

Standards

QUALITY

Businesses that win build systems, says Mirembe

QUALITY ASSURANCE
JOAN SALMON

Mary Mirembe, a senior laboratory analyst and quality systems consultant spoke to BD Life's Joan Salmon about the essence of quality assurance in business growth.

What is quality assurance, and why is it such a critical component for any business regardless of size or industry?

Quality assurance simply means putting systems in place to ensure that what you promise your customer is what you deliver.

Many people think quality is only about testing products at the end, but quality assurance begins much earlier. It involves how a company designs its processes, trains its people, selects suppliers, and checks its work along the way.

When quality assurance is done well, it reduces mistakes, saves time, protects a company's reputation, and builds customer trust.

Regardless of whether a business is large or small, customers expect reliability. If a restaurant serves a different tasting meal every day, or a manufacturer produces inconsistent products, customers quickly lose confidence.

In simple terms, quality assurance helps businesses move from guesswork to consistency, and that consistency is what keeps customers coming back.

Many small businesses view quality assurance as expensive or unnecessary. Why does this perception exist, and how can small businesses integrate quality assurance into their daily operations?

This perception exists because quality assurance is often misunderstood as complicated paperwork, expensive consultants, or large corporate systems.

Many small businesses assume that quality management only becomes necessary when a company is very big. In reality, the earlier a business builds quality practices, the easier growth becomes.

For small businesses, quality assurance does not need to be complicated. It can start with simple habits such as:

- Writing down clear procedures for routine tasks
- Training employees to follow the same method of doing things
- Checking work before it reaches the customer
- Listening carefully to customer feedback

er feedback

• Even small improvements in consistency can reduce waste, rework, and customer complaints.

• Quality assurance should not be seen as a cost. It is actually a protective investment that saves money by preventing problems before they happen.

In small and medium enterprises, how does quality assurance typically appear in practice, even if it isn't formally labeled as 'quality management'?

Many small and medium enterprises are already practising elements of quality assurance without necessarily using the technical terminology.

For example: A bakery that uses the same recipe and measurement every day to keep the taste consistent is practising quality control.

A shop owner who checks goods before placing them on shelves is practising inspection.

A service provider who asks customers for feedback and adjusts their service accordingly is practising continuous improvement.

Quality management does not always start with formal systems. Often, it begins with practical habits that aim to reduce mistakes and improve customer satisfaction.

What ISO and formal quality systems do is organise these good practices into a structured framework so that they

Mary Mirembe, a senior laboratory analyst and quality systems consultant. Quality assurance helps businesses move from guesswork to consistency, and that consistency is what keeps customers coming back. PHOTO/ JOAN SALMON

Quality
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become consistent and scalable as the business grows.

As an ISO expert, what key steps should a business take to prepare for and successfully obtain an ISO certification?

Preparing for ISO certification begins with understanding that ISO is not just about passing an audit. It is about building systems that help the business operate more effectively.

Quality assurance

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Some important steps include:

- Understanding the standard: Business leaders need to first understand what the ISO standard requires and how it applies to their operations.
- Conducting a gap analysis: This helps the organisation identify the difference between their current practices and what the ISO standard requires.
- Developing documented processes: The company needs clear procedures that guide how work should be done.
- Training employees: ISO systems only work when employees understand their roles and responsibilities within the system.
- Internal audits and management review: Before inviting external auditors, organizations should first evaluate their own systems internally.

When done properly, ISO certification becomes a reflection of strong internal systems rather than just a compliance exercise.

How do quality management systems and ISO standards intersect, and how can aligning with ISO standards improve both operational efficiency and long-term business sustainability?

Quality management systems provide the structure

through which an organisation manages its processes, resources, and objectives.

ISO standards provide internationally recognised frameworks that guide how those systems should operate.

When a business aligns its quality management system with ISO standards, it gains several advantages. First, processes become more organised and repeatable. Employees know what to do, how to do it, and how performance is measured.

Secondly, decision-making improves because organisations begin to rely more on data rather than assumptions.

Thirdly, ISO systems encourage risk-based thinking, which helps businesses anticipate problems early rather than constantly reacting to them.

Over time, these improvements reduce operational chaos, improve efficiency, and strengthen the company's ability to grow sustainably.

How does strong quality management contribute to long-term business sustainability and competitiveness in today's market?

Strong quality management builds the foundation for trust.

In today's competitive environment, customers have many options. Businesses that consistently deliver reliable products and services naturally stand out.

Quality management also reduces waste, improves efficiency, and strengthens internal accountability. These factors directly affect profitability and operational stability.

Another important aspect is reputation. Companies known for quality often attract better partnerships, stronger customer loyalty, and more opportunities in competitive markets.

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For entrepreneurs or startups that want to build a culture of quality from the beginning, what practical steps would you advise them to take?

For startups, the most important thing is to build the habit of consistency early. Some practical steps include:

Start by documenting how key tasks should be done so that everyone follows the same process.

Train employees to understand why quality matters and how their role contributes to it.

Pay close attention to customer feedback and treat complaints as opportunities to improve.

Measure basic performance indicators such as delivery time, customer satisfaction, or error rates.

Most importantly, leaders should model the culture they want to see. When leadership consistently prioritises quality, employees naturally follow.

Building a culture of quality from the beginning saves businesses from many operational challenges later as they grow.