

## Case study

### LRQA Business Assurance approach helps Dubai Customs improve customer satisfaction



#### About Dubai Customs

Dubai Customs is a Government body that facilitates free trade and helps secure the integrity of Dubai's borders.

As a partner in Dubai Government's development initiatives, Dubai Customs takes a leadership position and establishes working relationships with its clients to ensure the best possible level of service consistent with regulatory responsibilities.

#### The numbers

Dubai Customs was originally established in 1920

The total number of employees is 2590

The total number of client companies is 78,148 plus personal shipments and passengers

The number of transactions for 2008 was 5,213,936

In the last quarter of 2008 customer complaints were resolved within an average of 2.8 days

**Website:** [www.dubaicustoms.ae](http://www.dubaicustoms.ae)

#### Standards achieved

ISO 10002:2004 Customer Satisfaction,  
Complaints ISO 9001:2000

In April 2008, Dubai Customs became the first Government organisation in the Middle East North Africa (MENA) region to achieve the ISO 10002:2004 standard for customer complaint systems.

#### Overwhelming justification

It is a well established fact that successful businesses manage customer complaints effectively. However, unhappy customers rarely voice their dissatisfaction; they simply go elsewhere. So, it is vitally important to be able to address dissatisfaction, because failure to do so can have serious consequences. For example, it has been estimated that it costs four times as much to recruit new customers as it does to retain existing clients. Similarly, the cost of repairing a damaged brand is far greater than the cost of maintaining a customer satisfaction system that prevents such damage.

ISO 10002 helps organisations to identify, manage and understand how successfully they deal with their customers' complaints. Emphasising the importance of customers' rights to voice their opinions, Mr. Ahmed bin Lahej, Director of Client Management at Dubai Customs said, "Complaints shall be handled to the highest professional standards because this is essential to the success of a quality-driven continuous improvement programme."

Customer service objectives are outlined in the Dubai Customs strategic plan 2007-2011, which is consistent with the strategy of His Highness Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice-President, Prime Minister and Ruler of Dubai, which seeks to 'adopt and share best practices with regard to procedures and systems of work.'

#### Why LRQA

Customer service can be an emotive subject which many organisations prefer to retain as an internal issue for fear of bad publicity. In contrast, for Dubai Customs it was important to be able to provide tangible, verifiable benefits for its clients. It was necessary therefore, for its procedures to be verified by an external body with an international reputation for quality, transparency and reliability. This was the main reason for the appointment of LRQA in the project to achieve certification to ISO 10002.

LRQA has a history of working with Dubai Customs through the successful implementation of the ISO 9001 quality management standard. Consequently, LRQA auditors already possessed a good understanding of the business and could help to ensure that any new procedures integrated well with existing quality procedures.

Mr. Ahmed bin Lahej has commended the LRQA team and its Business Assurance approach, adding: "The focus on continuous improvement coupled with the extensive experience of the LRQA team enabled the provision of highly useful recommendations within the external audit reports."

*"...the extensive experience of the LRQA team enabled the provision of highly useful recommendations..."*

**Mr. Ahmed bin Lahej**, Director of Client Management at Dubai Customs

### Experience gained by Dubai Customs

Dubai Customs was delighted to report that the project to obtain ISO 10002 certification has achieved all of its objectives within a very tight time-scale (5 months). The project phases included a gap analysis/benchmarking, project launch, documentation, implementation, internal audit, external audit and finally certification.



The project objectives included a number of key performance indicators. For example, a target figure of 75% was set for the percentage of complaints resolved within 7 working days by the end of 2008 – in reality 83% was achieved and the average time taken fell from 7.4 days in the first quarter of 2008 to 2.8 days in the last quarter. Furthermore, a grievance procedure was established for those complaints that were not satisfactorily resolved with a target figure of <10% and in 2008 an actual figure of zero.

As part of the assessment procedures LRQA audited the efficiency of the customer complaint system which included an assessment of the system's ability to generate effective action as a result of a valid complaint to ensure avoidance of a repeated complaint. LRQA also tracked sample complaints to ensure that their root cause was addressed and that the continuous improvement objectives were met.

### Reasons for success

The single most important factor in the successful ISO 10002 project has been the commitment and dedication of the project team coupled with the support of senior management.

The procedure for registering a complaint has been simplified and is now available online. Customer satisfaction surveys

and physical visits, have also been employed to find ways to improve the ease and effectiveness of the complaints system.

High levels of training for all relevant staff, interactive workshops and email campaigns have all helped to raise internal awareness. Certification by LRQA has raised the profile of the project as well as added credibility and transparency to the scheme. Regular reviews are undertaken and departments are assessed separately, which encourages departments to look for complaints as a tool for improvement. In the future, complaint handling will be included in performance appraisals and awards will be given for good performance.

**"...Dubai Customs has clearly established itself as a pioneer in customer service..."**

**Basem Obaid, LRQA Business Centre Manager, Middle East and North Africa**

### Benefits of certification

The processes that have been established in order to achieve certification are already delivering increased levels of customer satisfaction; they are ensuring that customer feedback is gathered as part of the continuous improvement programme and thereby protecting the Dubai Customs brand.

By dealing quickly and effectively with customer complaints, and by assessing their root cause, Dubai Customs is saving time and costs in complaint resolution. Following the award of the ISO 10002 certificate, Dubai Customs was nominated in the Dubai Government Excellence Programme in the Distinguished Administrative Practice category and many other governmental organisations have expressed an interest following Dubai Customs' lead.

### Summary

Prior to the ISO 10002 project, customer complaints were regarded in a negative way. Since the completion of the initial audit and certification process, that has changed, with staff at Dubai Customs now viewing complaints as an important tool in the continuous improvement process. Basem Obaid, LRQA Business Centre Manager, Middle East and North Africa, said, "As the first government organisation in the region to achieve ISO 10002 certification, Dubai Customs has clearly established itself as a pioneer in customer service. Dubai Customs has demonstrated that it is a customer oriented organisation, one that considers the customer voice as one of the main drivers of continual improvement."