

## **Customer Dissatisfaction:** insidious enemy of the best laid plans

*By Doug Bennett*

According to studies by the Technical Assistance Research Programs Institute in Washington, D.C., the average customer with an unresolved complaint will tell 9-to-10 people, and 13 percent will tell more than 20 people. Furthermore, only about 5% of unhappy customers complain. This data suggests that the ISO was well-justified in broadening the standard within section 8 of the ISO 9001:2000 to include customer satisfaction, which many organizations either don't measure, or monitor only passively.

For those companies that do periodically undertake customer satisfaction surveys, there can be dramatic differences in the results; depending on whether the survey is conducted "in house" or by an independent third-party. Specifically, customers are far more likely to report dissatisfaction when a survey is administered by an independent third party. The reticence that 95% of people feel about complaining directly to one of their suppliers is lessened considerably when they perceive remarks they may make will not be attributed to them personally, but rather used only to compile a composite picture. Furthermore, "in house" surveys are not taken as seriously because, from the respondents' perspective, the company behind the survey is getting valuable information for free.

A properly-conducted customer satisfaction survey will pay dividends in increased customer retention and an improved bottom-line. If conducted regularly, such studies can measure the extent to which customer satisfaction has improved or declined over time, and can pin-point those aspects of a company's customer service program responsible for the changes. In short, at a surprisingly low cost, conducting these surveys will serve to demonstrate compliance with the ISO's standards and more importantly, generate information that when acted upon, will improve a company's customer satisfaction levels.

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