



Success Story: Bellwether, Inc.

Machine Shop Uses ISO Certification to Define Long-term Goals

In 1974, Robert “Bob” Jenkins, a young department manager working in the carpet manufacturing industry, realized that there was a major problem with a specific part of the loom used to weave carpet backing called a “shuttle gripper.” The shuttle grippers that were available were not compatible with the new looms his company had purchased, which was causing significant quality defects. The loom manufacturer had been approached with the problem, but did not solve the problem effectively, so Bob decided to solve the problem himself.

The following year, Bob and his father, John Jenkins, who had worked as a tool and die maker for many years, started Bellwether, Inc., a machine shop in McDonough, Georgia. They designed and manufactured a shuttle gripper that was superior to anything that was currently available. The business became so successful that they sold their shuttle grippers to over 70% of the textile industry, in 31 countries.

As fabric formation technologies changed and the demand for shuttle grippers decreased, Bellwether continued to change as well, eventually branching out to other industries and intentionally seeking out contracts for parts that were difficult to manufacture. They invested in advanced technology and took pride in their commitment to finding solutions for their customers.



Since beginning their work with the GaMEP, Bellwether has:

- Refined their metric tracking system, putting a greater emphasis on tracking metrics that directly relate to the goals listed in their business plan.
- Added four new metrics to track and improve supplier performance, follow-up actions, safety compliance, and environmental footprint.
- Become more aware of cost control measures by documenting waste disposal and scrap recycling.
- Doubled their output of goods and services per man hour worked.
- Defined the qualities that make customers most valuable and focused on attracting the most profitable business for the company.

»» Situation

In 2007, in response to requests from potential customers, Bellwether began to seek information on the ISO 9001 quality management system. They began working with the Georgia Manufacturing Extension Partnership (GaMEP) at Georgia Tech to update their current system and prepare for certification. Although they made many improvements at that time, with the economic downturn of 2008, the company was forced to change their focus to maintaining current customers rather than seeking the new certification to expand the business.

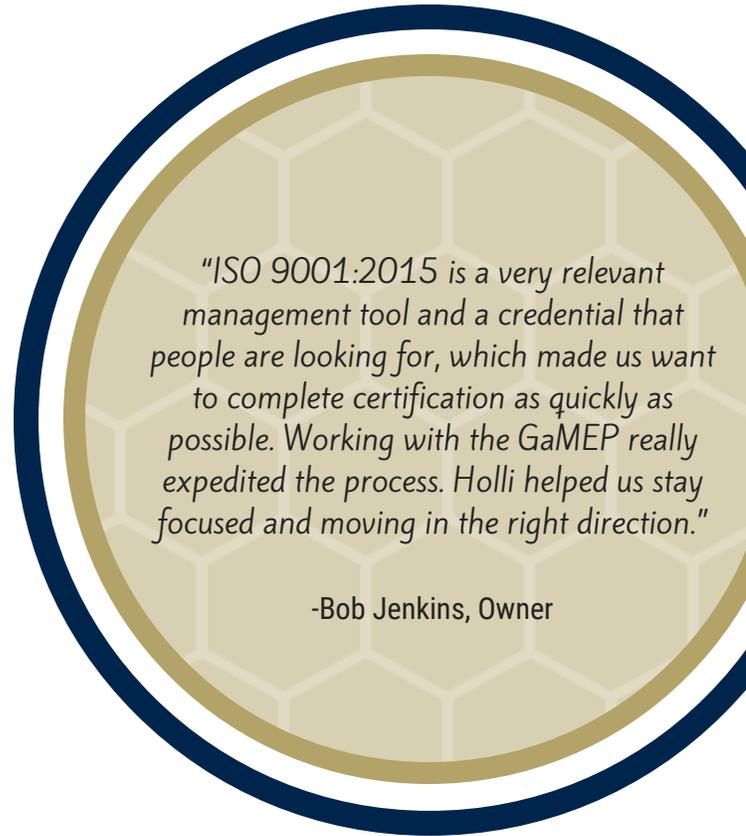
After recovering from the economic downturn, they once again began receiving requests from potential new customers, as well as existing customers, for the certification. In 2015, they decided it was time to finish the process, so they reached back out to the GaMEP and got to work making changes that would help them comply with the new ISO 9001:2015 standards.

»» Solution

Ade Shitta-Bey and Holli Kyle, project managers at the GaMEP, met with Bob and other staff members at Bellwether and assessed what steps should be taken to pursue certification. During this process Bob was excited to learn that the 2015 standard updates included an emphasis on improving the company's business plan and quarterly report structure.

They put together a plan and scheduled dates to work on defining terminology, refining procedures, finding missing documents, organizing paperwork, and training staff members on the new system. For nearly four months, Holli met with Bob once a week to discuss their progress, answer questions, and assign "homework" for him to complete the following week.

Bob said, "Working on this certification put everything in focus. The 9001:2015 standard created balance between conflicting issues and helped guide us in developing a long-term plan that made the most sense for our business."



"ISO 9001:2015 is a very relevant management tool and a credential that people are looking for, which made us want to complete certification as quickly as possible. Working with the GaMEP really expedited the process. Holli helped us stay focused and moving in the right direction."

-Bob Jenkins, Owner

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