



CERTIFICATION CASE STUDY



COMPANY:

Castle Keepers

HEADQUARTERS:

Mount Pleasant, SC, USA

EMPLOYEES:

750



CIMS Certification Helps Castle Keepers Succeed and Grow

In 2008, the owners of Castle Keepers, Tom and Janice Stewart, had already experienced substantial success with their business in Charleston, SC, but wanted to take Castle Keepers to the next level. “We were looking for a way to differentiate ourselves within the residential cleaning market, where anyone with a mop, bucket and vacuum can claim to be a professional cleaning company,” says Tom Stewart, President. “As we continued to grow we wanted to organize our processes and procedures without losing focus on the customer.”

Looking for inspiration and a framework around which to build an effective management structure, Tom attended a CIMS “ISSA Certification Expert” I.C.E.) Seminar at an ISSA (The Worldwide Cleaning Industry Association) convention, which introduced a new standard that seemed to be a perfect fit for Castle Keepers.

The Cleaning Industry Management Standard, or CIMS, was created “by the cleaning industry and for the cleaning industry,” and was developed specifically to apply to both building service contractors and in-house cleaning service providers. As such, CIMS deals with the unique issues faced by the cleaning industry, and focuses on compliance requirements that were determined by experts in the cleaning field.

While most programs in the cleaning industry measure knowledge or training, ensure products meet specific standards, or require that technical cleaning procedures meet set criteria, CIMS applies to an entire organization and focuses on management systems and service delivery processes. The CIMS standard makes no product, equipment, procedure, or system recommendations, and each organization retains the flexibility to choose how to best meet the CIMS requirements.

ISSA, a not-for-profit organization and the leading association for the cleaning industry worldwide, and its partner, the American Institute for Cleaning Sciences (AICS) worked with a consensus-based technical committee to draft the Standard, which was also subjected to full peer review. The CIMS Standard is based on universally accepted management principles and consists of five sections of management best practices: Quality Systems; Service Delivery; Human Resources; Health, Safety and Environmental Stewardship; and Management Commitment. The first organizations to go through the process achieved CIMS certification in 2007. A sixth dimension to the CIMS standard - CIMS Green Buildings and Service - was added in 2009.

The Stewarts elected to use CIMS as their framework and pursue certification under the Standard. They submitted an application and were assigned a third-party accredited assessor, an individual with industry experience who has demonstrated a capability to competently and independently verify that Castle Keepers meets the Standard’s requirements.

Over the next four months all the company’s systems were reviewed by Castle Keepers’ staff and fit into the CIMS format. The assessor visited Castle Keepers in person for two days and performed a comprehensive assessment of their CIMS processes, which included interviewing employees and customers. In September of 2009, Castle Keepers, Inc. became the only residential cleaning company to be CIMS Certified (with Honors), and one of the first cleaning companies in North America to receive the new Green Building Certification.

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—Tom Stewart
Castle Keepers

BEST TIP FOR COMPANIES THINKING ABOUT CERTIFICATION:

Don't be discouraged by your assessor's "poker face." The assessor's job is to determine compliance with the Standard without bias and is required to be thorough and look at almost all aspects of your organization. Without a serious assessment, the process would not work and certification would lack significance.

So what did Tom and Janice gain from CIMS?

- CIMS Certification opened doors for Castle Keepers in other areas of the cleaning industry, providing confidence to expand.
- CIMS certification identifies Castle Keepers as a quality, professional organization that is focused on its clients. "When you are performing several hundred cleanings a week, you have to find a way to make sure everyone is doing what they need to do to maintain that high level of customer service," explains Tom.
- CIMS allows consumers to differentiate companies that are professional and capable of getting the job done. "Customers understand industry standards, best practices and the professionalism they reflect," says Janice.
- CIMS ensures that Castle Keepers possesses a flexible business model through which it is committed to providing valuable, long-term service for its' customers in a changing economy. "When we made the change to chemical-free cleaning, it was much easier than I expected, since we were already running our business with a focus on training and processes," says Janice.
- CIMS enables Castle Keepers to cut costs associated with poor efficiency, passing along service improvements and savings to customers. "We recently changed our scheduling software," Janice points out, "and having our CIMS systems in place made the transition seamless."



ABOUT CIMS:

CIMS is the first comprehensive management and operations standard for cleaning organizations. Administered by ISSA and the American Institute for Cleaning Sciences, CIMS is a standard of excellence designed to help building service contractors and in-house service providers develop quality, customer-centered organizations.

The CIMS framework is built around five quality principles that have proven to be the hallmarks of well-managed, successful cleaning operations:

- Quality Systems
- Service Delivery
- Human Resources
- Health, Safety & Environmental Stewardship
- Management Commitment

Why should a company certify to CIMS? Daniel Wagner, director of facility service programs for ISSA, explains: "Implementation of the standard's elements affords an organization a tremendous opportunity to validate its management systems and processes. Professional, customer-centered cleaning organizations finally have a touchstone resource, a common rallying point around which all members of the industry can gather and work toward achieving an unprecedented level of professionalism and excellence."



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