

BY ROGER FROST



Editorial

Mind our own business!

ISO 9000 and ISO 14000 are ISO's best known standards and their pre-eminence tends to overshadow the fact that the organization has developed more than 13 400 other International Standards with something to offer for most sectors of business and technology.

This was again brought home by a recent exchange with an American journalist who had written an article on ISO's first International Workshop Agreement, IWA 1, *Quality Management Systems – Guidelines for process improvements in health service organizations*. When the journalist, who had contacted me for more details, ran her first article past me I tactfully pointed out that it was incorrect for her to describe the IWA as marking "ISO's entry into the health care sector". The journalist's reaction was revealing: "Oh – I know there are health care organizations that have been certified to ISO 9000, but I was making the point that IWA 1 is ISO's first document specifically for the health care sector."

From this reply, I realized that we were really not communicating on the same wavelength. The journalist was identifying ISO solely in terms of ISO 9000, while I was thinking globally of the entire portfolio of ISO standards. The journalist believed that ISO 9000 was all that ISO does. How many readers share this common misconception – or did at one time? More than a few, I would guess.

The point is not about being right or wrong – there are no prizes for knowing how many standards ISO has developed, or how many business sectors they address. The point is this: how many business opportunities might you be losing because you simply do not know of the existence of ISO standards that could improve either your product, the efficiency of your production, or open export markets for your company?

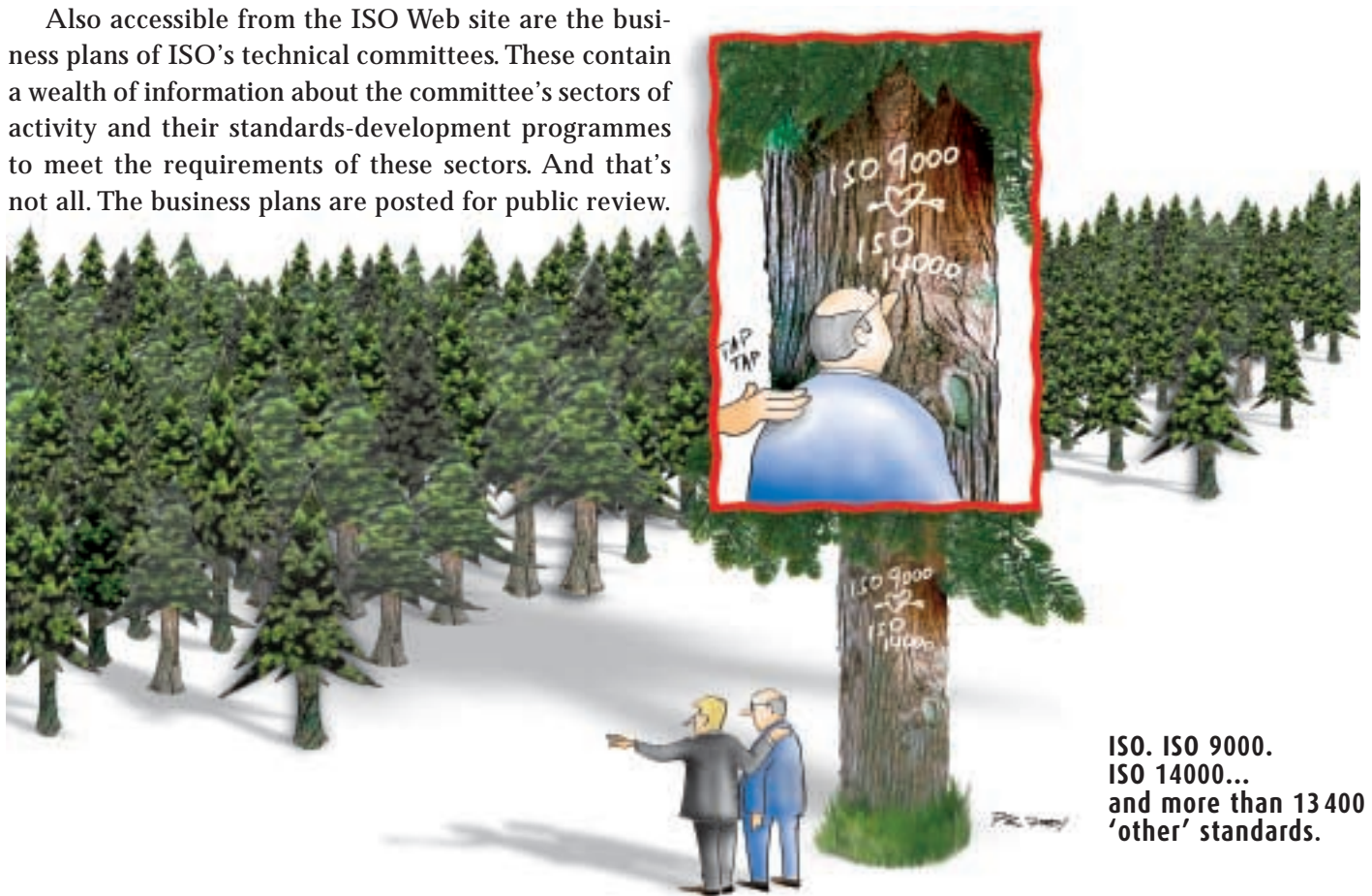
We can use the health care sector as an example. To show the journalist that ISO was a lot more than ISO 9000, I supplied her with the following list of ISO technical committees which develop standards applicable to the health care sector:

