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QUALITY MANAGEMENT SOFTWARE TRENDS

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Since the turn of the millennium, the proliferation of lean quality management and compliance systems has afforded manufacturers a means to soften the negative financial impacts on total cost of quality. Quality management and compliance departments in the manufacturing industry are taking on a more business-critical role. To increase quality and lower production costs, manufacturers are searching for new strategies to leverage an enterprise-wide quality management and compliance software solution.

In recent years, technological advancements in the capabilities of networking and information systems have all but obsoleted paper-driven quality management systems, which are simultaneously time-consuming and relatively expensive to maintain. As such, quality automation expenses remain as high as 5-8% of total production costs. Furthermore, manufacturers that conduct operations across multiple sites domestically and abroad must contend with the added challenge of coordinating disparate automated quality-management systems. In some instances, a single manufacturing site may still operate several different automated quality-management systems, further compounding the challenges of deploying novel, 21st-century solutions to improve total cost of quality.

THE OLD WISDOM: A BASIC COMPARISON OF SOFTWARE INTEGRATION VERSUS DISPARATE AUTOMATED AND PAPER-DRIVEN QUALITY MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS.

Despite the obvious advantages of an integrated software solution, many manufacturers continue to resist transitioning to an integrated, state-of-the-art quality management and compliance software platform. The cost of initial investment along with an uncertain ROI gives business decision-makers cause for concern when analyzing the potential viability of novel IT solutions. From a strictly financial perspective, the wide range of software products from which to choose places quality management professionals in a rather delicate position.

The problem with paper-driven methods for managing quality from an enterprise-wide perspective lies in the manner in which quality management systems have evolved. In one manner of speaking, many legacy quality management systems accommodate the paper-driven method itself, rather than the method accommodating

the system. The latest integrated software solutions on the market seek to correct this imbalance by streamlining quality management processes tailored to the unique requirements of the quality system as a whole from an enterprise-wide perspective.

When manufacturers opt to deploy disparate automation solutions, the challenge of data collection, analysis and management strains the capabilities of obsolete quality systems. Even after implementing new IT solutions to increase efficiency in quality management processes, the issue of interoperability only exacerbates the operational issues at hand. Surely, the evolution of OPC standardization offers a means to facilitate data transmission between disparate manufacturing components, but the problem of system administration from an enterprise-wide perspective persists even after deploying high-priced integrated software solutions.

BEYOND SOFTWARE INTEGRATION: QMS TRENDS FACILITATED BY THE IQS SOLUTION

Business decision-makers cannot afford to underestimate the human element of implementing new quality management systems. If deployed correctly, manufacturers can potentially achieve substantial ROI from integrated software solutions within one year. The key is to align integrated systems with current business practices by launching proactive training initiatives. Ideally, novel software solutions should be intuitive enough to take advantage of the technological literacy of quality management personnel.

Mobility is arguably one of the most exciting trends in the latest quality management software platforms such as the IQS solution. With the proliferation of mobile devices, quality management operators are now able to

remain up-to-date on real-time data. Communication between IT departments, quality operators, disparate manufacturing sites and upper-level personnel can now be streamlined through software platforms that leverage the mobile device phenomenon. Time-sensitive decisions are no longer subject to the inherent inefficiencies of disparate quality management systems as thousands of employees can view and report data in real time.

By leveraging the pervasiveness of mobile devices in the workplace, manufacturers can potentially lower the cost of data collection and analysis by as much as 75%. Support and data management expenses can drop by up to 50%, achieving total savings in excess of one million dollars in some instances. The nascent development of mobile device integration into quality management systems provides ample opportunity to increase this total savings figure even further.

The IQS software solution provides a framework to create a custom API tailored to the unique intricacies of existing quality management systems. Manufacturers also have the option to integrate data as an initial load or to update on a scheduled, as-needed basis. The flexibility of the IQS solution even extends to many of the most widely distributed enterprise systems used today.

Manufacturing industry experts agree that the success of quality management initiatives hinges on the ability of upper-level Management personnel to breed a new quality management culture. Integrated systems that combine intuitive training, mobile device elements and platform flexibility such as the IQS solution can help manufacturers stay ahead of the curve.



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