



Q&A

ISO/IEC 20000: A higher standard for your business



CSE Global (UK) shows the way

This report is based on an exclusive interview with CSE Service Director Kate Stead, talking about the process in detail, and providing some valuable advice.

Read about a real experience of implementing ISO/IEC 20000 and be inspired to take up the challenge for your own organisation to reap the benefits CSE did.

Introduction

CSE-Global (UK) Limited has an impressive customer list; a preferred supplier to the NHS Connecting for Health's National Programme for IT, the company also provides real-time business solutions to customers such as Severn Trent Water, the Meteorological Office, BP and the Environment Agency.

Supporting these solutions can be complex, however, it is partly through excelling at this that the company has managed to grow extensively over the past year, and is now undertaking a seven figure office expansion as a result.

How has this success been achieved? From the service point of view, it can be put down to a thorough understanding of ITIL and how it can apply to an external customer service environment, underpinned by Sunrise's web-based software Sostenuto. CSE's latest success - attaining ISO/IEC 20000 certification - places it among the select few (not quite 40 companies as this goes to press) to have achieved what many aspire to.

We interviewed Kate Stead, CSE's service director, who has taken the company all the way on this journey to certification.

Q&A

AS (Angela Steel): Congratulations on such a great achievement. How does it feel?

KS: It feels great. We are all really thrilled with this success. The team has worked hard towards this over the last two and a half years, and the achievement of ISO/IEC 20000 has been rewarding; not just for us as a department, but for the whole company as it has really enhanced our relationship with our customers. Obviously, any project that involves change always comes under scrutiny, and we breathed a sigh of relief to see our staff and customers come on board with it, because the benefits have been so compelling.

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AS: Where did the initial drive come from?

KS: The goal to attain ISO accreditation had been there for a long time. Very early on our board saw the opportunity that ISO/IEC 20000 offered as a standard for service quality and the competitive advantage that this brings. Their view was that until you measure yourself against a standard, you don't really know how good your service is. ISO provided the most thorough benchmark available. The management was so clear about this, that they actually recruited me with this goal in mind.

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AS: You started by implementing ITIL and you had already achieved ISO 9001. What made you aim for more with ISO 20000?

KS: ISO 9001 encourages you to deliver to processes that you've designed as an organisation. It is not as prescriptive as ISO/IEC 20000, which is much more demanding, and built around best practices rather than the ones you've put together yourself.

With a good ITIL implementation, you are certainly a long way down the road to being ISO/IEC 20000 compatible. However, you could implement ITIL and still have an ineffective set up – it's just a guideline. ISO is just more rigorous, although it does leave some leeway. In fact, it is

perfectly suited for a dynamic organisation, and for example CSE have set up emergency procedures in order to give itself that flexibility.

AS: How long did it take and what were the main stages?

KS: It took us around two and a half years. We began by implementing ITIL processes and putting in place Sostenuto by Sunrise, the software to support these. Once we were comfortable with ITIL, there were three main stages that led to certification: we carried out a gap analysis to determine which areas needed attention, then we underwent stage I auditing (the pre-assessment), followed by stage II auditing (the full assessment) three months later.

It is important to say that this initial certification was focused on one part of the business: the health side, and our task is by no means finished. As well as extending the standard to other areas, we are very aware that the standard means continuous improvement. It is never done and dusted!

AS: What role does the software play in working to the ISO/IEC 20000 standard?

KS: Sostenuto was chosen specifically with ISO/IEC 20000 in mind. There were two reasons why it stood out among other service management packages: it is very effective at translating ITIL into good working processes, and more uniquely, it lends itself well to the concept of continuous improvement that comes with the standard.

For us to do this requires us to be able to constantly go back and re-evaluate the processes over time. For example, incident management: how easy is it to use? Are we collecting enough information for customer reporting and for trend analysis? The answers may lead to the processes being changed, and the underlying technology has to be able to support that change.

Sostenuto, being so configurable, is perfectly suited for the process of continuous improvement required by ISO/IEC 20000, as it allows the department to add to it all the time. We have made changes to the way we do things since we started out, adding or removing fields, and reviewing business rules.

Sostenuto has made the process possible, because it holds all of the processes in one place and links them all together, making it easier to track progress. It also provides a common language for all staff and customers.

AS: Have you started seeing the benefits?

KS: Most definitely. The quality of our service is a key selling point and ISO has directly led to an increase in customer satisfaction. The low level of complaints has a direct impact on CSE's ability to maintain contracts, so there is a very clear commercial and financial outcome for us.

