

Tekmark Draws on Lucent Worldwide Services Experience to Achieve TL9000 Certification

Quality Assessment Success Story

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– Patricia Parisano, Vice President of Solutions Operations, Tekmark

Executive Overview

The Client

Tekmark is a rapidly growing telecommunications and IT services provider.

The Challenge

Achieve ISO/TL9000 quality certification.

The Approach

Quality Assessment services from Lucent Worldwide Services including training, knowledge transfer and auditing.

Why Lucent

Lucent has achieved its own TL9000 certification, has quality procedures developed by Bell Labs, and worked as a partner with Tekmark.

The Benefits

- Rapidly increased TL9000 learning curve and “audit readiness.”
- Can now capitalize on major opportunities requiring TL9000 certification.
- Improved cost performance and competitive position.
- Increased customer satisfaction through specific quality mechanisms.

The company

Based in Edison, NJ, Tekmark provides information technology services, telephony services and related business solutions to a broad range of Fortune 100 and 500 companies. Tekmark’s clients include major corporations in telecommunications, financial services, technology, health care and pharmaceuticals, manufacturing and electronics. Started 25 years ago as a telecommunications staffing service, Tekmark has expanded its expertise to such areas as installation services for complex fibre networks, software applications, security and data collection. The company delivers its installation service solutions through three affiliates - Global Solutions Services, Power Optech and TeleSphere.

The challenge

In early 2004, Tekmark executives decided to undertake the arduous journey of obtaining TL9000 certification, which is the telecommunications industry’s add-ons to the famous ISO 9001:2000 quality management certification. “Several factors made this an obvious move,” explains Pat Parisano, Vice President of Solutions Operations. “We were getting opportunities from major corporations who wanted to work with us but required ISO certification for inclusion on their vendor list. We also saw other advantages, in terms of improving our competitive position and formalizing our operations as we deal with the challenges of a growing business.”



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Operations

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Director of Operations for
Global Solutions Services

As any company who has been through ISO certification knows, it’s a daunting process. Tekmark did not take it lightly. “We knew it would take a major company commitment,” says Pete Flaherty, Director of Operations for Global Solutions Services. “We asked a lot of questions up front: What is involved? How much time will it take? How much will it cost? What expertise is required? We realized that TL9000 certification takes specialized staff to administer. We also looked for existing checklists and templates to help guide us through the certification process. We knew we needed to do an internal assessment of our existing operational processes and map these to corresponding ISO processes. We needed a work plan of tasks that would fill the gaps in our existing processes. Addressing these gaps becomes the essence of getting ready for certification.

“Basically, we saw TL9000 certification as an important step for us, something that would provide major benefits in terms of new opportunities and more formalized management processes,” concludes Parisano. “But to get there we had to make some business choices. Should we do it with internal staff or reach out to experienced consultants? We decided to look for a consultant. Lucent was our first choice. ”

Lucent solutions

Lucent Worldwide Services (LWS) provided Tekmark with a package from its Quality Assessment service, including:

TL9000 Readiness Analysis. Lucent consultants reviewed Tekmark’s Quality Management procedures and operational metrics, and interviewed and observed critical aspects of their current operations for compliance with TL9000 standards. From these, Lucent provided a “gap” analysis and recommendations on how to fill them.

Training package for Electro Static Discharge (ESD) Awareness. TL9000 requires a significant ESD training program and quality controls. Parisano and her team realized from the Readiness Analysis that it would take several weeks to research and develop these, so they engaged Lucent for a training package they could roll out to their workforce immediately.

Service Quality Auditing Services. TL9000 requires that seven specific metrics be submitted on a quarterly basis. One of the most important is Service Quality Audit, which measures whether an installation complies with specific quality standards and requires onsite audits of a sample group of customer orders. LWS is providing this service with a team of experts on telecom installation requirements.

TL9000 Pre-Certification Audit. Tekmark is scheduled for its actual TL9000 certification audit in January 2005. Lucent TL9000 experts are providing a pre-certification audit in December, so that Parisano and her team know which areas they need to fix or improve prior to the “real thing.”

