



 QMS wrapper™

# REMOTE AUDIT

**DO REMOTE AUDITS  
BECOMING  
'NEW NORMAL'?**



# Do remote audits becoming 'new normal'?

Audits are used for a variety of reasons, including assessing compliance with standards and regulations, adherence to requirements and specifications, **evaluating process and system performance, evaluating the adequacy and effectiveness of the quality management system;** etc.

A remote internal audit is usually done partially or completely off-site employing technology to support the auditor when a site visit is not possible.

ISO guidelines have explicitly addressed remote auditing since 2018 (ISO 19011:2018 – Guidelines for Auditing Management Systems) and the technology to facilitate the off-site evaluation of every company that wants to stay compliant with its relevant standard.

Remote audits refer to the use of information and communication technology for collecting information, questioning audited personnel, and even doing a tour in production areas to verify processes. Types can vary from teleconferencing, web meetings, and collaborations to video technology and applications. Some of the options include Skype, Zoom, Microsoft Teams, etc.

Such a concept is “pushed” into the mainstream due to restrictions on travel and in-person interaction imposed on the spread of the coronavirus pandemic.

The approach for collecting information is equal to the on-site audit - interviews, observation of processes and activities, review of documentation, and records. For some processes, it may not be



possible to verify remotely their effectiveness within the QMS. Therefore, a partial on-site internal audit should be completed at some point in the future. When this happens, we must update the annual audit plan to reflect such events.

During this type of audit, auditors can adopt auditing methods which they use during on-site audits, including being open-minded, diplomatic, listening, and being respectful to the audited personnel. Auditors will continue to ask key and relevant questions related to the scope of the audit. They can audit the required areas in detail and without any issues, using this audit style. The audited people can share their screen and even give the option to auditors to take control of their computers to explore audit trails and evidence.

So, a well-organized audit and good communication are crucial to ensure that the process runs as smoothly as possible.

The remote audit will typically be the same duration as an onsite audit. You will need to be available at all times.

Is the remote audit the future of auditing? Probably yes, but I don't think they will take over the entire audit activity. Why? Because the company is deemed a higher risk, then more time on-site will be required.



# **BENEFITS OF REMOTE AUDITING**



# Benefits of remote auditing

Remote audits may have many benefits when it comes to efficiency, access to competence, increased reach, and mitigating risks. But companies have to use it in the right context.

The main benefit of remote auditing is cost flexibility. Auditors will incur fewer costs through every remote audit they conduct, such as travel expenses and billable hours. On-site audits still hold value, although the companies have to conduct them less regularly and to organize them much more carefully.

## REMOTE AUDIT BENEFITS RANGE FROM:

### A. Improving the efficiency of the audit:

1. Reduced travel time
2. Availability of audit team with required competence, connecting and including them in the audit where needed.
3. Enabling more ground, e.g. number of sites and geographies, to be included, thus increasing your insight and control.

Most data is accessible from anywhere (cloud storage), such as a cloud portal, so there is no need to waste time traveling to check the documentation that can be available by other means? This causes a significant reduction in costs and time spent on commuting to the audit location.

### B. Enabling wider access to and sharing of competence:

1. Additional competence or auditor(s) can be added to any audit team in cost-efficient ways.
2. Increased access to the auditor(s) with the right competence.



Working from a home office environment, the audit team will feel more comfortable, since they will be able to use all the necessary tools, such as high-speed internet, monitors, printers, etc. This way, the productivity will be substantially increased during a remote audit.

### **C. Increase your reach & mitigate risk:**

1. Avoiding travel to risky areas, making more sites accessible, and increasing control.
2. Maintain business continuity under severe conditions and situations.

Some locations to audit can be difficult to access for many reasons; maybe they are just in an inaccessible area, or special permits are needed to get in – even visas sometimes are required if audits are conducted internationally. With a remote audit, we avoid these difficulties.

Many auditors have realized remote working is not only possible but that it can add value and efficiency. Working remotely has forced auditors to be more proactive and to think 'outside of the box'.

The advantages are indisputable over the traditional audit, although there are still some obstacles to overcome. Many find remote audits very attractive since reductions in costs and resources are undeniable using virtual methodologies.

Also, remote audits are an alternative for a more effective and productive method of auditing, not only from the point of view of the audited company but to the audit team as well.



# REMOTE AUDITS – WHAT ARE THE LIMITS?



# Remote audits - what are the limits?

A remote audit, also known as virtual audit, is the method of conducting an audit distantly, using electronic means such as videoconferencing, email, and telephone to acquire audit evidence, just like during an on-site audit.

The overall aim is to evaluate this evidence objectively to determine the extent to which we have fulfilled the audit criteria.

The benefits of remote audits have already been discussed, so let's not be hypocrites and talk about the limits of this methodology. There are plenty of downsides too, some apparent and some less.

The one area to consider is technology. If network connections are not very reliable, interviews and meetings can be interrupted, and it may take some time to reconnect and solve all the network problems. Also, depending on the location of the audited company and technology used, one of the main challenges organizations can run into is logistics – it can be hard to access the VPN to log into a database in order to show evidence.

Since plenty of audits were conducted until now, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the research showed that most notified bodies claim poor network connections is a common obstacle.

Notified bodies have also faced problems related to the limited IT skills of the audited company, poor image, and sound quality, as well as the need to scan documents.



The companies that are scanning documents may consider using QMS software. Just saying...

The other obstacle when it comes to remote auditing is trust. Some auditors want to perform on-site audits because they believe they can trust the audit only if auditors have physical access to audit evidence. They consider it is easier for the audited company to hide issues and even possible nonconformities.

Even though there are few limits when it comes to this audit method, many auditors have found that remote auditing is not only possible but that it can add value and efficiency. Working remotely has forced auditors to be more proactive and to think 'outside of the box'.

