

ISO 9000: Predictions of Future Trends

by Peter Sandford

Editor's Note: In the June issue, we addressed ISO 9000 basics. In this issue, the author talks about the future of ISO 9000.

Those of you who are making a living writing policies and procedures for ISO 9000 are perhaps wondering if this is a short-term wonder or a permanent fixture. I don't own a crystal ball, but I can offer my thoughts on where the ISO bandwagon is headed.

I came to the U.S. two years ago after working in Europe for 20 years, mainly in the United

Kingdom. I first encountered ISO 9000 when it was called BS (British Standard) 5750. In the United Kingdom, ISO 9000 was adopted by companies in four overlapping phases.

Phase 1. Large companies were persuaded by revised government purchasing guidelines to become ISO compliant. ISO certification inevitably followed.

Phase 2. Medium-sized companies were persuaded by the companies that had become certified in Phase 1 that ISO was a "good thing."

Phase 3. Carelessly written purchasing procedures or guide-

lines favored ISO-certified suppliers, many of which were forced to adopt ISO requirements, even if their business was unsuitable.

Phase 4. Small businesses and independent contractors resisted the adoption of ISO and protested to government representatives and industry leaders. Some concessions, such as cost and complexity, were made.

My perception is that the United States is between phases 1 and 2, roughly where

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P&P PIC Sets Goals for 1995-1996 Fiscal Year

by Raymond E. Urgo

With a new fiscal year starting, I want to share the goals we have set for the P&P PIC.

Our overall goal is to set in motion the ongoing responsibilities of the PIC's four teams. These responsibilities (along with the name of each team leader) are listed below:

Membership (Jerry Laing)

- Create a welcome letter for new PIC members by 5/95
- Conduct a membership survey by 10/95
- Create a membership profile by 10/95
- Create a membership directory by 10/95

Programs and Projects (Diane Whitmer)

- Coordinate proposals for P&P presentation at the 1996 STC conference by 8/1/95
- Compile lists of P&P resources by 12/95
- Encourage members to enter organizational manuals in publications competitions

Public Relations (Carol Carlson)

- Create a P&P PIC brochure by 11/95
- Publish a P&P PIC article in the *Intercom* by 11/95
- Establish contacts with other PICs and outside organizations as needed

Newsletter (Audrey Cielinski Kessler)

- Publish four to six editions of the PIC's *STEPS & SPECS* newsletter

Each coordinator has begun working toward these goals. Our major challenge during the next

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Letters



I just received my June issue of *STEPS & SPECS*. I enjoyed it immensely. Audrey is doing an excellent job!

*Martha Collins
Suncoast (Florida) Chapter*

The *STEPS & SPECS* newsletter is so well done

*Eleanor Orthun
Los Angeles Chapter*

Letters to the editor—positive, negative, indifferent—are always welcome. Send your comments to STEPS & SPECS Editor, 2013 Brookview Drive, Kent, OH 44240-4204.

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prepared to get involved with both processes and documentation.

- Adopting ISO requirements to nonmanufacturing environments will challenge both process and documentation design skills.
- Independent technical writing contractors will need to be prepared to pursue their own ISO certification or risk losing business.
- ISO certification will be used as a sales and marketing tool.
- If you work for a company that claims not to require ISO certification because it is not “international,” the world will soon begin to pass you by.
- The difficulty of interpreting ISO 9000 requirements for specialist industries will lead to the widespread use of guidelines and interpretations.
- The early pioneers who obtained ISO certification by following the advice “write down what you do” will discover that they have locked themselves into a too rigid structure.

The last point on this list perhaps suggests the conclusion to this article. ISO certification is not a “fit-and-forget” solution. Rather, it should be a continuous process of review and improvement.

There always will be new policies and procedures to be written or existing ones to revise. If you work for a company or agency, involvement with ISO documentation puts you at the heart of core business processes, rather than being part of a peripheral (and perhaps dispensable) technical

writing group. If you are an independent, involvement with a client’s ISO documentation can give you a unique insight into their business and provide opportunities that you normally would not become aware of. 

Peter Sandford is a freelance technical writer/consultant, specializing in ISO policies and procedures, document control systems, user documentation, and on-line systems. He is a member of the Twin Cities chapter of STC and the P&P PIC.

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the United Kingdom was four years ago.

