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E-ENTREPRENEURSHIP

WHITE BOOK - CHAPTER 2

Topic
Entrepreneurship & Certification

In this chapter, we will discuss an important, even central, topic for many companies: certification.

Whether it concerns internal or external processes or products, initiating a certification process requires rigor, expertise and knowledge. Here we will discuss why it is strategic to position yourself on such an issue.

WHAT IS A CERTIFICATION?

The certification is a voluntary approach that allows to attest the quality of a product, a service, a process, or the work of a company. A certification shows that the certified person respects the specifications defined by another organization. The verification of the respect of the specifications is done by an independent organization.
It is a proof that the products or services offered by a company comply with specific requirements of certain standards.

A certification is represented by a written document issued by a recognized body, independent of the parties requesting the certification. Every company, government, or organization has the right to apply for certification of their products, processes, or services.

Certifications will be especially useful for consumers or users, who will be able to refer to them to choose between several organizations offering the same services. Depending on the certification obtained by a company, consumers will be able to know which standards are respected. A certification is valid for 3 years. On the official document you will find the name of the certified organization, the certifying body, the reference quality standard, the field of application, the date of issue of the certification and the period of validity.

What is the objective of a certification?

The objective of a certification is to highlight the quality of its services, products, etc. and consequently to have an additional competitive advantage.

The certification process also allows you to analyze yourself and to understand your strengths and weaknesses. We can then act to strengthen our weaknesses. We can also consider that obtaining a certification allows you to belong to a community and to share common values with other certified organizations.

What is the purpose of a certification?
The purpose of certification is to demonstrate the conformity of a process in relation to a reference system.

To identify a need for structuring (recognition) in a market. All markets, as they mature, need to be regulated/secured in order to continue to evolve. A certification also serves to attract a new type of customer to the market.

What are the advantages of a certification?
Among the key advantages, one can find

- To allow a differentiation between the certified and the others
- To take a position, to be part of a process
- To improve
- To benefit from an introspective (outside view)
- To have an additional advantage over the competition
- To give customers confidence

WHY A CERTIFICATION?

How to choose the certification ?

To choose the certification (or label) that suits you:

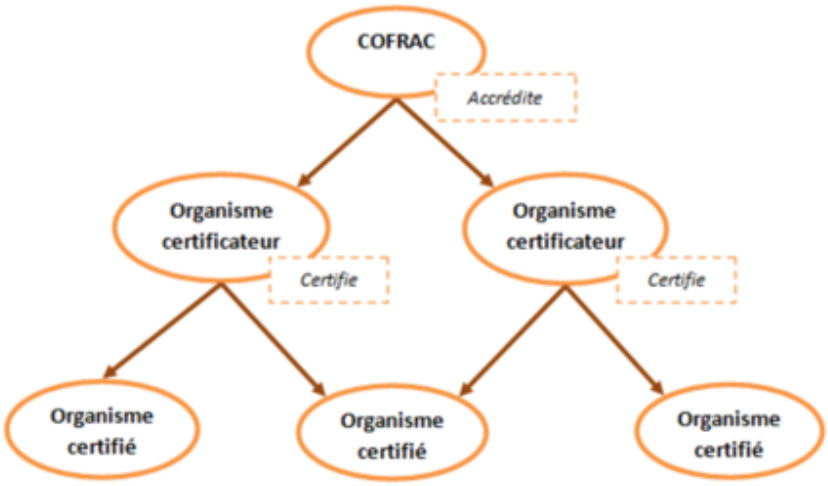
- You must know what your customers' needs and expectations are;
- You must define the needs and expectations you have for your own structure or yourself;
- You have to identify the main impacts of such certification on your company;
- Finally, you have to compare the different advantages of each certification, in your field of activity.

Certification hierarchy

The value of a certification depends on the certifying institute that issues it. The reputation of such organizations depends above all on their impartiality when evaluating companies or organizations eligible for certification.

In addition, all certification organizations must themselves be audited by independent accreditation centers that evaluate them in order to rank them.

In France, COFRAC (for Comité français d'accréditation) manages all certifications centers. The role of COFRAC is to allow the organizations it accredits to have the right to certify other organizations, processes, systems, products or people according to their accreditation.



The different types of certifications

- EU certification: This is a mandatory standard for products that circulate within the European Union. Each product having obtained the EU certification undergoes a control test before entering the market, and then every year to verify and control the quality. It should be noted that for certain products, such as high-risk products, the intervention of a specialized company has become mandatory to obtain EU certification.

- ISO certifications : They concern the quality management methods to realize the production of a good or a service. The 2 most well-known ISO certifications are ISO 9001 and ISO 14001.

- Other certifications : Other certifications exist such as the personnel certification which attests that the employees have received an adapted training, the European ecolabel which is the official ecological certification in Europe, the Keymark which attests that the product is manufactured in Europe and that it can be marketed in Europe.

FOCUS ON ISO 9001

The ISO 9001 standard

It is a standard which gathers the good practices on the one hand on the organization and on the other hand on the management.

Indeed, companies must make a special effort on the following topics to ensure customer relationship and satisfaction: strategy, management, purchasing, risk analysis, control of external providers, analysis of KPIs to measure the company's performance, communication and management of customer complaints.

A company is considered certified when all requirements are met and verified by an auditor.

Similarly, in the health sector, the role of ISO 9001 certification is to ensure the safety of patient care by respecting good practices.

