



By: Dave Frank

A standard for *growth*

How CIMS certification is bolstering a small BSC.

When Jim and Gail Sutton started their cleaning business in 1996, they envisioned it growing into the thriving organization it is today.

For the past 12 years, Better Business Cleaning Inc. has grown significantly — approximately 15 percent to 20 percent each year.

Busy keeping up with their expanding enterprise, the Suttons struggled to find the time to pause and focus on “systemizing” the business.

“I knew what I wanted to create and write, I had everything in my head,” Jim says. “I just didn’t know what we needed to do or how to go about the process of standardizing the business and make it ‘franchise-able’ for growth.”

When Jim first heard about ISSA’s Cleaning Industry Management Standard (CIMS) he didn’t know what to expect.

Then, ISSA released a draft of CIMS for public review.

“When I read the CIMS outline, my reaction was ‘yahoo,’” Jim recalls. “It was like someone had taken all of the things I had been thinking and put it on paper.”

The Suttons saw CIMS as not only a tool to standardize their business, but also to do so among other businesses in the industry.

CIMS created a baseline to measure changes, standardized customer requests and specifications, and provided a competitive advantage.

Building the business infrastructure

Once CIMS was open to BSCs and in-house service providers, the Suttons acted on their desire to become a certified organization.

This new motive drove the duo to reorganize their time and pool their resources and get into what Jim calls “baseline mode.”

During this time, the Suttons gathered all of the information required, including documents and policies (some existing in the business and some brand-new), to complete the building of the business infrastructure.

This frame-working process included creating a baseline from which they can measure changes, improvements and failures.

“We knew that if we got everything written down, we could correct, change and improve,” Jim says. “You really cannot verify improvements or measure change unless you have a baseline. Without a place to start, you have nothing that’s measurable.”

This baseline is now helping Better Business Cleaning increase the effectiveness of its work and improve communication with customers.

Creating a standard for service

With their business now certified, the Suttons have also created a standard for which clients can ask for service.

For example, customers are allowed to be as specific as they would like when it comes to cleaning tasks and frequencies.

“We use requests for proposals as an opportunity to educate customers,” Jim says. “A client might say ‘clean this’ or ‘clean that,’ but we want specifics. We standardize their requests so they can get exactly what they want.”

Better Business Cleaning customers know in which areas and on which days to expect traffic vacuuming and spot mopping and when they can expect full mopping and full vacuuming.

This standard for including all specifications makes the service clear to customers upfront and allows both the customer and Better Business Cleaning to measure whether or not expectations are being met.

Gaining a competitive advantage

Offering clear, concise customer expectations is one advantage over competing businesses that offer to simply “clean” an area.

On a broader level, CIMS certification allows customers to quickly know whether or not a cleaning business has the proper framework in place to operate as a quality organization.

The Suttons believe CIMS is raising the bar for the cleaning industry and is giving their business a competitive advantage, which will help Better Business Cleaning continue to grow.

Only now can they rest assured that they’ve got the right systems and framework in place to handle anything.

“We’ve now got everything out of my head and into the business,” he says. “Most importantly, we have a standard for growth.”

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Dave Frank is a 30-year industry veteran and president of the American Institute for Cleaning Sciences, an independent, third-party accreditation organization that establishes standards to improve the professional performance of the cleaning industry.