ISO has made us much more proactive in the way we deal with our customers. The incident trends are more even, there are fewer peaks and troughs because the trend analysis has allowed us to identify training needs and manage rollouts in quieter periods, for example. We did notice an initial surge of calls because the team was actively encouraging people to get in touch. I read somewhere that if no-one calls the helpdesk, then that's a bad sign, so that was pretty reassuring!

The better quality of engagement has really paid off for customers, as there is continuous communication with CSE throughout the process of a rollout for example, so there are no surprises. The standard has also imposed a more consistent approach, so customers receive the same answers regardless of who they ask in the company. This inspires more confidence in the organisation's professionalism.

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AS: Have you gathered any customer satisfaction statistics?

KS: We used to do an annual survey, which we've replaced with an emailed questionnaire every time an incident is resolved.

In fact, we asked customers which five questions they would like to be asked, so we know the feedback we're gathering is based on their criteria, and is not subjective. From 13 very large customers in the health sector, we have had 17 surveys back in the last month, including 13 'excellent' responses across the board and the remainder of the responses rating us as 'very good'.

AS: How costly and resource intensive was the process?

KS: Probably much less than you would expect on both counts. I may have been hired with ITIL and ISO in mind, but my core role was still to run the service desk. I had no dedicated resource to throw at this project, so it was a question of making the time every day to set up some processes that would eventually lighten the load. In the beginning, I actually spent thirty minutes a day only on this project, but as time went on and we had more processes in place, we found we had less fire-fighting to do and more time for ISO/IEC 20000.

The experience is a bit like learning to play an instrument: put in small amounts of effort each day, consistently, and you will reap the rewards later.

In terms of cost, it is not necessary to spend lots of money on achieving ISO/IEC 20000. I used online questionnaires to do the gap analysis – there are free ones available online. The main investment was the software, but we would have had to make provisions to upgrade our IT service management system anyway.

AS: What are the pitfalls that could undermine a project like this?

KS: It's essential to be realistic about what you can achieve, and in which timescales. The main factors that could affect the outcome are staff morale (as you need everyone to be behind this), resources (not always easy to juggle the day to day with the proactive process implementation). And, finally, personalities – you really have to work on getting people on board.

A project like this requires tenacity, determination and patience but it's eminently achievable, and as long as you take small steps, consistently, the pitfalls are easy to overcome. Believe me, it is well worth the effort!



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AS: What's next?

KS: ISO/IEC 20000 helps you to achieve transparency of services and adopt an approach that tackles the root cause of issues. This is definitely a way of working we want to extend throughout CSE and its subsidiary companies. Now that we have achieved such big service improvements on the health side we are moving onto other areas of the business. My only slight worry is that now we've raised the bar, we will be expected to deliver the same results even faster!

Some more words of advice...

AS: Where do you recommend starting on a project like this?

KS: It makes sense to approach the whole project logically, along the lines of the incident, problem and change lifecycle. For us, this made it easier to imagine the outcomes from the customer's perspective and to stay as objective as possible.

When we started out, we had a number of databases in different places that were not linking together well, so our first aim was to streamline all of the data in Sostenuto to create visibility.

We began with incident management, populating customer contacts, SLAs and details for third parties and contracts. Once set up, we ran it alongside the original system before switching off the old system.

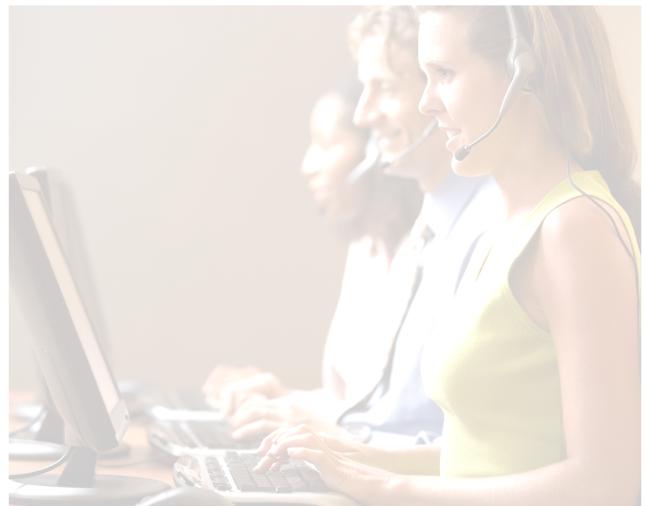
Once incident management had been running for a while and we were producing good reports, we moved onto problem and change management, then configuration. You do actually end up working on everything at the same time to a degree behind the scenes though. For example, incident and problem management are so inter-related, it is very difficult to implement modules in isolation

When we did the ISO/IEC 20000 gap analysis, it revealed much more work – in our case the areas we identified were capacity, availability and continuity management.