Why Lucent

Parisano and her team chose LWS for several reasons. “Lucent has been through the TL9000 certification process,” notes Parisano. “They have quality experts who’ve measured and documented it and they have field organizations who’ve implemented it. Why not draw on their expertise? Plus, associating with a firm as respected as Lucent—they use telecom quality methods developed by Bell Labs—was very impressive to our customers.”

Flaherty was also impressed by Lucent’s experience with ISO certification: “Lucent has done the journey, been through the audits and been certified. We felt that learning from Lucent’s experience had to increase Tekmark’s ability to come up the learning curve and be ‘audit ready’ much faster than we would by taking the journey with just internal talent.”

Parisano and her team were also struck by Lucent’s commitment to enterprise customers such as Tekmark. “Lucent’s desire to address the enterprise market was clear to us,” she says. “‘Partnership’ is an overused word, but it fits our relationship. We’ve had a long and positive relationship with Lucent, but I would say that this has been our best experience with them. Their professionalism and willingness to adapt to our needs was outstanding.”

“At one point in the process, we felt the costs of our service quality audits were getting high. Lucent might have said, ‘Well, that’s the way we do them.’ Instead they worked with us to cut costs by moving auditors closer to projects to reduce drive time. Our relationship was more than just ‘vendor-customer.’ It was iterative. Lucent’s approach was to address problems with us and work them out.”

Results And Business Benefits

Opening substantial business opportunities “There are many companies in our industry who would like to work with us and know about the quality of work we do,” says Flaherty. “But they require ISO certification as a matter of policy. The fact that we’re getting TL9000 is already opening up opportunities to us.” Drawing on Lucent’s expertise and services significantly enhances the appeal for Tekmark’s customers and prospects. “The mere fact that we’re working with Lucent to establish our TL9000 processes gets respect in our market.”

Gaining a competitive advantage in a standards-driven industry. By undergoing the TL9000 certification process with Lucent, Tekmark is also reaping an immediate competitive advantage with companies that don’t know Tekmark has installation service capabilities. “Lots of our competitors in this particular business say they are quality committed installation service providers. But our willingness to go through the ISO/TL9000 certification journey with someone like Lucent carries the additional credibility of having a widely recognized firm support our quality focus,” says Flaherty. “We’re a process-driven business. The telecom industry has its own standards body that governs work, and if you work with major telecom companies like Verizon or BellSouth, they have their own standards as well which they expect vendors to meet. Going through the TL9000 process confirms our ability to meet these additional standards.”

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Improved feedback for Tekmark customers. Parisano points to an added marketing and sales benefit. “The TL9000 process includes a formal customer feedback loop to enhance continuous improvement,” notes Parisano. “We can point to that process with our customers and show them exactly how their input gets registered and acted on—a benefit for them and a selling point for us.”

Lower operational costs. LWS is also working with Tekmark to realize operational improvements to its business. One of the core precepts of quality management is that improving quality does not raise costs, it *lowers* them. “We feel very confident we’ll realize significant savings from fewer reworks, less troubleshooting and by identifying system vulnerabilities early and correcting them,” says Parisano.

Stronger measurements and repeatable methodologies for a growing business. Tekmark also anticipates improved management of its business going forward. “As we grow our business, we have to continue addressing the issue of delivering quality services and installations to our customers,” says Flaherty. “That requires methodologies that are repeatable and that we can use with new hires in a more distributed organization. The ISO process helps to give us that capability. Plus, it has a big emphasis on measurements and these measurements are becoming our operational instrument panel. They provide our management with the verification that our processes are ‘under control’ and being uniformly applied. They also alert them to deviations quickly, allowing them to respond and correct them quickly. The ISO disciplines are improving our ability to make continuous quality improvements that increase our speed, cost performance and competitive position. They’re helping to grow our presence in this marketplace.”

“TL9000 certification is already paying for itself many times over. There are a lot of companies in our industry who would like to work with us and know about the quality of work we do. But they require ISO certification as a matter of policy. The fact that we’re getting TL9000 is already opening up opportunities to us.”

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