TC 48, *Laboratory glassware and related apparatus* ● TC 76, *Transfusion, infusion and injection equipment for medical and pharmaceutical use* ● TC 84, *Medical devices for injections* ● TC 106, *Dentistry* ● TC 121, *Anaesthetic and respiratory equipment* ● TC 150, *Implants for surgery* ● TC 157, *Mechanical contraceptives* ● TC 168, *Prosthetics and orthotics* ● TC 170, *Surgical instruments* ● TC 173, *Technical systems and aids for disabled or handicapped*

persons • TC 194, *Biological evaluation of medical devices* • TC 198, *Sterilization of health care products* • TC 210, *Quality management and corresponding general aspects for medical devices* • TC 212, *Clinical laboratory testing and in vitro diagnostic test systems* • TC 215, *Health informatics*.

Point taken? Similar lists can be put together for other sectors of activity. In fact, you can do it yourself quite easily. Why not visit ISO's Web site – **www.iso.org**? ISO's entire standards collection is catalogued online, with several search possibilities to help users identify standards that could be useful to them. Another way to discover the breadth and depth of ISO's offering is to scroll down the list of the organization's 187 technical committees and pick those corresponding to your area of interest. A listing of the standards they have developed is then only a mouse click away.

Also accessible from the ISO Web site are the business plans of ISO's technical committees. These contain a wealth of information about the committee's sectors of activity and their standards-development programmes to meet the requirements of these sectors. And that's not all. The business plans are posted for public review.



Anyone with a comment, complaint or contribution to offer can do so via an e-mail link directly to the secretariat of the committee concerned.

ISO 9000 and ISO 14000 undoubtedly enjoy a worldwide stature and the chances are strong that ISO's complete portfolio contains other standards which could prove to be gems as far as your business is concerned. By investing the time to investigate the total ISO offering – what you might call “minding ISO's business” – you put yourself on the path to discovery of new opportunities for your own business. ■

'The bottom line' does not tell the whole story

In those business circles where it is better to be perceived as hard rather than soft, “the bottom line” – profitability – is put forward as the ultimate value. The financial situation of an organization is obviously of basic importance. However, believing that it is all that really counts is like believing that we

live to breathe, instead of the contrary. Other values have their importance – even in business.

The International column of this issue includes an article on the *Recuperar* workers' cooperative of Medellín, Colombia, formed by a socially disadvantaged group of refuse collectors whose livelihood was threatened when a decision was taken to replace the city's waste dumping area with a modern sanitary landfill. The article recounts the part played by an ISO 9002 implementation and certification programme in the success of what has become both a thriving enterprise and provider of social services to its members and their families.

The authors write, "For the cooperative...social assistance and the well being of its workers is more important than the 'bottom line' on the financial balance sheet. The real added value of *Recuperar* to Colombian society is not how much profit it makes, but how much social benefit it provides."

There are other examples which show that implementing ISO 9000 and ISO 14000 programmes can contribute not only to measurable business goals such as the efficiency and effectiveness of organizations, but also to more intangible facets such as self-esteem, the sense that one is performing useful work and making a positive contribution, and social recognition. Examples published in *ISO 9000 + ISO 14000 News*, the forerunner to *ISO Management Systems*, include those of sheltered workshops in Australia and France for mentally handicapped people for whom ISO 9000 certification brought recognition that they were capable of turning out quality assured products and competing on the open market. Another example quoted to me concerns the increased pride of artisan workers in India when ISO 9000 certification allowed them to compete on export markets.

Whether or not the implementation of ISO 9000 and ISO 14000 represents a cost or an investment is a crucial question and a complete answer needs to be sought in more than financial measures alone.

Important as it is, the bottom line does not tell the whole story. ■

Letter to the Editor

ISO 9000 and Web sites

Do any of the ISO 9000 series of quality management system standards apply to Web sites – especially company Web sites? Many Web sites have out-of-date information – often in the "What's new?" section pages!

It is often impossible to find basic information like addresses and telephone numbers. Orphaned Web pages, picked up by search engines, are another source of frustration. It would concentrate minds if Web site administrators had to draft policies for update and maintenance.

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Editor: *There are, of course, no specific references to Web sites in the ISO 9000 standards, which give generic quality requirements. However, clause 7.2.3 of ISO 9001:2000, Customer communication, could certainly be construed as relevant:*

"The customer shall determine and implement effective arrangements for communicating with customers in relation to

- a) product information*
- b) enquiries, contracts or order handling, including amendments, and*
- c) customer feedback, including customer complaints."*

ISO Management Systems would welcome comments from readers on this issue.