

BENCHMARKING FOR SUCCESS

BY NARENDRA AGGARWAL

Accreditation plays a critical function in ensuring accuracy and reliability in highly regulated industries where such capabilities are important. SMEs that adopt international standards will build confidence and obtain recognition for competence.

QUALITY assurance solutions are equally important for the growth of home-grown small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) as well as the bigger businesses. We feature here two companies. One has leveraged quality and standards to build competencies to support Singapore in providing globally recognised testing services in the pharmaceutical industry; and in upholding the quality and performance of public health departments.

The other is a global quality assurance provider helping Singapore to grow to become a leading aviation hub in the Asia-Pacific region today.

ALS SINGAPORE

From humble beginnings as a palm oil laboratory with five staff in 1977, today ALS Singapore is the premier laboratory service provider to the food, environmental, electronics, tribology, pharmaceutical and biological fluid sectors in South-east Asia.

ALS Singapore provides quality assurance solutions, and has vast experience in the field of microbiological examination and chemical analysis in accordance with standard referenced international methods. Currently, ALS Singapore is SAC-SINGLAS accredited to be compliant with the ISO 17025 standard and its requirements.

The ISO 17025 accreditation provides the criteria and guidelines for laboratories to achieve quality assurance and quality control. ALS Singapore has been one of the pioneers in adopting SAC-SINGLAS accreditation in the 1980s under ISO 17025 and has now expanded to cover the scope under ISO 15189 (Medical).

The Singapore laboratory has developed capabilities to provide microbiological and chemical testing for the pharmaceutical industry. ALS Singapore has a dedicated team to provide product testing and validation to government departments, pharmaceutical manufacturers, healthcare centres and hospitals. The business is focused on providing services that exceed client expectations for quality and reliability, technical assistance and value for money.

The company's clients here consist of many SMEs and multinational corporations (MNCs) in manufacturing and trading as well as supermarket chains and food and beverage (F&B) outlets.

"The laboratory service business relies a great deal on technical competency and integrity. Food

and pharmaceutical industries have strict regulatory controls, and the laboratory service provider needs to have good laboratory practices and good knowledge in local government laws and international standards," says Ken Lam, senior marketing manager, ALS Singapore, who has 15 years of experience with the company. He is currently focusing on business development in food and pharmaceutical industries.

"The ISO Laboratory Accreditation Scheme can provide good leverage on international standards to assist the accredited laboratory to use it as a strategic tool to build capabilities and competencies. Coupled with management support, our laboratory has since grown to a strong 130-plus employees working in an 8,000 sq m building now."

Some of the standards adopted by ALS Singapore are ISO/IEC 17025 and ISO 15189. The standards provide quality management and technical guidelines to the laboratory. The accredited laboratories are to be audited every year based on these standards' specifications and guidelines.

"Laboratories can improve based on recommendations and corrective actions on rectifying non-compliance and observations raised and advised by the auditors. Continuous improvement is the important driver to grow the business and fulfil clients' demands on technical competency and trust in the company service. Management needs to invest in more advanced instruments and provide training to staff to assist and give technical support to clients who may face challenges on issues like product recalls/scares," says Mr Lam.

For clients – both government and private – who demand a high standard of laboratory services, the accreditation scheme is a must in their criteria as a service supplier as this ensures the clients of confidence in the supplier laboratory management system and practices to maintain accuracy and reliability, and the ability to respond effectively especially in the coverage of increased public health concerns.

"Accreditation is recognised as an efficient tool for the laboratories to have a proper quality system in place. The laboratory accreditation system is important for the acceptance of test results in terms of accuracy and reliability," says Mr Lam. "In the event there is an argument on tests which relates to public health related contaminants such as Melamine, Phthalates, Bisphenol A, etc, technical competencies and compliance become critical because the agency of concern needs reliable



OBTAINING RECOGNITION
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laboratory support for taking proper action, making decisions and formulating policies," he adds.

ALS Singapore is also very active in working with supermarket chains and F&B companies as they take public health issues very seriously. Public health issues often arise from microbiological and/or from chemical contaminations in food, resulting in product recalls and scares.

"The best prevention of such food recall/scare is to practice QAQC due diligence. To effectively carry out the task, they entrust and outsource this portion of work to an accredited laboratory like ALS, which has the technical knowledge and resources (management system, equipment and staffing) adhered to ISO 17025 standard under Singapore Accreditation Council SAC-SINGLAS," says Mr Lam.

ISO/IEC 17025:2005 specifies the general requirements for the competence to carry out tests and/or calibrations, including sampling. It covers testing and calibration performed using standard methods, non-standard methods and laboratory-developed methods.

More importantly, ISO/IEC 17025:2005 is for use by laboratories in developing their management systems for quality, administrative and technical operations. Laboratory customers, regulatory authorities and accreditation bodies may also use it in confirming or recognising the competence of laboratories.

ISO 15189, which is for medical laboratories, lays down the requirements for quality and competence. In fact, ISO 15189:2012 specifies requirements for quality and competence in medical laboratories. It can be used by medical laboratories in developing their quality management systems and assessing their own competence. It can also be used for confirming or recognising the competence of medical laboratories by laboratory customers, regulating authorities and accreditation bodies.

