

Quality Management Systems

Senior Sales Manager for TPS says that TÜV Rheinland made the process easier and more rewarding

BACKGROUND



Technical Power Systems, Inc., (TPS) founded in 2001 is a Chicagoland-based designer and producer of customized rechargeable batteries and chargers for OEM and replacement applications. The company is well respected for its comprehensive line of custom battery packs; specialty lithium ion, nickel metal hydride, sealed lead acid and nickel cadmium batteries; and battery chargers and power supplies.

BUSINESS CHALLENGE

TPS was exceptionally proud of its quality system, which, along with their broad product line and dedicated customer support, they felt was a major contributing factor to their continuing success in a highly competitive market. TPS frequently invited their clients to visit their Lisle, IL plant to audit their production and quality management systems. "We loved showing off our systems and facility," said Najib Habiby, Senior Sales Manager for TPS. "Clients would come in with a good impression of our capabilities and leave with an even better one. Unfortunately, as economic pressures grew and forced many organizations to do more with fewer resources, it became more difficult for customers to spend the time and money to visit and audit our facility, so we decided to seek ISO 9001:2008 and ISO 14001:2004 certifications."

Habiby, President Joe Giovanatto, and Quality Assurance Manager Tony Giovanatto of the TPS management team formed the certification committee and hired an outside consultant to help them with the process. Working with its consultant, the company prepared for its certification by researching the process, performing an internal audit and exploring potential independent auditors. "In doing our research and internal auditing, we were really quite pleased to see how well our existing program meshed with the requirements as we understood them. However, we still had a slight feeling of uncertainty as to what an external auditor might say. In hindsight, I think it is only natural to feel a little apprehensive when an outsider is coming to inspect you," said Habiby. "We knew what we wanted from an auditing firm; we wanted a company that had great worldwide name recognition, was technically adept and had people with whom we felt we could work well to make the process as simple and pain-free for us as possible."

Habiby spoke with and reviewed presentations from each of the four prospective auditors suggested by the consultant. Said Habiby, "While all the candidates were similar, as the vetting process continued differences emerged. For example, each of them asked us to fill out a number forms, often asking for the same information as we had already given..."

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BUSINESS CHALLENGE CONTINUED

“Only one of the candidates went so far as to pre-fill the forms for us based on what we had given them previously. That same candidate even allowed me to interview the lead auditor to assure that there would be chemistry between us, and did so before we ever made any kind of financial commitment to them,” said Habiby.

Habiby also noted that while the TPS goal was to earn certification to both ISO 9001 and 14001 standards, several of the auditors only prepared quotations for the 9001 request, in spite of being asked several times.

“It’s interesting that at first we thought choosing our auditor was going to be a difficult part of the process, but ultimately, choosing TÜV Rheinland was really the easy and obvious choice for us. They met all of our criteria, listened to what we wanted, and gave us what they said they would in a prompt and professional manner.”

SOLUTION AND RESULTS

The actual audit was a three-step process, starting with a pre-audit assessment. “Bob Carter, TÜV Rheinland’s lead auditor, accompanied us on a walk through of our facility. He spoke with us about the nature of the auditing process and what it was expected to accomplish,” said Habiby.

“He spoke extensively about the experiences he had had over his many years of auditing and he explained what kind of problems can arise and what steps could be taken to solve them. His store of knowledge is extensive, and was really quite helpful.”

The next step of the audit, Stage 1, reviewed TPS’s documentation, management systems and procedure manual. “We had several areas where minor deficiencies were found, but rather than be negative and critical, Bob clearly and concisely showed us where our shortcomings were, and we were able to quickly fix the deficiencies and move on to Stage 2.”

The Stage 2 audit involved interviews with production floor personnel and a second auditor, Chuck Hughes. “I accompanied Bob and Chuck while they interviewed our people on the floor, but they insisted that I not say anything,” said Habiby. “Getting audited can be somewhat stressful and some of our people were nervous, but both Bob and Chuck seemed to know who was nervous, and they did everything they could to make our people feel comfortable and at ease. It was very obvious to me that both auditors had done this many times before, and were able to get the information they needed without anybody’s feathers getting ruffled.”

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SOLUTION AND RESULTS CONTINUED

The Stage 2 audit revealed three minor deficiencies that were easily fixed, and on August 10, 2011 TPS was awarded its ISO 9001:2008 and ISO 14001:2004 certificates. Habiby gives much of the credit for this to TÜV Rheinland's regional sales manager Melissa (Miller) Argiro and her team. "Melissa was outstanding. She worked really hard to make sure the process was simple for us. Bob and Chuck were also great to work with. Throughout the entire process, I felt that TÜV Rheinland wasn't there just to pass or fail us; they were there to ensure our success. They made the process more understandable, easier, and more rewarding."

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