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Accreditation vs. Certification: Why the difference matters

In regulated high risk industries words like accredited, certified, and compliant are often used interchangeably. They shouldn't be. They sound similar but accreditation and certification serve very different roles. Understanding that difference is critical for organizations seeking ISO credibility and long-term trust.

At Altomaxx, we are a certification body formally recognized by a national accreditation body. That recognition is not a marketing claim but a legal and technical assurance that our certification decisions align with ISO. To understand why this matters, we need to start with the foundation of trust in the conformity assessment system.

Accreditation sits above certification. It is the mechanism by which governments and the international community ensure that certification bodies, laboratories, and inspection organizations are competent to do their work. In Canada that role is fulfilled by the Standards Council of Canada (SCC). A national accreditation body creates a foundation of trust by "checking the checkers." This means confirming that the requirements of national and international standards are met by the organizations that issue certifications. SCC also undergoes peer evaluation by the International Accreditation Forum (IAF) and the International Laboratory Accreditation Cooperation (ILAC). Through international mutual recognition arrangements certifications issued by SCC-accredited bodies (like Altomaxx) are accepted globally, support trade, and enable regulatory confidence.

Certification: Where Organizations Demonstrate Conformity

Certification is the process most organizations are familiar with. It is how a company demonstrates that its management system or service meet the requirements of a standard. However, certification only has credibility when the certification body itself is accredited. For organizations wanting certification, this means that accreditation-backed certification is anchored by the fact that they come from accredited companies. This shows that certification bodies are aligned with an internationally recognized system, not an isolated commercial service

"Compliance Recognition" and Gold Seals: Not the Same Thing

In recent years, many companies have entered the market offering "compliance recognition", "gold seals" or internal approval marks. These offerings often look official and may reference standards but they are not certification. The key differences are critical, because providers are not accredited by a recognized accreditation body and their assessments are not independently overseen. There is no assurance of auditor competence, impartiality or consistent decision making. Their "seal" typically has no standing with regulators, international partners, or insurers. In other words, they are private claims, not part of the internationally recognized conformity assessment infrastructure. While such recognitions may have internal or marketing value, they cannot replace certification issued by an accredited certification body.

Choosing certification from an accredited certification body is not just a box tick. It is a strategic decision that affects regulatory acceptance, market access, legal defense and credibility.

At Altomaxx, our certifications are backed by a recognized accreditation framework. That means when we certify an organization, it is not just *our* opinion, it is a decision grounded in internationally recognized oversight, competence, and trust.

In a marketplace increasingly crowded with unofficial seals and compliance claims, accreditation-backed certification remains the gold standard.