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Software for Environmental Management Systems

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Organisations of all shapes and sizes need to be able to demonstrate an effective environmental management system (EMS). It can be a qualifier when bidding for new business and in some cases you can't do business without one, because your prospective customers may insist on it.

Having an EMS can be another "tick in the box" for ethical supply chain purposes. But investing time, effort, resource and money into such a system should really be regarded as a sound business investment. Of course, there must be a business case to support the need for an EMS as well as a compelling return on investment argument and a rapid project payback period. In most cases an EMS will even deliver a bottom-line positive return, but it will only do this if you embrace the continuous improvement that a standards-based approach (typically ISO 14001) offers, and here is where software can really help.



It has been estimated that for every £1 spent on an EMS build, implementation and maintenance, it costs nearly double to manage the information. More than 40 per cent of a system's build and implementation costs and nearly all of the annual maintenance costs can be eliminated by using the right software.

If you aren't sure if you really need an EMS, first consider these:

- Do you need to demonstrate environmental compliance?
- Do you need to monitor environmental performance?
- Is it important to effectively, efficiently and speedily track or reduce rates of environmental incidents/accidents/deviations/unplanned events?
- Can you currently prove adherence to environmental policies and procedures?
- Could you do with some help with document management?
- Do you have a clear and auditable process for dealing with environmental non-conformities and assessment recommendations?



If the answer is yes to any of these questions, then you should be considering web-based EMS technology solutions. Software can be deployed across multiple locations to improve performance, internal control, external communications and overall corporate performance.

Organisations using a web-based EMS often state that information needed for annual reporting, which previously took days to obtain, can instead be retrieved in seconds. Others have claimed that they have reduced the costs of environmental incidents by 10 per cent over 12 months.

The right software will help with the following key elements of an EMS; the management of audit, compliance, legislation, waste management, performance, risk assessment, documents, actions, incidents, reporting, management review, training, and the setting of objectives and targets. Using a manual paper-based system is time-consuming and more expensive than you may realise. Purpose-built software brings the benefit of management system continuity despite personnel changes, as the framework for information delivery is constant and is not dependant on any one person's knowledge.

It's worth considering the benefits that various roles will gain from using a web-based EMS. For example, what a senior-level manager wants and needs from such a system will be very different from an operational environmental manager.

A CEO will traditionally ask questions such as "Do we really need this? What is the ROI? Does it support our strategic objectives for governance, risk and compliance? How will we know if it is successful?" A CEO is looking to build competitive advantage, maintain internal control and keep a good reputation so they will need the tools to help implement the company's environmental strategies and initiatives.

On the flipside, the site operational manager will want to know about environmental reports for site activities, how to be more efficient, how to send email notifications of actions and escalations, and how to configure localised environmental information.

The site manager's goals are to manage key environmental risks on-site; manage key stakeholders, suppliers and customers; get an overall view of team tasks and performance; and meet environmental targets and objectives. Thus he or she needs to be notified of outstanding actions, quickly report on performance and be assured of meeting the objectives and targets set.

Those businesses that are having difficulties managing or assuring environmental compliance; experiencing costs relating to environmental non-compliance (insurance premiums, fines, penalties, litigation, damage to brand and reputation, corrective actions); considering moving from a paper-based EMS; struggling with environmental reporting; or are adopting a standards-based approach to risk management, should be exploring the potential benefits to your business of a web-based EMS.

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