Based on my observations of what happened in Europe, I offer the following predictions:

- ISO 9000 will continue to be adopted widely. Many companies that have obtained or are close to obtaining certification have deemed “ISO certified or complaint” to be a prime consideration for selecting suppliers.
- The need for smaller companies with limited resources to document their processes will continue to create opportunities for independent technical writers with ISO experience.
- If you work for a small company with documentation professionals who have limited experience, you will need to be



Q What sets procedures documents apart from other types of technical documents?

A Procedures are instructions, such as how to install a software program or how to assemble a piece of furniture. Procedures typically are written as steps. Other types of technical and nontechnical documents (e.g., articles and proposals) typically are written in paragraphs. The steps in procedures documents provide the reader with how-to information.

Q How detailed should my procedures be?

A There really is no set amount of detail that's optimal for all procedures documents.

The level of detail should be appropriate for the audience. Three factors to consider are the type of procedure, how often the reader will be using the procedure and the reader's level of experience with the tasks explained in the procedures document. A person highly familiar with the subject, for example, is likely to require less detailed instructions than someone with little or no experience with the topic.

Q What characterizes a good index?

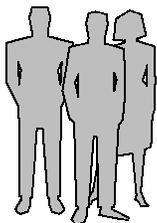
A Good indexes are complete, accurate and concise. To be complete, an index should include a listing for all major points in the document. To be accurate, the page references in the index should be

the page numbers on which the reader can find the indexed information. There also should be no misspellings, incorrect dates or incorrect cross references. To be concise, entries should be detailed and specific rather than general or too broad.

Q I've heard the term placekeeping aids. What are these and when are they used?

A Placekeeping aids help the reader keep track of which steps have been performed and which steps have yet to be completed. A typical format is the checklist in which a box or line is placed to the left of each step. As a step is completed, the reader places a check mark or some other symbol in the blank space.

Sources: *Science and Technical Writing: A Manual of Style*, Philip Rubens (general editor), Henry Holt: New York, 1992, and *Procedure Writing Principles and Practices*, Douglas Wieringa, Christopher Moore and Valerie Barnes, Battelle Press: Columbus, Ohio, 1993.



P&P PIC People

Moves . . . Job Changes . . . Activities

Audrey Cielinski Kessler, P&P PIC newsletter editor, has relocated to Kent, Ohio. Her new business and home address is 2013 Brookview Drive, Kent, Ohio, 44240-4204. Her new phone numbers are 216/677-8598 (office) and 216/677-1168 (home).

Raymond E. Urgo, P&P PIC manager, was interviewed

recently on a national radio program about his work with policies and procedures.

Jerry A. Laing is the new coordinator for the PIC's membership team. Jerry is a member of the San Gabriel Valley (Calif.) chapter. He works as a policies and procedures independent consultant/contractor. You can reach him at 818/454-1010. 

Proposals Submitted for '96 STC Conference

Diane Whitmer, P&P PIC programs and projects team leader, coordinated and submitted a proposal for a P&P progression at STC's 1996 annual conference. **Raymond E. Urgo** submitted a separate conference proposal for a procedures flowcharting workshop.

If you have submitted a P&P-related proposal on your own, please call Diane at 816/482-5292 so she can add your name and proposed topic to her list. 

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The *STEPS & SPECS* newsletter needs—and wants—your input. If you would like to write an article, have an idea for one but don't know how to get started, or just have a comment or question related to policies and procedures, please let me know.

To get your creative minds working, here are some topic suggestions:

- Online P&Ps
- P&P quality control



- Processes for tracking P&P revisions and revision cycles
- Writing P&Ps for a mixed skills-level audience
- Book reviews
- P&P-related events
- P&P project coordination
- Training/professional development

Call or write today with your ideas and suggestions.

few months is the development of a membership survey, profile and directory. To volunteer your time or ideas, contact the appropriate team coordinator. 

Raymond E. Urgo is principal of *Urgo and Associates*, a member of the Los Angeles chapter of *STC* and manager of the *Policies and Procedures PIC*.

Help Wanted

Carol Carlson, P&P PIC public relations team leader, needs volunteers to help design a brochure for the PIC. If you would like to help, please call her at 312/275-6633.

Odds & Ends . . . The NUS Seventh Annual Procedures Symposium is set for Oct. 31-Nov. 3 in Clearwater Beach, Florida. The theme is streamlining procedure programs in a competitive environment. The focus is on procedures control and production. For more information, call 800/637-2743.

STEPS & SPECS

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The mission of the Policies and Procedures professional interest committee is to assist STC members in developing, implementing and managing policies and procedures communication through educational and networking opportunities, STC conference sessions and publications, and communication with other STC PICs and professional organizations in areas of common interest.