

Mini-Case Study: Quality Management at Global Green Books Publishing

Global Green Books Publishing is growing its eBook business, satisfying demand for customized eBooks for the college market and for a growing number of commercial customers. These customers expect a high-quality product that works in each of the environments that their users use – various operating systems, eBook readers, and hardware (desktop computers, tablets/phaslets, and smartphones).

As part of the standard development process, each eBook goes through several quality checks. When the order is received, a customer service representative checks the order and a more senior customer service representative verifies the order. During the Production Phase, a quality assistant will check the eBook against the job order and customer order to make sure it is ready for production, and once approved by quality, each of the requested eBook formats are created. A second quality check is performed by the customer service representative who is assigned to the customer to make sure that each requested format is ready to release to the customer.

Some customers (and their eBook users) are complaining about quality problems in the eBooks they have received from Global Green Books. Sometimes the eBooks do not work correctly in the intended environment. Sometimes, content is not clear or fuzzy. Sometimes, a quality check will find that not all parts of the requested order have been included in the eBook. This causes rework before the eBook can come back for a second quality check before being released to the customer service representative for the final quality check. In each of these cases, the "cost of quality" is the cost of NOT creating a quality product. Every time the project has to rework an eBook to correct a quality defect, the cost of quality increases.

Samantha and her project managers met with a key group of supervisors who are managing a critical number of the eBook projects. They reviewed the lessons learned data and brainstormed from their experiences with producing eBooks to identify some of the quality problems that they were seeing in the eBook projects. They identified a number of issues:

- The customer's quality requirements are never discussed within the project team. They are dealt with by the customer service representatives at the beginning and end of the eBook production process. This means that team members do not know what the customer expects and just do the tasks assigned without knowing what is "good". They may have a very different or no understanding of what the customer's quality needs are, unlike the customer service representatives.
- The standard job template doesn't suggest that supervisors plan into their project any reviews or checkpoints at which quality can be verified. The only quality checks come after the eBook is finished. This does quality checks of the whole eBook, but doesn't allow for checks on each component –content formats, correct conversions or desk top publishing checks.
- These two factors lead to a perception among team members that quality is just simply some testing by some other groups (quality and customer service), rather than a way of working and reviewing or checking work as they proceed. Further, many team members don't even see quality as their responsibility, because it's something done by someone else.

- One of the challenges facing the customer service representatives is that they do test each eBook, but they cannot always check each eBook in an environment that is the same as that used by the end users of the eBook. Sometimes users have different equipment than the customer service representatives have to use for their testing. There are times when this causes surprises after the eBook is released. This leads to external failure costs for dealing with processing customer complaints, dealing with rework to fix the eBooks, and releasing a revised eBook. Luckily the customers handle distribution to their users, so Global Green Books is not bearing the cost of customer returns and warranty claims that they might have if they were selling a consumer product directly to consumers.

The group agrees that they would like to make some changes to bring their total quality costs below the costs of quality that they are currently incurring. This means that they want to reduce the costs of failing to meet customer requirements or expectations, and reinvest those savings into preventing problems as they go that do not meet the customer's requirements, and checking to make sure that the eBook and all of its components conform to the customer's requirements. Catching some of the quality problems sooner, before the entire eBook is produced will also reduce the internal failure costs that they are experiencing. These internal failure costs are rework and re-checking following the quality checks by Quality and the customer service representative.

Comment on the following aspects of the case study:

- a) Consider the problems that Samantha and the group identified. What do you think are the causes of these problems?
- b) What would you suggest they do differently to eliminate these problems?
- c) Who should be responsible for quality? What would you recommend be the specific responsibilities of each identified role?
- d) What prevention activities would you suggest to prevent poor quality in the eBook products? Examples could be planning for quality activities or team building activities focused on improving quality
- e) What appraisal activities would you suggest to evaluate the eBook product to ensure that it meets quality standards and customer requirements? Should they add in-process checks of eBook components in addition to their current final inspection/tests? If so, who should do these?
- f) What would you suggest they do to involve team members more in pursuit of high quality eBooks for their customers?