An Insider's Guide to Selecting a QMS

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Introduction

In every business sector, Quality Management is essential. To remain competitive in today's global economy, you must continually strive to meet or exceed your customers' requirements in the most efficient and cost-effective way possible. Deciding which tools to use in order to manage quality effectively can be a daunting task.

"Quality means doing it right when no one is looking." ~Henry Ford

Compliance-driven companies are shredding their manual, paper-based systems and/or evolving beyond the limited capabilities their own homegrown custom software solutions. This is because their current systems do not offer a central and integrated repository for all quality events that empowers their organization to continually improve with collaboration, accountability and automation. They are trying to lean-out their quality system and are searching for the right QMS solution that is geared specifically to their business model. They have already learned, the hard way, that lean manufacturing is a myth without lean quality. This short guide will hopefully lend some insight on things to consider when selecting the right QMS solution for your organization.

Ask yourself the following questions:
- How are you doing things now?
- Is what you're doing now working?
- How much time does it take to enter data?
- How long does it take your Quality Manager to generate reports and metrics?
- Is the information reliable?
- Are any efforts being duplicated?
- Do you have visibility to your QMS at a glance?
- How often do improvement efforts get lost in someone's inbox?
- If you had to find a Quality Record, how long would it take you?
- How long does it take to prepare for an Audit?
- Are Quality efforts shared by the entire organization?
- Is there management buy-in and executive backing for a new QMS?

Cost

One of the biggest things to consider when selecting a QMS solution is cost. Consider the questions in the previous section. Arguably, each one can be tied to a cost to your organization, *which you are already paying*. If you choose not to use Quality Management Software, there is an often-higher cost to developing and maintaining your own solutions – solutions that cannot upgrade, evolve or integrate with your critical business data.

Homegrown quality solutions, using MS Access, Excel and Word are clunky at best. Information has to be duplicated in many cases, which not only costs valuable time, but also leads to data entry errors, which ultimately yields unreliable data. Creating KPI's and reporting trends can take many hours of sorting and massaging data to display in any meaningful way. Because quality records typically aren't readily retrievable, valuable time is spent trying to find the information you need. These types of things can lead to audit findings, which then costs more time in resolving issues, re-tooling the software programs to meet your needs, more training and then re-training.

These are all wasteful efforts. Quantify what these shortcomings are costing you now, and what is possible if you could minimize or eliminate many of these costs. The right QMS solution will reduce your costs dramatically. Properly implemented, that software investment will not cost you money, it will save you money. Be sure to pick one that offers your organization both:

- An ROI model that accurately **predicts** your savings over time
- Total Administrative Cost of Quality tracking that **proves** your savings over time.

"A bad system will beat a good person every time." ~W. Edwards Deming

Custom vs. Out-of-the Box

Whether you decide to go with a custom software solution or an "out-of-the-box" solution, there will be a learning curve, which can disrupt your organization temporarily, but usually once your team gets used to the new methodology, the disruptions will disappear. The most difficult part of implementing any new software system tends to be overcoming resistance to change.

Custom software can be developed internally to meet your every whim, however, these solutions will be very costly in development and implementation, and the upkeep can exceed your current costs. A custom solution rarely gets more than 20% down the road of providing the full-featured functionality of a mature QMS. Plus, often times, a dependency forms with internal IT staff that can be disastrous if that talent leaves the company. In that scenario, the software cannot be edited, upgraded or made compatible with future versions of Windows – eventually making it unusable. Before investing in a homegrown custom solution, ask yourself if the high cost and high risk is worth it.

An effective "out-of-the-box" solution may require some adjustment to your current processes, but in most cases, will be much more cost-effective than custom software. It should be pre-loaded with quality methodologies for managing each type of quality event that forces your organization to use quality best practices. Before selecting an "out-of-the-box" QMS solution, ask yourself if it's worth the cost of modifying your current processes to conform to the software. Ensure the QMS is configure-to-order for your industry and offers the ability to define multi-user, custom workflow inside each module.

Quality Standards

Your organization's ISO 9001 Certification is an indication of your commitment to meeting your customers' needs. The right Quality Management Software will be designed to help you comply with the ISO standard, and will be flexible enough to allow you to expand into some of the more stringent requirements of AS9100 (Aerospace), and ISO 13485 (Medical), or any other ISO-based quality standard that your business model requires. With the release of the ISO 9001:2015 standard, it is imperative that your QMS system provides:

- Compliance processes that are easily understood and documented in a vaulted environment
- Audit management process to understand current compliance status and identify areas for improvements
- Formal risk management framework
- The ability to identify risk factors across operations; and quantify, visualize and mitigate risk factors across operations.

Integration

For Quality Management Software to be truly effective, it needs to integrate seamlessly with your current Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) systems. You spend valuable time entering Part Numbers, Customers, Vendors, Job Numbers, etc. into your ERP system, why should you have to re-enter this information into another software program? Any time you have to re-enter critical data, you have a potential failure point. The key to quick, reliable data entry is an integrated software solution. Here are the key questions to ask your QMS provider:

- Does your software offer a standard, field-tested, read/write integration to my ERP system?
- Does your company partner with my ERP provider, to ensure future compatibility and timely and well co-coordinated product updates?
- How many standard ERP integrations have you built, and can I keep using your QMS solution even if my ERP needs change down the road?
- Is your company a leader in offering ERP-integrated QMS solutions?

Support

It goes without saying that before you purchase any software; you should know what you're getting into. Any good software company should be willing to give you a list of references who use their system, and wouldn't mind you calling to see how the software is working for them.

Technical support is critical, and generally, you don't have any interactions with your QMS' support department until after you've purchased, and by then, the primary contact you will ever have with the company is through their Support department. An effective or ineffective Support staff could make or break your decision. Ask your potential QMS reference customers about the quality of their support experience. Give Support a call

during the sales cycle, and see how long it takes to talk to a real person. Then ask them for details about their Support metrics:

- How many support calls do you get per day, and how many people work in your support department?
- What percentage of time is my support question answered on the first call?
- If my support question requires a call back, how often it is resolved that same day or within 24 hrs.
- What is your annual maintenance renewal rate? (This demonstrates customer satisfaction with the QMS product and their support services.)

Conclusion
In order to effectively meet or exceed customer requirements, Quality Management Software is becoming an essential indication of your continued commitment to excellence. There are many factors to consider when choosing a solution to ensure the right fit for your organization. Taking into account the points highlighted in this Insider's Guide should help you choose the right QMS for your company, which should also increase your customers' loyalty through a tangible increase in product quality.

"Give them quality. That's the best kind of advertising." ~Milton Hersey

uniPoint Software

Our EQMS: uniPoint is the industry leader in ERP-integrated, Enterprise Quality Management Software, offering standard integrations to over 40 leading ERP systems. This means you no longer have to run your quality system in isolation of your critical business data. Plus you can eliminate redundant data entry, reduce mistakes and show measurable efficiency improvement.

Our Solution: The cornerstone of our solution is the technology we use to develop it; the database we use to store your critical data reliably; and the reporting engine we employ to summarize your data in printed reports, graphs and charts. uniPoint uses Microsoft Visual Studio .Net; a Microsoft SQL Database; and Crystal Reporting. You will never outgrow our system, and you can rest assured that our proven technology will continue to service your growing and adapting quality compliance needs going-forward.

Our Advantage: Over 1,500 companies throughout North America agree that uniPoint is one of the easiest software applications they have ever used. That's because we use a consistent and intuitive design philosophy in every module. To support your users, our implementation consultants are ISO experts. Plus we offer FREE group training webinars every month.

THANK YOU.
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