Meeting Customer-Specific Requirements

BY ROBERT KOZAK

According to the International Automotive Oversight Bureau (IAOB), failing to address customer-specific requirements is one of the largest problem areas for companies implementing ISO/TS 16949.

While QS-9000 dedicated an entire section (Section 2) to customer-specific requirements, in ISO/TS 16949 various references to these requirements are scattered throughout the document. Customer-specific requirements are mentioned in 0.5 Goal of this Technical Specification, 1.1b Scope, 4.2.4 Control of Records, 5.6.3 Review Output and 8.2.2.1 Quality Management System Audit among other possible references (be sure to perform your own analysis to understand where ISO/TS 16949's references to customer-specific requirements apply to your own organization). Still, many readers of the technical specification still sometimes miss the importance of customer-specific requirements which, when coupled with the requirements of the standard, together form the fundamental management system requirements for those subscribing to ISO/TS 16949.

Previously, companies certified to QS-9000 only had to worry about Ford, General Motors and DaimlerChrysler's requirements. Now, an ISO/TS 16949 certification is extended in scope to include not only the Big Three's requirements, but also the separate requirements from Audi, BMW, Honda, Suburu, Peugeot and other automotive manufacturers that are ISO/TS 16949-subscribing customers. (For a list of ISO/TS 16949-subscribing customers and the Big Three's customer specific requirements, visit www.aiob.org.) Be careful not to confuse customer-specific requirements with product specifications, as ISO/TS 16949's intent is only to include those requirements targeted for quality management systems. To obtain a complete list of applicable customer-specific requirements, contact your customers directly.

ISO/TS 16949 incorporates an expectation that suppliers will identify, implement and audit these customer-specific requirements with the same intensity that they do the basic requirements of the standard, an expectation that will likewise be held by your auditor. ISO/TS 16949 auditors will be inquiring during each audit about new automotive customers the company may have picked up and auditors must ensure that the company has checked for any new customer-specific requirements.

Make sure that your organization has a comprehensive list of customer-specific requirements that includes a document title, latest revision and document location such as the particular web site where the requirements are posted. It is your responsibility to make sure that you have the most current revision on hand for every audit and to make sure that these requirements have been implemented. It is also advisable that you document the process for identifying customer-specific requirements and include customer-specific requirements either on a checklist or audit plan to prove that the organization is internally auditing these requirements.

When performing an audit, one method of checking for customer-specific requirements is by examining Production Part Approval Process (PPAP) files, as many of the documents found within a PPAP file are related to these requirements. By simultaneously auditing the PPAP process with the customer-specific requirements, auditors can efficiently kill two birds with one stone.

While companies with a large customer base will find meeting customer-specific requirements to be a taxing challenge, there are three basic steps that can aid in meeting this challenge:

- Maintain a comprehensive list of customer-specific requirements.
- Develop a process to implement the customer-specific requirements with a designated process owner.
- Audit the customer specific requirements frequently.

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