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## Communicating your annual internal audit plan

By Kelly Huckabone

Never underestimate the importance of communicating your internal audit plan early in the year. Typically, it is the quality manager who prepares and schedules the audit plan for the internal audit cycle around an organization's operating cycle in alignment with the dates of the scheduled external audits.

It is important to make key leadership aware of the audit schedule very early on in the calendar year, as sometimes there are changes in the queue that can impact the quality management system (QMS) and the audit schedule. Changes can include, but are not limited to software updates, organizational changes, mergers and acquisitions, and new product launches.

You'll want to plan your audit schedule around significant changes and use the internal audit process to validate how effectively those changes were implemented. An audit offers a chance to assess whether procedures were developed and training was implemented. If you have a strong change management process, the quality team should know well in advance of any significant changes occurring. Unfortunately, that does not always happen.

What is the right amount of information to communicate? At a minimum, you should include the reason for the audit, benefits of the program, number of audits required, and how audits will be conducted. This high-level overview provides the leadership stakeholders with awareness of the importance of the audit program. Most often, it will be their teams working through audits and corrective actions, so it is critical that there is alignment for resource planning across the organization.

Early notification also allows internal departments to prepare. Individual agendas will contain detailed information about the scope of the audit, which processes will be audited, and logistical information.

Companies use many ways to communicate their audit plans. Sometimes audit communication can be a simple memo or email, or it can be a formal presentation. Whatever method you choose to communicate your plan, make sure to clearly articulate your approach to all stakeholders. That way, you'll have a greater chance of ensuring compliance of your auditing program.

In the coming months, we will delve deeper into the different steps of conducting an internal audit. **Thank you and Happy New Year!**

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### About the author

Kelly Huckabone is the North American Audit Program Manager who oversees the Unity™ Lab Services internal and external customer and supplier audit programs. Kelly is a certified risk manager, lead auditor with the American Society for Quality (ASQ) and has been conducting audits for over 25 years for different quality systems, including ISO 9001, 13485, and 17025, as well as Health Canada and the FDA.

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