

“ISO Certification helps manufacturer retain customers and expand into new markets”

Company Background:

After arriving in Boston from Denmark in 1973, Dr. Anders Henriksen earned his Sc.D. in Ceramic Science in The Department of Materials Science and Engineering at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Dr. Henriksen moved to Chatham, New Hampshire in 1982 and started a consulting firm called Chatham Technology. Later that year his passion for product development led him to start Ceramco, Inc., as turnkey OEM manufacturer of custom technical ceramics of complex geometries for customer-specific applications.

After Dr. Henriksen’s passing in 2006, his son Thomas assumed leadership responsibilities of the business. Thomas’s qualifications as a Material Scientist readily fit his role in leading the company’s R&D initiatives as well. Today Ceramco is nestled in New Hampshire’s White Mountains and employs 24 at their 12,850 square foot headquarters located in Center Conway.

The markets served by Ceramco are many and varied. These range from aviation and aerospace, scientific instrumentation, energy, textiles, and heat treating products. They also produce and inventory a full line of stock ceramic fasteners for general use in applications that demand the properties offered only by a ceramic.

Ceramco has always prided itself on innovation and customer satisfaction. Ceramco blends their own raw material, and backs it with full documentation and traceability. They work closely with their customers throughout the engineering process and manufacturing, then onto the on-time delivery of parts. This ensures all parts are guaranteed to comply fully with all customer specifications and performance requirements.

Situation:

Ceramco runs conservatively which has always helped their profitability. But companies need to innovate otherwise they stagnate and lose their competitive edge. With ceramics still an emerging technology, Ceramco made considerable capital investments in R&D. This allowed them to realize the potential of a larger market that could use their unique processes and products.

But tackling new markets meant a new challenge. Several customers preferred Ceramco to be ISO 9001 certified, “We were concerned with losing customers who stated (ISO) was a requirement. It would allow simplified reporting to a customer’s quality requirements,” said Jim McMahon, Ceramco’s General Manager. “They need to know it will be produced right the first time.” Ceramco knew they had to get ISO certified if they were to grow their customer base and increase market share, “The larger motivations became capturing new clients and retaining the ones we already have.” said McMahon.

Solution:

The next step was to find a way for Ceramco to become ISO 9001:2008 certified. The good news was they did not have to look very far. Ceramco took advantage of NH MEP's ISO 9001:2008 Collaborative Program. The NH MEP ISO Collaborative Program allows small to medium size companies undertake the ISO certification process. NH MEP with the support of its partner Exolytics created a program designed to develop and train SME's on ISO 9001 at an affordable cost.

In March of 2015 Ceramco began the NH MEP ISO 9001:2008 Collaborative Program. All of the companies involved with the collaborative had the same objective, getting new customers and retaining existing ones. Jim McMahon was impressed by the step-by-step approach of the training. But what struck him the most was the comradery of those being trained, "In class I liked the way people learned from one another. We shared information and that interaction was important." Jim particularly liked the company visits from Exolytics, "It was very hands on. They worked directly with us right on the company floor."

McMahon added, "The documentation went fine. It was introduced slowly and as unobtrusively as possible. It completely explains why we are doing it and why it has to be done that way." Slowly Ceramco's employees started using the system and became comfortable with it. Some advice from McMahon, "Get your corrective action plan in soon. Engage the employees."

McMahon most valued the structure the collaborative training provided. "ISO provided a more systematic approach to handle day to day issues. It also provides a structured resolution plan for when something goes wrong and how to apply methodical corrective actions." He goes on to say, "ISO lets us know where in the process things fall down and allows us to standardize practices. We now know what to expect & have eliminated opportunities for oversight in the corrective process."

After completing the NH MEP ISO 9001:2008 Collaborative Program, Ceramco was awarded ISO 9001:2008 certification in October of 2015.

Results:

Ceramco now has the ability to enter new markets and retain customers without the barrier of not being ISO certified. No longer is there a concern about losing out on business due to this. Being ISO certified opens up a myriad of other possibilities said McMahon, "It's not only a growth of the market, but the technology too. There is a market for applications not yet realized."

Since Ceramco became ISO certified they have used surveys to track customer satisfaction. What they have found is the ISO certification has led to the company become more efficient and organized. They can quickly and calmly react to any challenge that arises and overcome it with confidence.

The following results for Ceramco are complimented by having gone through the NH MEP ISO 9001:2008 Collaborative Program:

- Retained two major customers totaling \$100,000 in business
- Growth rate of 18% in 2015
- Ability to enter new markets more easily

- Able to innovate their technology more aggressively
- Gives them a competitive edge
- Reduces customer audits
- Quality assurance is standardized and simplified

Testimonial:

"I appreciated the fact that the (NH MEP) ISO training was a streamlined approach without making it too complex. With the help of the (NH MEP) training and ISO certification we strengthened our position of retention with two of our major customers."

- Jim McMahon, General Manager of Ceramco, Inc. - www.ceramcoceramics.com