofs of conformity. Such proofs are required in many business and public sectors. Their high recognition and the strong reputation of the certification bodies granting certificates enhance competitiveness and facilitate market access.

6. How would you encourage the companies, which have not applied for the certification yet, to change their attitude towards quality politics?

First of all a progressive business quality strategy which puts a focus on sustainable success needs to be in place. The implementation of ISO 9001 as the basic approach and management system will constitute the appropriate fundament to achieve the targets and to integrate stepwise the new requirements an organization may be faced with.

Choose the best and not the cheapest certification body to get support on how to use the standards and requirements. Make use of credible conformity proofs established by independent third party certification bodies to demonstrate their established reputation and recognition.

It could also be said as follows:

- clear quality strategy – appropriate development and performance base
- effective management system – reliable business results
- credible certification – more effective communication and trust, better business support