

## **ISO certification helps FiberNext LLC acquire new customers and retain old ones**

### **Company Background:**

With its humble beginnings out of company owner Craig Bowden's house in 2003, FiberNext LLC began as a technical training company for the fiber optics industry. However Craig quickly saw an opportunity and soon FiberNext was building fiber optic cable assemblies. This led to more customers who needed training, as well as their technicians and OEMs. With the workload expanding Craig brought on Ryan Irving as a manufacturer's rep and distributor in 2005. It did not take long before Ryan was hired as FiberNext's Chief Operating Office and CFO. They continued still with training as an important way to reach new customers and develop lasting relationships.

Since then FiberNext has become a versatile turnkey solutions provider for any company working with fiber optics. The company provides a wide variety of both technical services and custom manufactured products to meet customer needs. They focus on three profit centers- manufactured products, parts for resale, and service. Their product offerings include custom fiber assemblies for any application, and a full complement of both passive and active fiber optic networking products.

Now located in an 8,000 square foot facility in Concord, NH, FiberNext has grown to 21 employees and are looking to hire more. The markets they serve include utility, telecom, fiber-to-the-home (PON), datacom, industrial, broadcasting, avionics, tactical, security, bio-medical and municipal sectors, as well as many others.

FiberNext prides itself on being a market leading distributor and value-added reseller of thousands of fiber optic networking components. Innovation and high levels of service leading to increased customer satisfaction is what makes FiberNext LLC stand out from their competition.

### **Situation:**

It started becoming apparent that FiberNext may have fell out of consideration with some customer jobs because they were not ISO certified. "We would bid on a job, the customer would tell us they saw the value we provided, but for some reason we didn't get it." said Ryan Irving.

He then remembered vividly, "A particular customer of ours who was ISO certified mentioned we might get bumped as a vendor unless we were also ISO." Because FiberNext builds equipment for many companies who are ISO certified, Irving added, "It didn't take long to see the writing on the wall. We needed to protect what we have so we can retain existing customers and get new ones."

It was around 2014 when they brought in Tom Miller as Production Manager. "What I learned fast was if we got a call from a potential customer, and they found out we weren't ISO, it was no thank you," said Miller. "The military especially requires it, so we had to get on board."

With many of their customers already ISO certified the good news was they learned and followed the ISO procedures those customers adhered to. This gave them a well-rounded knowledge of ISO. "But our knowledge of ISO wasn't formalized, said Miller. "Customers pushed back to see if our procedures were formalized but of course they weren't. We really needed to be ISO." Tom was given the task to oversee their ISO certification.

**Solution:**

The next step was to find a way for FiberNext to become ISO 9001:2008 certified. They did their research and in 2015 they were led to the NH MEP 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.

The training spanned seven months, one full day each month. Because it was a collaborative program five companies participated with three people attending from each company. The primary instructor led the classroom training with two support instructors to help answer questions. The instructors taught the practical learning in the classroom sessions, and then afterward gave them homework on a particular aspect of what was taught that day. The following month during the next classroom session they would present their completed homework. "This fostered the collaboration where we as a group heard what each company was doing. We learned from one another. We shared information and that interaction was important." said Irving.

The last portion of the program they were taught ISO internal auditor training. This was to prepare their employees for an outside audit. They were allowed five days, one-on-one with the team from Exolytics. "We had a mock internal audit where we looked at and went through every procedure," said Miller. "We learned that as long as you are meeting the standards, you can do things your way."

Ryan Irving summed up the training this way, "The instructors were knowledgeable and accessible, the teaching was informative and hands-on, and the collaborative approach gave us insights we otherwise wouldn't have had."

After completing the NH MEP ISO 9001:2008 Collaborative Program, FiberNext was awarded ISO 9001:2008 certification in January of 2016.

**Results:**

FiberNext now has the ability to acquire new customers and retain old ones without the barrier of not being ISO certified. No longer is there a concern about losing out on business due to this.

"One immediate result was," said Ryan, "We had been doing business with a large aerospace company. But in 2015 they rejected us because we weren't ISO. Now that we're ISO we're doing business with them again." They also received positive feedback from some medical companies and other customers about doing business with FiberNext because they are now ISO certified. Recently they received quotes from two companies who do work for the military all because they are ISO. "Overall it has been a very positive experience for us." said Ryan.

The following results for FiberNext can be credited by having gone through the NH MEP ISO 9001:2008 Collaborative Program:

- \$100,000 in new sales in 2016
- Retained sales of \$500,000 in 2016 that otherwise would have been lost
- Retained 50 customer orders in 2016
- Added 2 new fulltime employees in 2016 and looking to hire more in 2017
- Increased investment in workforce practices or employee skills at the cost of \$3,000 in 2016
- Increased investment in new products or processes at the cost of \$7,000 in 2016
- Increased investment in plant or equipment at the cost of \$3,000 in 2016
- Increased investment in new information systems or software at the cost of \$50,000 in 2016
- Avoided unnecessary investments of \$5,500 in 2016

**Testimonial:**

“FiberNext very much appreciated working with the NH MEP ISO 9001:2008 Collaborative Program, the other companies that participated, and the instructors. The collaborative approach was well received internally as proven by being certified three months after finishing the program.”

- Tom Miller, Production Manager, FiberNext LLC - [www.fibernext.com](http://www.fibernext.com)