

REMOTE SERVICE DELIVERY

**AUTHOR: OSCAR COMBS, SR. CONSULTANT
MARCH 25, 2020**

INTRODUCTION

With the emergence of the coronavirus (COVID-19), many organizations are doing their part to prevent the spread of infection by practicing social distancing. Some organizations have implemented “No-Visitor” policies, which is a good policy to prevent the spread of COVID-19, but not so good when it comes to receiving services from their suppliers, which may require onsite interaction. This is especially true for consulting, auditing and training services, which are typically performed by coming onsite to deliver such services. Traditionally organizations have been reluctant to have these services delivered remotely using web conferencing technology, but COVID-19 has thrust remote service delivery into the fore front. This article will explain the benefits of utilizing technology, such as web conferencing to have consulting, auditing and training services delivered remotely to your organization.

WHAT IS REMOTE SERVICE DELIVERY?

Remote service delivery, is providing services through the use of a web conference platform, which typically is conducted through the use of the internet. There are many web conferencing platforms that organizations use to deliver their services remotely, such as GoToMeeting, Google Hangouts, Zoom and Skype to name a few. With the ability to use web cameras for face-to-face, microphones or telephones for audio and screen sharing, remote service delivery has become more acceptable and effective for organizations. Most web conferencing services offer the ability to download the application to the desktop or mobile phone, for even more flexibility. This allows consulting, auditing and training services to be offered, just as if a consultant was onsite at your organization. Yes, I understand that we like to shake the hand and look in the eyes of individuals we are doing business with, but COVID-19 has forced many organizations to embrace the validity of remote service delivery.

WHY COMPANIES HAVE BEEN TRADITIONALLY RELUCTANT

Let’s face it, its just something about shaking someone’s hand and looking them in the eye that makes us feel all warm and cozy inside. We are all a bit reluctant dealing with someone that’s behind a computer screen, right? Especially when it comes to our consultants, auditors and trainers. With the use of the web camera, web conferencing allows you to look straight in the eyes of people. With COVID-19, most people don’t want to shake hands to prevent the spread of the virus. I agree shaking hands is part of most cultures, but its also the vehicle of how many viruses and diseases that we faced even before COVID-19 were spread. Looking at someone in their eyes and shaking their hands, doesn’t make them more trust-worthy or knowledgeable. It just makes us feel more comfortable. How many of us have been scammed or wronged by someone that we got a good feeling from because, we shook their hands and looked in their eyes? I rest my case.



5629 FM 1960 Road West, Suite 200
Houston, TX 77069
Tel: 832-326-9796
Fax: 281-607-2035
email: info@iso9001group.com
www.iso9001group.com

The International Organization for Standardization (ISO), issued ISO 19011:2018 Guidelines for auditing management systems, which is a standard that all first party, second party and third parties utilize globally. ISO 19011:2018 recognizes the use of remote audit activities and establishes guidelines and requirements when conducting audits remotely. Although an accepted practice, many organizations feel that audits must be conducted onsite. How can an auditor conduct an audit thoroughly without talking to employees, walking the floor or reviewing records? That's a great question and a very valid concern. This is where the use of the web camera, screen sharing and audio features come into play.

The game changer here, is really the ability to download the application to the mobile phone of the auditee. The auditee is asked to download the web conferencing application onto their mobile phone, which allows the auditor to become mobile and view the auditee's facility through the web camera of their mobile phone. The auditor is even able to look at equipment close up, interview employees, go into offices of other departments and even see the overall working environment of the operation during the audit. What about the documents that the auditor needs to review for objective evidence? That's the power of screen sharing. The auditee is able to share their screen, which allows the auditor to review records very thoroughly and in great detail or records can be uploaded to a secure folder. The auditor is even able to take a picture of the screen to capture objective evidence. Although the auditor is operating remotely, the auditee is able to take the auditor through the entire organization with the use of technology. It's like having your auditor in the palm of your hand.

As of March 25, 2020 there are over 30 million students throughout the United States that are out of school due to COVID-19. To continue delivering instruction to students, schools and universities have turned to web conferencing. Many adults still feel like they need to be in the classroom or have a trainer come onsite to their facility, so that they can see the instructor, interact with other learners and ask questions. Web conferencing platforms allow all attendees to turn on their web cameras and see each other, including the instructor. Attendees are even able to ask questions, just as if they were in the class by using their microphone or the chat feature. Training material can be provided digitally for students or shipped directly. COVID-19 has shown the importance and validity of attending training remotely. There are also many financial benefits organizations should consider.

FINANCIAL BENEFITS OF REMOTE SERVICE DELIVERY

The ISO 9001 Group has been delivering consulting and training services remotely since March 4, 2011 and conducted our first remote audit on January 11, 2018. We have been delivering services remotely at some level for over 9 years and have perfected its use to improve efficiency and reduce costs for our clients. There are several primary benefits of delivering services remotely.

One of the primary benefits of remote service delivery, is the reduction of risk for all parties involved. COVID-19 has made this very clear. Let's face it, when a consultant, auditor, trainer and even your employees travel, it increases risk for them and the organization. These risks may include car accidents, plane crashes, injuries, exposure to chemicals and viruses, such as COVID-19. These risks are totally eliminated with remote service delivery.

In addition to risk elimination, there are many time and cost benefits of remote service delivery. The ISO 9001 Group has been able to eliminate travel expenses such as: flights, hotels, meals, parking and rental cars for our clients. Just imagine if your organization needs to send 10 employees to training. The travel expenses alone, not including the cost of the course could conservatively exceed \$15,000. With remote training these same employees can attend training from their home or work office. Also consider the time these individuals would save traveling back and forth to training.

What about conducting consulting or auditing services remotely? Typically an auditor must travel onsite for these services. If local, the auditor may have to travel up to 4 hours to conduct a 2 day audit, estimated at 1hr traveling back and forth over a 2 day period. With remote audits, the cost savings can be passed along to the client. Similarly, if the auditor had to fly to the client site to conduct the audit. All the time and cost associated with flying to the clients' site is eliminated. Conducting the audit remotely, could save a client up to \$3,000+ just in travel time, flights, hotel, rental car, fuel, parking and per diem.

Most times when consultants, auditors or trainers come onsite organizations provide food and beverage. The time and cost associated with organizing meals for employees to attend training or for auditors can be very expensive and timely. Many times after the onsite training course, the organization end up throwing much of the food away. With remote service delivery all of these expenditures and time are eliminated.

CONCLUSION

I understand the human psychological factors of why people still want to look in the eye and shake the hand, but COVID-19 has demonstrated that we can still maintain the personal interface while reducing undesired risks while we work. We are in the twenty first century and remote service delivery is here to stay and if used properly can assist your organization operate more profitable and efficiently.

Author Biography



Oscar Combs, Senior Consultant of The ISO 9001 Group, a management consulting, auditing and training firm based in Houston, Texas. Oscar has over 25 years of experience working with management systems. Oscar has worked with clients throughout North America, South America, Europe, The Middle East, Asia and Africa helping companies manage risk and improve their business operations. Oscar holds an MBA from the University of Houston. He is certified by Exemplar Global as a Principal Management Consultant and Lead Auditor. Oscar is also a Senior Member of the American Society for Quality and has served as the Programs Committee Chair for ASQ's Houston Chapter 1405.