KEEPING A CLOSE WATCH
Intertek has developed a series of management tools and audit solutions to assess and benchmark suppliers, while helping companies manage and track the performance in their supply chains



enforce them around the world. Intertek Business Assurance is certified to international standards that ensure that we have the experience, capabilities and resources to provide consistent certification audit results to all of our clients. Being certified to ISO 17021 provides assurance to our clients and stakeholders that the solutions we offer meet the regulations and standards of the international marketplace," says Mr Ang.

Accreditation plays a critical function in ensuring accuracy and reliability in the aerospace industry and its supply chain. Thus, adopting international standards is important for Singapore SMEs in this business. "In the highly regulated aerospace industry, manufacturers, distributors and service providers in the supply chain are exposed to face stringent regulation challenges related to performance, safety, quality and reliability," says Mr Ang.

In addition, achieving third party certification helps the industry assess business risks that effect accuracy, reliability, quality, delivery and overall contract performance through identification and management of mitigation to reduce and eliminate these risks that could negatively affect performance.

Intertek is certified to international aerospace standards such as AS 9100, AS 9110 and AS 9120.

Mr Ang says that accreditation differentiates an organisation from its peers who achieved recognition after going through rigorous competency and capability assessment. It is through the prescribed standards under the technical infrastructure for conformity assessment that ensures the applicant has achieved the required level of prescribed standard for a particular process, system or product.

"Through the third party certification process, we have independent assurance that our business systems and processes meet international standards that have proven to provide consistent and predictable results that helps us deliver superior contract performance to our

INTERTEK

As a quality-centric business, Intertek has leveraged quality and standards to build competencies that support Singapore in being the leading aviation hub in the Asia-Pacific region today. The company is a leading total quality assurance provider to industries worldwide with a network of more than 1,000 laboratories and offices and over 40,000 people in more than 100 countries.

"We bring quality to life. Intertek delivers innovative and bespoke assurance, testing, inspection and certification solutions to the worldwide supply chain, supporting the supply chain with research & development, raw materials sourcing, components suppliers, manufacturing, transportation, distribution and retail channels, and consumer management," says Ang Chee Teck, country managing director, who has more than 500 employees in Singapore.

Intertek has a wide range of customers coming from different sectors and industries. In each of their quality assurance journeys of the supply chain, whether it is a supplier, manufacturer or production plant or retail store, the company provides the most appropriate professional opinion or accredited solution.

"As a leading certification body, Intertek is in a unique position to both adhere to international standards, as well as audit and

customers in our marketplace," he adds.

Developing and enhancing the technical capability and experts' competency are important for Singapore's SMEs as the country strives to be a successful maintenance, repair and overhaul (MRO) hub. Going forward, the aerospace market activity is expected to be more intense by 2030. Solution providers who are accredited to support requests such as quality control, material certification and failure analysis will benefit directly from this new development.

"Accredited SMEs can also contribute more competently in the operational areas of the aerospace industry, such as supplying component parts during repair and maintenance, lube and oil sectors for engines and overhaul, etc," says Mr Ang.

Meanwhile, the accreditation provided by Singapore Accreditation Council (SAC) is boosting Singapore's credibility and supporting its role as an aerospace MRO hub. Over the years, the SAC has established and maintained recognitions with other partners and international organisations such as International Laboratory Accreditation Co-operation (ILAC), International Accreditation Forum (IAF), Asia Pacific Laboratory Accreditation Cooperation (APLAC) and Pacific Accreditation Cooperation (PAC).

Mr Ang says that the SAC certification facilitates regional and local trade. It is important as it helps to build confidence and recognition for competence and capabilities to various accredited conformity assessment bodies.

"We recognise the importance of SAC's role in two main areas: the well-established network and partnership recognitions they have built and represented over the past 50 years; and as a key pillar to enhance infrastructure and support Singapore's economic growing sectors such as the aerospace industry," he adds.

For SMEs, using accredited services can be leveraged as a strategy for growth. Accreditation is a mark of industry confidence. It is also an assurance mark that demonstrates the highest level of competency achieved by the service provider, as set out by an international accreditation council. It is recognised as a benchmark solution for all industry stakeholders globally and it is becoming the gold standard to do business and compete in the next century.

"It opens doors for growth and new business opportunities for all businesses willing to undergo the scrutiny and rigor of the third party process to achieve certification and the recognition that comes with it. OEMs (original equipment manufacturers) and aviation, space and defence stakeholders will see third party certification as a prerequisite to do business in the industry in coming years," says Mr Ang. "If you are not certified, you will not be able to do business in the future marketplace no matter what level of the supply chain you are in."

As aerospace organisations work to demonstrate good corporate governance and quality across the supply chain, their suppliers are also being asked to showcase their capabilities, capacity and performance in these areas. Being proactive in improving supply chain performance requires evaluation of processes and procedures, measuring the results in order to better react to risk, monitor market signals and facilitate continuous improvement, Mr Ang adds.

Intertek has developed a series of risk-based management tools and audit solutions to assess and benchmark suppliers, while helping companies manage and track the performance in their supply chains. ■

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