

THIRTEEN MONTHS TO ISO CERTIFICATION

ABOUT AMERICAN POLARIZERS, INC. American Polarizers, Inc. (API) is a high-end manufacturer of polarized optical filters based in Reading, Pennsylvania. A leading global manufacturer of innovative optical technology since 1960, API is a Ben Franklin Technology Partners Innovation Award Winner. The company's product knowledge, optical lamination facilities and custom fabrication capabilities allow them to offer a wide range of filter solutions to many industries around the world. With 20 employees, API supplies polarizing materials and solutions for a wide range of applications, including aerospace, imaging, computer vision, video and still cameras, inspection, biomedical, nondestructive testing, quality control, and testing and measurement.

THE CHALLENGE. API sought ISO 9001:2015 certification in response to requests from some current customers and in hopes of winning new ones. As the company's Vice President of Special Projects, Victoria Bentley, pointed out, prime contractors and other customers (particularly those serving the aerospace industry) often prefer to deal directly with ISO-certified suppliers—a practice that relegated API to a lower point on the supply chain. The company turned to the Manufacturers Resource Center (MRC), a NIST MEP affiliate, for training and funding support.

MEP CENTER'S ROLE. First, MRC identified and engaged a consultant to prepare API for the road ahead. "MRC was very easy to work with," said Bentley. "Even though we admittedly didn't know much about the process of obtaining ISO certification, MRC said they could help us, and they did." MRC also helped anticipate additional needs, such as AS9100 certification for aerospace.

In terms of grant support, MRC explained the grant process and the funds available for training and certification. This process aligned with API's strategic plan, which called for ISO certification as an initial strategic step, followed by a website refresh and additional marketing efforts. API committed to an aggressive timeline for the ISO project, although company leaders recognized it would pull key critical individuals away from their operational duties. All involved agreed that the importance of this effort was well worth the short-term challenge.

"In a matter of two business days, we had grant funding for the project, we identified a consultant to help, and he was here the following week," said Bentley. "Thirteen months later we passed our audit, which was in line with what we hoped to accomplish. We were thrilled to complete the process as diligently as we did."

"ISO gives us credibility; it shows our commitment to quality excellence and enables us to sell to end users more efficiently."

-Victoria Bentley, Vice President of Special Projects

RESULTS



Achieved ISO certification in 13 months



Significant increase in the number of prospective clients



Certification enables API to better fulfill their customers' global needs



More than **\$14,000** in training funds

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