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AS: It's often stated that cultural change is more challenging to bring about than technology change. How did you make sure you got people on board with this project?

KS: Getting people's buy in really is essential and yes, you have to give this aspect at least as much attention as getting the technology up and running. The adoption of ISO/IEC 20000 was not just a culture shock for CSE staff but for our customers as well. For example, we had to start asking them for a lot more information around each incident. Once customers saw the benefits however, such as more detailed reporting, they were quite happy with that.



For us, it was important to actively seek trends in our dealings with customers, which meant engaging with them more. We set up structured meetings with them: business relationship meetings, which were forums for active feedback, and yielded some great ideas.

Throughout the whole process, we tried to 'drip feed' the changes to customers as the scale of the changes would have been too vast otherwise. For example, we gradually standardised the number of priorities set for each customer to three. We made a slow transition to ITIL and ISO terminology. The team continued to talk about 'calls' for a long time and slowly introduced the concept of 'incident management'.

In Sostenuto we were able to initially turn off some of the functions that would have been too big a leap, ready to switch them on again when they are ready. The software's html interface gave customers immediate benefit. It boosted their confidence to see details of their calls over the web and the extra transparency bought us a lot of goodwill.

When it came to our team, I made sure I found out about people's strengths, likes and dislikes first, before matching these with the different areas of responsibility. In CSE as a whole, the project impacted on all departments. Sales are involved in the business relationship meetings and are actively engaged with the continuous improvement plan as they provide another obvious link into the customer.

"ISO is and always will be an ongoing project rather than a one off achievement."

AS: What provisions should be in place to maintain the standard once it's been achieved?

KS: ISO/IEC 20000 requires evidence to be collected on an ongoing basis. For example, meeting minutes should be kept and easy to access. For us, they are the best way to track how we engage with our customers. It's a good idea to review the criteria by which you assess your performance as well. If you always measure the same things, how do you know you're not missing anything?

You will need to demonstrate that processes are being implemented correctly. For example, once a change has been authorised, does it actually go ahead as planned?

We are audited regularly – since the beginning of the project, we have undergone 12 internal audits and two external audits for ISO/IEC 20000. As you might have gathered, ISO is and always will be an ongoing project rather than a one off achievement. This is what makes it such a valuable standard to be associated with and such a powerful and compelling benefit for our customers.

And finally...

Do...

- ❖ Think about evidence. Start collecting it early and make sure you have a structure in place. For example, does everyone know where meeting minutes are supposed to be stored?
- ❖ See if you can add to what is already working for you, rather than reinventing everything.
- ❖ Also wipe the slate clean in some areas – initially Kate configured Sostenuto to mimic its existing processes to ensure a smoother transition, but eventually some of these were superseded by more efficient processes.
- ❖ A lot of internal audits – processes may be in place but are they being followed correctly? The audits are necessary to show continuous improvement.

Don't...

- ❖ Make it more complicated than it needs to be!
- ❖ Get too hung up on terminology – it took Kate and her team two years to see ISO and ITIL terminology widely adopted. In fact they didn't actively push it in the initial stages; they just focused on getting the concepts across.
- ❖ 'Do it' to people: involve them!

About ISO/IEC 20000

ISO/IEC 20000 is the first worldwide standard specifically aimed at IT Service Management (whether in-house, outsourced or external). It replaces BS15000, which has now been withdrawn and describes an integrated set of management processes for the effective delivery of services to the business and its customers. ISO/IEC 20000 is aligned with the process approach defined within ITIL from the Office of Government Commerce (OGC).

About Sunrise

Sunrise was founded in 1994 and is a leading independent provider of IT service management solutions. Our customer base includes over 1,000 blue chip and public sector organisations, including:



About Sostenuto

"This is IT service management software going way beyond the basics that ITIL dictates..."
(Computer Weekly)

Sostenuto ITSM is a powerful, fully browser-based IT service management solution. ITSM is fully pink verified, accredited by Pink Elephant as having ITIL compatibility and awarded the highest possible vendor certification level of 'ITIL Service Support Enhanced'.

Sostenuto Foundation is also a fully browser-based IT service management solution with a dynamic business rules engine. Foundation offers the core ITIL disciplines of incidents, problems, configuration and service levels as standard, meaning you can adopt full ITIL compatibility at a later stage.

Contact us...

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