

BEARCAT UTILIZES PURDUE MEP EXPERT TO OVERCOMES ISO 9001 HURDLES

ABOUT BEARCAT ANODIZING. Since 1971 Bearcat Corporation has been meeting the aluminum metal fabrication needs of some of the largest RV and marine companies in the U.S. In 2017, they expanded the capabilities offered within their 50,000-square-foot facility by establishing a second business, Bearcat Anodizing, LLC. This new company, with a state-of-the-art fully automated production line, provides high levels of service to a broad array of industries. Overall Bearcat Corporation and Bearcat Anodizing employ 40 people (with plans to hire at least five more) in their one-shift fabricating operation and three-shift anodizing business.

THE CHALLENGE. Nick Davis, Bearcat's vice president of operations, vividly recalls being approached by a company in the spring of 2020 for a quote, but there was a stipulation-- Bearcat needed to be ISO9001 certified. Knowing very little about the ISO world, Nick reached out to Chris Stager, president of the Economic Development Corporation of Elkhart County, to seek help in identifying an ISO quality management system development resource. That resource was Purdue MEP, part of the MEP National Network™.

MEP CENTER'S ROLE. Purdue MEP spent 10 days assisting the Bearcat Team in the creation of an ISO 9001:2015 quality management system (QMS). In addition to developing and implementing QMS procedures and infrastructure, conducting internal audits, applying corrective actions for internal audit findings, and the final management review, Purdue MEP's Ted Boehm trained the entire Bearcat team on the ISO process. This collaboration with a very engaged Bearcat team resulted in a workable QMS that meets the ultimate goals of customer satisfaction and improvement. In October of 2020, Bearcat was awarded ISO 9001:2015 certification. That certificate is featured prominently on their homepage. While Nick cannot attribute their ISO certification to all of their business growth in the last two years (15% increase in 2020, another 30% in 2021), he knows that it was a contributing factor to their attracting new business outside the RV and marine industries. He also shared that due to the measures put in place with the help of the Purdue MEP, their nonconforming product is identified and never shipped to a customer, and their customer returns are basically zero.

"The Spring of 2020 saw us drawn into the ISO world, and we really did not know what to expect. As a company, we have been very impressed with the services that we've received from Ted Boehm (the SME from MEP) and from Purdue MEP. The quality management system definitely helped us, providing a measure of accountability that we were lacking, and allowing us to cut down on returns, and the subsequent credits that had to be issued. It's improved our processes, all the way around. Ted comes in once a year to consult with me. He always has new insight; always has some new ideas of ways that we can continue to improve. It's a relationship that I don't see us moving away from. It's definitely been a positive for Bearcat."

-Nick Dave, Vice President of Operations

RESULTS



15-30% sales growth in last two years



Bearcat has been able to attract new business outside its traditional markets



Related quality improvements have basically eliminated customer returns

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