

CASE STUDY

UNITED NATIONS

The benefits of attaining ISO/IEC 27001:2005 certification

Background

The United Nations Secretariat earned ISO 27001 certification in March 2006. The scope of the certification included the assets and the infrastructure in support of network services.

According to the organization's website www.un.org, 51 countries founded the United Nations in 1945, with more than 190 member countries belonging to the organization today.

Customer needs

When the world is watching, it's not enough to practice due diligence; one has to go the extra mile to demonstrate its practical implementation.

This philosophy drove the United Nations headquarters in New York to seek compliance and certification to ISO 27001 – an international Information Security Management Systems (ISMS) standard. The Information and Communication Technology Services Division of the United Nations, made up of about 100 employees, proposed certification to an internationally accepted standard because it was important to earn the credibility of a third-party registrar's stamp of approval.

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Dino Cataldo Dell'Accio, Information Communications Technologies (ICT) security officer - speaking from his professional expertise and not in an official capacity for the United Nations - said the United Nations Secretary General issued an ICT strategy in November 2002, identifying security as one of four building blocks. With ICT security as a priority, the United Nations staff had to decide the best approach for not just managing information security, but also to demonstrate on a world stage that they were doing so. The United Nations selected ISO 27001 because it represented the most comprehensive set of security best practices available on the international market.

Benefits

Dell'Accio said it is hard to define the benefits of certification in quantifiable hard numbers, but that the benefits are nonetheless indisputable. The primary advantage of certification is that it provides a formal validation from a third-party that the organization is practicing due diligence in the area of information security. Another major benefit is that ISO 27001 provides a comprehensive domain covering information security for the United Nations' extensive and complex range of activities.

For example, within the complex range of ICT activities, the adoption of ISO 27001 helped the organization to create a logical and comprehensive inventory of policies, guidelines, documented controls in the information security domain, and related activities

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such as business continuity and disaster recovery. "We're able to assess our preparedness in a very consistent and rapid manner, whereas, before that would have taken months of preparation," he added.

Another benefit is the simple, yet very effective, system-based approach to managing comprehensive sets of best practices. ISO 27001 is built so that it is easy for an organization to seek other similar certifications and build on the various systems.

"One of the best advantages is that once you demonstrate that you are able to comply with a logical set of best practices and controls, you acquire an ability that will allow you to extend the same capacity to other domains," Dell'Accio said. "And those domains become easily interrelated."

ABOUT THE SYSTEM

Dell'Accio said it was important for the organization to use a widely accepted international set of best practices rather than a country specific standard.

"When you are trying to introduce a benchmark of best practices, there is always that feeling that this is a theoretical exercise," he said, addressing how the United Nations got employee buy-in to the ISO process. "It's difficult to demonstrate how and why compliance to a set of best practice adds value to the day-to-day work. "

The organization supported its staff and their efforts in building an information security management system that is

BSI's role

As part of a competitive process, BSI was one of a half dozen companies to place a public bid for the job at the United Nations. BSI fit the bill because it was an accredited registrar with extensive international experience.

The first registration was in New York, but the United Nations plans to replicate the effort at its other offices around the globe. BSI will be able to perform audits in all those locations.

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now generating the benefits of clear terms of reference, avoided duplications, and well documented requirements.

"It's not just a simple piece of paper with a stamp on it, but the validation of an established system of people, resources, objectives, and rules about a specific domain of work and the best way to implement it. A system that allowed the organization to assess its posture in the field of ICT Security, measure it against a widely and internationally accepted standard and then define, plan, and communicate its long term improvement strategy."

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