

How To Get Your Snow Business ISO 9001 Certified



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What makes your operation ANY different from other top-tier companies providing commercial snow and ice management services in your market? But what can you do to elevate your company from your competitors? Are you familiar with ISO 9001 certification?

Whether it's something you decide to pursue or not, chances are one of your competitors is weighing the advantages of obtaining it.

ISO is an international nongovernmental organization that brings together experts to develop voluntary, consensus-based International Standards. ISO, founded in 1946 during a meeting of civil engineers in London, has published more than 21,000 International Standards, covering almost every industry. A relatively recent standard is SN9001, Industry Standards for Snow and Ice Management.

Like any new program, it got off to a relatively slow start. But that's changing even though achieving the SN9001 standard is no slam-dunk.

At a recent [Ohio Landscape Association](#) event, Bill Malen, vice president of operations at [Schill Grounds Management](#) in North Ridgeville, Ohio, shared his company's months long journey to attain ISO 9001 certification. Schill Grounds Management, a growing \$8-million full-season service provider, is the second company in Ohio to achieve this certification for snow management. Reportedly, about 20 other companies in the U.S. and Canada have also earned ISO 9001 for snow.

Malen said ISO develops standards, but is not involved in their actual certification. External certification bodies approve and issue the certificates. Achieving ISO 9001 required a third party to audit Schill's processes and procedures to ensure that the company adheres to the business and quality management standards for professional snow and ice management,

Malen explained. Schill used Smithers Quality Assessments to guide it through the process.

Everything the company did had to be documented. The entire Schill management team was involved in the process that took months, said Malen.

"We're committed to continually improving our processes, be more efficient and to deliver the highest quality services to our clients. We're confident this will help achieve that," said Malen about why the company sought certification. He said certification is valid for just three years, after which the company must go through most of the process again.



Photo: Schill Grounds Management

Malen adds that, apart from being a strong sales and marketing tool in that it assures clients you're committed to providing the highest quality services available, ISO 9001 aids risk management. The certification shows you have adopted ANSI/ASCA Industry Standards, some of which help protect you from baseless slip-and-fall lawsuits. This may reduce his company's insurance costs, he said.

It's difficult at this point to speculate how big or positive an impact achieving ISO 9001 will have on Schill Grounds Management or any other company that has committed the time and resources to take this extra step.

What is certain, however, is that companies achieving and embracing ISO 9001 will elevate the industry.

The bigger question would be: How many other snow or green industry service companies will seek ISO 9001 certification and what overall effect will this ultimately have on the industry's efficiency and its greater value to its millions of clients?

ISO 9001 Certification Benefits

- There is a common, understood system including consistent and repeatable processes
- The organization/ business functions in a disciplined and systematic way, almost no matter what happens
- You have fewer failures in quality of service or product
- People are clear about what to do and how; they don't have to spend time 'making things up' or 'finding things out' or reinventing wheels
- You have more or better business because you can sell to new markets, or the certificate distinguishes you in the marketplace
- You know more quickly if things are going wrong, and where
- You stop spending money or time on the same old problems. Because many have been resolved permanently, and if another comes up, you now have a process and the resources and skills to identify and fix it. Faster, better, cheaper.
- Better management control and reporting – you know how your business is doing and what to look at.

- You don't scratch your head wondering how to respond to questions asking about your quality system, because you know.

Use These 5 Steps for ISO Certification

Achieving ISO 9001 certification requires an outside consultant or certification service. Selecting a registrar close to your company may help reduce your costs. Here are five more steps needed to obtain ISO certification, according to 9001simplified.com.

Step 1: Preparation. Appoint a senior manager at your company to research and gain an understanding of ISO 9001. This individual should get training and full support from management and employees to implement the quality management system.

Step 2: Documentation. ISO 9001 requires a host of documents – manuals, procedures, policies, objectives, flowcharts and instructions. The documentation is specific to each company.

Step 3: Implementation. Step-by-step you introduce any new requirements that affect company employees and help them to adjust. Employees must easily recognize the benefits of the changes, both to themselves and to the company.

Step 4: Internal Audits. Evaluate your company to see if all ISO 9001 requirements are being followed. Conduct them periodically after achieving certification. Internal audits are performed by an employee of your company who has been trained in ISO 9001 audits or you can use a subcontractor. The goal of each audit is to verify your company meets the certification requirements as they are described in your quality manual and your quality procedures.

Step 5: Certification. In order to achieve ISO 9001 certification, it will be necessary to have an independent ISO 9001 auditor visit your company and perform the certification audit, which can be done soon after you have completed your internal audit.

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