

## Thinking about powerful procedures?

### Think badge-size.



Being concise matters. Thirty-second commercials sell. Pictures overpower words. Catchy slogans stay in the mind of consumers.

Many would agree that instructions, quality procedures and company policies, should also influence, empower, and drive exceptional results. Unfortunately, in many cases these documents remain either unused or underused.

To illustrate this I'll give an example taken from my ISO 9001 external audits conducted a few years ago when paperless office was still a novelty. It was quite usual that my interviewee would start our discussion by reaching for a thick dusty folder that was titled "ISO 9001 Documentation".

The folder contained a set of mandatory quality management procedures as well as lengthy and detailed process descriptions and work instructions relevant to the audited areas. We both sneezed as dust puffed up into the air and I made a note that the folder had not been touched since my previous visit to that company. In other words, the company didn't really use these documents for any other purpose but to be reviewed during audits. These documents didn't bring real business value as they failed to serve their internal users.

Why do so many documents remain underused or unused?

There are several reasons for this. First of all, employees are getting increasingly overwhelmed by the amount of information which comes to them as emails, text messages, internal posts, and many other sources. They just don't have time to read everything that comes their way, especially lengthy instructions. A typical employee only scans the document to find details which may require more attention.

Secondly, the average focused attention span of a healthy adult is 30 seconds, which is enough to read about 50 words. To hit the first mark, the document should be a size of a smart-phone screen and contain only essentials such as milestones, critical quality elements, and the like. Low level details can either be left to professional discretion, provided during training, or kept in brief help boxes if the document is maintained in electronic format. There are much better ways of designing e-documents than duplicating the look of paper-based ones.

Overall, the employee should review all relevant instructions within 20 minutes which is the average sustained attention span of a healthy adult.

Still have doubts that conciseness is very powerful?

The world's leading brands have switched from lengthy customer satisfaction questionnaires to a Net Promoter Score which has just one simple question "How likely are you to recommend this business / product to a friend or colleague?" This is just one more example to illustrate that conciseness can drive business results.

Share this article!



## About the Author

---

**Natalia Scriabina** has a background in training, consulting and auditing. Natalia authored and co-authored a number of publications on quality management, innovation management, social responsibility, business sustainability, and related topics.

Natalia is an IRCA ISO 9001: 2008 QMS Lead Auditor. She has a Masters in Engineering Sciences from the National Technical University of Ukraine (NTUU "KPI").

Let us know what you think:

- Does your company use lengthy or concise documents?
- Have you ever seen or used a "one-page" document rule?
- In your opinion, what is the best size and optimal level of detail to maximize the business value of a document?

Fully customized [ISO 9001:2008 Quality Systems Manual and Procedures Templates Bundle](#)