

A slice for the little guy



ASCO Power Technologies Canada, a division of Emerson Electric, is a 65-person company based in Brantford, Ont. It supplies emergency power switching solutions to about 350 customers, including hospital data-centres, BMO, Wesco Distribution, GAL Power, Hewlett-Packard, Cummins, and Siemens. It also maintains the transfer switches on Canadian Navy frigates.

As its impressive client list demonstrates, ASCO Power is a small business that is not afraid of working with the big guys. One of the reasons for its success in winning lucrative contracts with government and big business is the credibility and competitive edge it has built through certification to standards and active participation in the development and revision of standards that impact its business says ASCO Managing Director Joe Lacko.

ASCO is certified to the ISO 9001 quality management system standard and its products meet the requirements of C22.2, No. 178, the standard for transfer switches which is referenced in the Canadian Electrical Code. Its participation in standards development includes sitting on the Canadian Standards Association (CSA)¹ committee responsible for C22.2, No. 178 and membership in the Electro Federation of Canada.

"We look at standards, and learn how to discuss them at the federal and provincial level. It's too scary to find out what would happen if we were not involved. It's in our blood to be part of standards and industry associations," says Lacko.

John Walter is vice-president of standards development at CSA. He says that in an increasingly competitive marketplace, where large organizations are dealing with multiple suppliers and tight deadlines, they regularly stipulate that the products being supplied must meet certain standards of quality and performance. This certification to a standard or set of standards often becomes a requirement of bidding for contracts.

"Whether a company is small, medium or large, if they adhere to the standard, everyone knows what they have to provide," says Walter. "The small company knows its product has to meet the standard to qualify. It allows them

to compete with companies their own size or larger because the rules are the same for all. It also prevents underbidding by people providing an inferior product."

Penny Silberhorn is the manager of the Conformity Assessment Division, Acquisitions Branch, for the Canadian General Standards Board (CGSB). She says that being able to demonstrate conformance to standards can provide a competitive leg up on government and other contracts with large organizations. She says governments look to certification bodies such as CGSB for lists of qualified suppliers. ISO 9001 is among the most sought-after certifications for small business, according to Silberhorn.

"Organizations that implement an ISO 9001 quality management system find that their operations are more streamlined and efficient," she says.

"Extraneous processes are eliminated, freeing staff for more relevant work, and managers are enabled to bring control and consistency to the operation. This in turn decreases costs by making the processes faster and cheaper."

Companies like ASCO, who actively contribute to the committees that develop standards for their industry, further improve their chances of landing big contracts, according to Rae Dulmage, director of standards for Underwriters Laboratories of Canada (ULC).

"Small and medium-sized businesses who tap into the standards system can get access to and contribute to international and national standards that will directly affect them. In doing this they may come upon opportunities and contacts that they otherwise would not make," says Dulmage. ■

¹ CSA is one of four organizations accredited by the Standards Council of Canada to develop national standard. The other three accredited standards development organizations are the *Bureau de normalisation du Québec*, Canadian General Standards Board and Underwriters Laboratories of Canada.

New regional offices to help small business win government contracts

The Office of Small and Medium Enterprises, a division of Public Works and Government Services Canada, is opening six regional offices in Halifax, Montreal, Toronto, Ottawa, Edmonton and Vancouver. The centres will make it easier for small and medium-sized businesses across Canada to bid for federal government contracts.

To learn more about government procurement opportunities visit: www.pwgsc.gc.ca/sme