

Proactive Corrective Action QualityCenter 2000

by Dirk Dusharme

In response to the need to handle and track customer complaints as well as (we hope) the resultant corrective actions, we have seen a spate of new software. The majority of these solutions have the necessary tools for complaint handling and corrective action embedded into medium- to high-end, do-everything document control software—with the commensurate cost.

I recently looked at QualityCenter 2000, a new package from Atlanta-based Manageware LLC and one of the relatively few specifically corrective-action-oriented packages brought to my attention. It promises to become a well-integrated corrective action package tailored toward customer complaints, with the hooks in place to handle internal complaints and supplier problem tracking in future releases. The 1.0.1 beta release reviewed here performed well, albeit with a few minor problems that are addressed in the formal release now available.

As Manageware points out, corrective action software is, by its nature, reactive. QualityCenter 2000's selling point is that it makes the corrective process more proactive by storing a history of all customer complaints (though Manageware uses the gentler term "customer concerns"), which can later be viewed as reports that allow users to spot complaint trends and head off production problems before they occur.

The product has two separate but integrated functions. The administrative function includes setting up access for all users, which can include anyone in the company, and inputting all company customers and associated data, products, part numbers, suppliers and so forth. The user is whoever comes into contact with a customer concern and initiates the complaint/corrective action sequence.

Because all pertinent data has already been added to the database by the administrator, data entry is simplified for the user, who only has to pick choices from pull-down tables: customer name, customer location and customer contact. The user also adds information related to return material authorizations and sorting for defective products as well as cost estimates for the concern. The user then assigns the concern coordinator and the members of the team responsible for addressing the concern, who can then be e-mailed from within the program with one mouse click.

Once this core information has been entered, the user fills out a concern detail form with specific information related to each complaint, for example, part number, part description, quantity failed, manufacturing date and defect code. The user can

also attach pictures, if needed, to further illustrate the concern. Multiple concern forms for each customer complaint are allowed. Again, much of the data entry is handled by pull-down tables. If corrective action is required, another form provides by default a corrective action process with the following seven steps: describe problem, immediate corrective action, root cause, system escapes and control, permanent corrective action, verification, and related document review and prevention. Additional files (of any type) may be attached to the corrective action form if needed. Provisions are also made for warranty returns.

The corrective action form is heavily tailored toward the automotive industry and includes the option of selecting the corrective action form favored by each of the Big Three: Daimler-Chrysler's seven-step form, General Motors' five-step problem resolution form, Ford's eight-discipline form, and a special form for truck and heavy equipment suppliers. Of course, any of these forms or a generic seven-step form could be used in any industry. Upon request, Manageware will even create custom corrective action forms to match any industry's terminology.

Once data has been collected, the potential strength of QualityCenter 2000 is revealed: the ability to spot complaint trends using one of the many history or reporting capabilities of the product.

In each of the seven corrective action steps, the user can pull up a history of what has occurred in that step for that particular part in the past. This is useful not only in resolving the current complaint, but it also allows the history on this part to be reviewed prior to production to alert planners of possible problems so they can be headed off before they occur.

In the same way, QualityCenter 2000 uses the integrated Crystal Reports 8.0 to generate more than a dozen defect history reports based on part number, customer, location, defect code and so forth. Reports present a bar chart and spreadsheet documenting defect count and related data. A cost analysis chart shows the individual and cumulative costs of concerns.

One service not often found that Manageware provides is the willingness to work with a customer to customize or add forms to the program in order to tie the software more tightly to the company's existing procedures.

The latest release fixes several user interface, help menu and database issues, making the software much easier to use. If you already have an older version or want to check out QualityCenter 2000, ask for a demo of the this release and take this forward-looking tool for a spin. **qd**

QualityCenter 2000 by Manageware LLC

System Requirements: Pentium II 233 or higher PC; Windows 95, 98 or 2000 (NT, 2000 or Novell for network server); 64 MB RAM.

Price: Stand-alone—\$795 plus \$495 for each additional copy. Network—\$4,995 (full site license) plus \$1,495 each additional site. Discounts available.

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