

Accreditation: Exporting Your Business

Press Release

In an increasingly competitive business environment, companies small and large across the globe have one main goal in common; to save time and money whilst simultaneously increasing sales. Simple to state, but considerably more difficult to achieve, particularly in testing economic conditions. However, accreditation is one tool that can help businesses reach this target, especially those with ambitions to expand into other international markets.

In essence, accreditation is a tool for ensuring the competence of an organization to carry out one or more specified tasks. Accreditation provides confidence in the companies that either hold or utilise services that have achieved accredited certification status. Accreditation is the basis of trust.

In Angola, Botswana, Democratic Republic of Congo, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe, the task of implementing the necessary infrastructure falls on the Southern African Development Community Accreditation Service (SADCAS). SADCAS is a multi-economy accreditation body established in terms of Article 15 B of the Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) Annex to the SADC Protocol on Trade with the primary purpose of ensuring that conformity assessment service providers (calibration/testing/medical laboratories, certification and inspection bodies) operating in those SADC Member States which do not have national accreditation bodies are subject to an oversight by an authoritative body. In other words, SADCAS 'checks the checkers.'

Certification applies to standards that relate to business operation, the most commonly used being ISO 9001 for Quality Management Systems (QMS) and ISO 14001 for Environmental Management Systems (EMS). Inspection regimes cover product design, products, materials and equipment, installations, plant, processes and services. Some of these areas will be subject to legislation that demands regular inspection. Product testing and calibration are used to demonstrate that a product meets a specification. This might be a customer requirement, a part of a product development regime, or even a legal obligation. There are more than 50 accredited conformity assessment bodies, most of which are testing laboratories, in the 13 SADC Member States serviced by SADCAS with more than 30 under process at SADCAS.

Exporting

Companies looking to expand their business on the global market can benefit from holding accredited certification in several ways. The first and most important is that it can provide an entrée into a given market that would otherwise be closed to that organization. An increasing number of organizations, in both the public and private sectors are specifying accreditation as a precondition to tendering for contracts. A company that either holds or utilises accredited certification services is therefore able overcome this hurdle and widen the potential market for its goods or services.

As accreditation is recognized internationally it can open doors abroad equally well as those in the domestic market. This is made possible by a series of Mutual Recognition Arrangements/ Agreements (MRAs). These operate as catalysts for the respective economies in two ways. In addition to helping companies with SADCAS accreditation or accredited certification to pitch for business abroad, it also enables companies to have confidence in the results for accredited facilities in other countries.

One of the best examples of an effective MRA is that operated by the International Laboratory Accreditation Cooperation (ILAC). ILAC membership reaches across the globe, boasting 80 members, covering a total of 70

different economies. Following SADCAS' achievement of signatory status in the ILAC MRA in November 2015 this means that laboratories holding SADCAS accreditation have better access to 70 foreign markets in – A truly global reach.

A larger playing field is just one of the ways in which accredited certification can help to increase sales. It can be utilized as a credential to designate an organization as qualified to provide a particular service. This demonstration of confidence provides credible evidence of best practice and can be used to distinguish one organisation from its competition.

Business Benefits

In addition to increasing potential business, accreditation also has a key role to play in saving businesses time and money. As anyone busy running a business knows all too well, sourcing the right people or organizations to carry out particular key services can be a time consuming process that is fraught with 'unknowns'. Using SADCAS - accredited services can make sourcing an appropriate supplier a lot easier and quicker.

At first glance achieving SADCAS accredited certification status may appear to be yet another distraction that prevents the time-strapped business owners from concentrating on providing the company's products or services. In fact the opposite is true, as accreditation can help business owners devote more time to the sharp end of their business.

Light Touch Regulation

At a macro level accreditation can help by reducing the regulatory burden upon commercial organizations. Making regulation more effective and less onerous is a common goal for governments across the world.

Testing, inspection, calibration and certification collectively known as Conformity assessment services, all play a vital role in underpinning and demonstrating compliance to these standards. But in order for businesses and governments to have confidence in the work done by these assessment organizations, the assessment organizations themselves also need to be independently assessed and verified. This is where accreditation comes in. With confidence in the conformity assessment process underpinned by accreditation, standards can be used to support a lighter touch approach to regulation, which in turn means business owners spend less time tied up in red-tape.

Increasing Efficiency

Accredited certification to a QMS standard, such as ISO 9001 can also help businesses at a micro level. It can provide a regular and objective "check-up" that helps an organisation's management identify and implement operational improvements. In addition to increasing process efficiency, having an effective QMS in place reduces costs by limiting the rate of product failure and down time.

Just as achieving accredited certification status is not about having a certificate to hang on the wall, there is more to using accredited services than merely ticking compliance boxes. A conformity assessment service accredited by SADCAS has proved that it complies with the best practices of the particular industry. It has also demonstrated that it is competent to deliver a consistently reliable, impartial, and accurate service, which meets the appropriate internationally-recognised standard. When a business chooses an accredited supplier, it can be sure that it is receiving the best and most appropriate service for its needs.

Owing to increased client confidence in the accreditation process, business productivity can be increased as the number of time consuming client-audits is reduced. The MRAs mean that products do not have to be re-tested for new international markets, which further reduces paperwork and improves operational efficiency. Using an accredited supplier takes the guesswork out of choosing an evaluation body, giving the company confidence that they will get the service that best fulfils their requirements.

Other Benefits

In addition to clients, the staff of a company that holds accredited certification can also benefit. Employees can have a profound influence on how a prospective client perceives the company. Undergoing regular assessment visits provides employees with an increased sense of professionalism and pride in their work. This encourages them to stay on the “cutting edge” of the relevant technological developments in their field. Staff are also more likely to be committed to observing the firm’s QMS and standards of performance.

Accredited services also play a vital part in risk management. Obtaining adequate insurance cover can be dependent on the ability to demonstrate that a company has thorough processes. It is also worth remembering that in the event of legal action, the use of accredited bodies to carry out independent evaluations can help to demonstrate due diligence.

Summary

Governments and economies across the world are increasingly turning to accreditation as a means improving business performance. Using the services of an accredited body allows a business to make informed choices. It can help them save time and money whilst increasing efficiency. For companies looking to expand abroad, it can open the door to new markets. It provides confidence in the goods or services being provided, helping to win new business and establishing credibility in the absence of a track record with that client. Not only does the use of accredited services show best practice it can also provide credible evidence of due diligence should anything ever go wrong.

To find out how SADCAS accreditation can help your business, visit www.sadcas.org
or call +267 3132909/ 3132910.

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