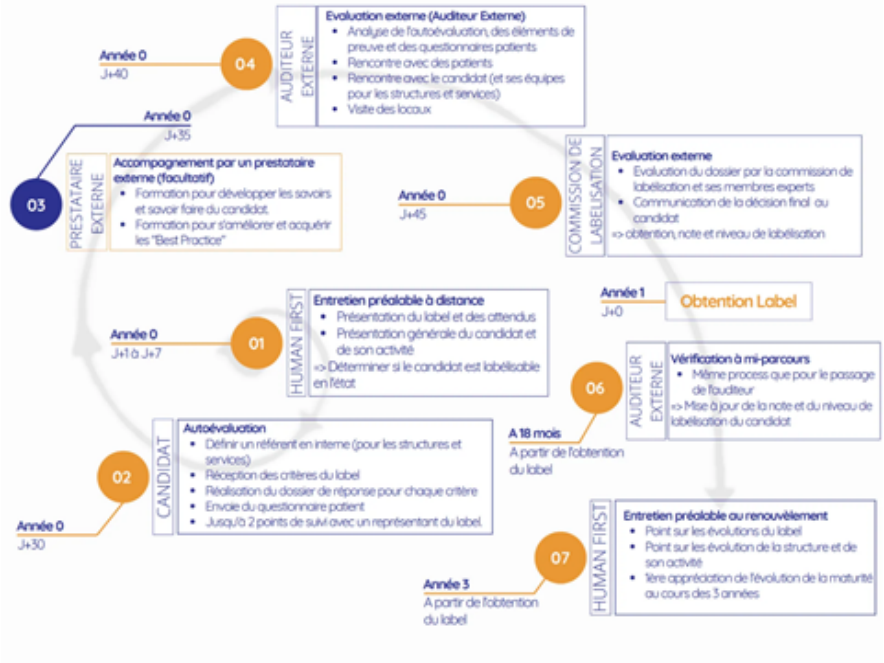
	Total certs (#) 2018	Total certs (#) 2019	Total certs (#) 2020	Change (#) 2019-'20	Change (%) 2019-'20
ISO 9001	878,664	883,521	916,842	33,321	3.77%
ISO 14001	307,059	312,580	348,473	35,893	11.48%

ISO certifications in the world
Source: https://www.quality.org

To be certified ISO 9001 is a vector of progress for a company, the acquisition of this standard makes it possible to increase the confidence of the customers and prospects, to improve the operation and the performances of the company and to engage a quality approach also makes it possible to involve all the collaborators in a valorizing project.

To be ISO 9001 certified is to be assured, as a customer, to obtain good quality products and services.

In order to start the process of certification (and until the renewal of it) each firm must follow a seven steps process presented in the figure below



FROM CERTIFICATION TO RENEWAL

Key elements to remember

1- Analyze the target market

When choosing a certification, it is important to analyze the market you are targeting:

- In the case of a virgin market, the construction of the certification standard must be done with actors of this market (future clients of the label),
- In the case of competing certifications, it is often more difficult to enter the market. In the case of competing certifications, it is often more difficult to enter the market. You need to differentiate your certification from the others by providing a consistent set of arguments that will increase the value of your certification.

The most important thing in this step is to understand the needs and issues of your future clients.

2- Preparing the project

Just don't forget that a label has an cost, starting with

- The construction of the standard, by calling on experts in the field on which the label will be based;
- The legal structure that carries it, by opening an account, by registering the company,;
- The salaries;
- The communication budget.

3- The reference system (and its validation)

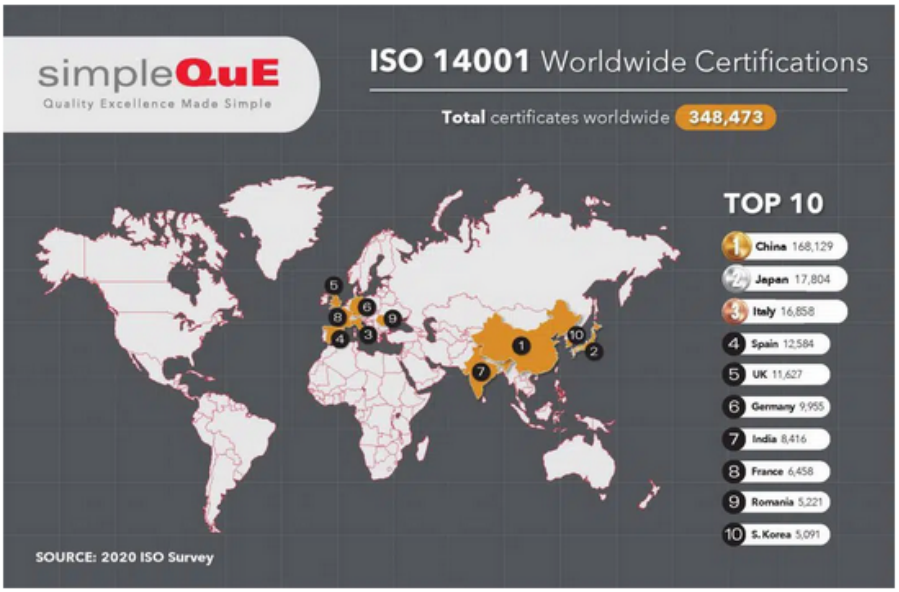
Composed of criteria and indicators, the reference system is the basis on which the auditor will be able to audit a candidate and produce his audit report.

It is advisable not to make the standard public, to avoid plagiarism.

4- MVP

Def: A minimum viable product (MVP) is a version of a product with just enough functionality to be usable by early customers who can then provide feedback for future product development.

It is important to test your repository at pilot sites, and evolve it accordingly, so that it is field-ready.

5- Pilot sites

The pilot sites are the sites where the certification standard is tested, in order to evolve it towards a final version, adapted to the target market. They are also the first ambassadors of the label.