

ET'S MANAGING DIRECTOR, DUNCAN MOUNSOR TALKS ABOUT QUALITY AND STANDARDS AND WHY THEY UNDERPIN THE COMPANY'S VALUES

When ET was set up almost 40 years ago, the company's founder had an ambition that ET would be a leader not a follower in the air quality monitoring business.



The first bullet point on the Company's Vision Statement was to supply the highest quality products and services in the industry. A priority that's as important now, as it was then. Providing superior service is what differentiates us from the other providers.

A better way of doing things.

Back in the early 1980's, believe it or not, customers were expected to take care of analyser servicing and repairs themselves, or send equipment back to the supplier for service and maintenance.

It was a big inconvenience for them having to remove the delicate and sensitive analysers from sites and carefully pack them up and ship them back to the supplier. It also meant that from the day they were taken out of the monitoring stations to the day they were re-installed again, valuable air quality data was being lost. This could run into weeks or even months and had a huge potential negative impact on data capture rates.

We identified early on that there must be better ways of doing things.

ET identifies that in-situ servicing is key and develops service and maintenance contract solutions.

We decided it would be so much easier for the customer if ET, the specialist supplier of the equipment after all, came to site and carried out the servicing and maintenance in-situ. It meant customers didn't have to worry about carrying out inconvenient and complicated repairs and maintenance themselves, and also that the analysers would only be out of action for a couple of days maximum each year, leading to far higher data capture rates.

And if the analyser developed a problem between planned service visits, all they had to do was give us a call, and we would come out to investigate and fix the problem. Again on-site, and more often than not, the next working day. And that was birth of the air quality monitoring equipment service contract model that is now industry standard, almost 40-years later.

The importance of quality, standards and attention to detail.

Servicing often complex air quality monitoring instrumentation requires a high degree of skill and finesse as well as the utmost attention to detail. In addition to the hands-on element of analyser servicing, processes and procedures needed to be drawn up and put in place, and service engineer training (first-hand by the instrument manufacturer where possible) was given paramount importance.

As the Company grew and grew, so did the number of customer sites and the number of service contracts. This meant that adherence to written and procedures and verbal instructions as well as consistency of service from one customer site to the next was of crucial importance. Of equal importance was quality training and mentoring for our growing team of service engineers.

ET becomes the first air quality monitoring equipment provider in the UK to attain ISO 9001.

At around the turn of the millennium, ET decided to go down the road of adopting a formal quality management system and decided upon the internationally recognised, and highly regarded ISO 9001 standard. We are extremely proud to be the first air quality monitoring equipment supplier and service provider in the UK to attain ISO 9001 certification, and we have retained our certification now for more than 20 years.

We didn't just stop there with ISO 9001. Operating in the environmental sector, it was only right that we focused on our green credentials and making sure that our impacts on natural resources and the environment were assessed, reduced and mitigated where possible.

Therefore, the next internationally recognised standard that we adopted was the environmental management system ISO 14001. And finally, perhaps the most important of our trio of standards and certifications is OHSAS 18001, the formal health and safety management system that we adopted and implemented.

OHSAS 18001 has recently transitioned to the brand-new ISO 45001:2018 standard and ET was awarded this certification at the start of this year. Again, we are ahead of the curve being among the very first businesses (of any type) in the UK to make the transition to this new and updated standard.

What does all this really mean to us and our customers?

Holding these industry recognised standards really emphasises our commitment to quality, the environment and health and safety. And equally as important, to continuous improvement. They also show the outside world that we are a professional and quality-focused organisation, and that we invest time, effort and resources into maintaining and improving ourselves and that all of our employees buy-in to this philosophy and way of working.

These systems help us by getting things right first time, taking corrective action when things do go wrong and with the ultimate goal of preventing recurrence. They also ensure that employee health and safety and wellbeing is managed in a highly professional and formal manner, and that our accident record over the years is remarkably low. Not only do we have a responsibility for our employees, but also our customers and the general public.

And from an environmental perspective, examples such as our wholesale move to the purchasing of green electricity and the adoption of a fleet of petrol-hybrid and electric vehicles demonstrates our environmental leadership and our desire to become carbon-neutral by 2030.

Quality meetings and audits.

Periodic auditing of our integrated management systems, and six-monthly third party assessments are fundamental to ensuring that our quality, health and safety and environmental standards don't slip. It's fair to say that our external auditor and the BSI assessors leave no stones unturned.

Once upon a time I used to dread the thought of a BSI audit, but over the years we have all come to realise that our ISO systems really do work for us, and not vice-versa. In turn, we all benefit.

How our customers benefit.

To start with and most importantly, our customers benefit the most because whether we are supplying them with a new air quality monitoring station, a new gas or particulate analyser, or just carrying out a routine service contract visit, they have peace-of-mind that work is carried out in a professional and consistent manner and to a very high standard.

And as customer satisfaction is so important to us, we can evidence what we say here by means of many highly positive and complimentary customer testimonials and references.

Continuous improvement.

Continuous improvement resonates with me both on a personal and professional level. We should never stop trying to learn new things and keep improving, whatever we do in life.

Over 30 years ago, before I started at ET, I worked for a computer graphics company who in turn did a lot of work with Gloucestershire's aerospace and engineering companies like Smith's Industries and Dowty.

I learnt during this time that quality and continuous improvements were not only necessary from a reliability, performance and safety perspective, but also key to their success and staying ahead.

From a business perspective, no matter how good you think things are, there are always improvements that can be made, even if just small tweaks to processes and procedures.

Of course, occasionally, things do go wrong, we are human after all and mistakes will be made. But it is all about understanding the root causes of mistakes and problems and putting these issues right at source and trying to prevent any recurrence of them.

This, along with valuable and constructive feedback from customers and employees, as well as observations and opportunities for improvement that fall out of the audit and assessment process underpin what continuous improvement is all about.

This, and along with a fantastic line of products and services, is what helps keep ET successfully driving forward and ahead of the game.

At the end of the day, quality is remembered long after the price is forgotten.

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