



The small business guide to standards

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things that
standards can do
for **your business**

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Improve your goods and services

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Prove your commitment to quality

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Obtain new and keep existing customers

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Sharpen your business processes

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Cut costs – and drive profitability

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Help ensure regulatory compliance

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Support your export efforts

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Strengthen your marketing pitch

Quality



How standards make the difference

The benefits of standards look impressive on paper. But do they really deliver those benefits to small firms?



Suzanne Ralton, Agua Fabrics

If someone were to tell you that you can make your business more efficient, improve the quality of your products and services, win new customers and boost that all-important bottom line, you'd want to know more. Using standards can do all these things for small firms.

At the most basic level, standards are simply applying tried and tested best practice to your business. They are created by experts who have the trusted knowledge that's needed to develop best practice.

Standards encourage you to focus on the products or services you deliver, the business processes you follow and the way you manage your business as a whole.

They do this by providing a practical framework for you to examine, review and continually improve any area of your business. You can follow this best practice informally or choose to get outside confirmation from a recognized certification body.

But however you approach standards, they can – and do – provide solid benefits for firms like yours.

Suzanne Ralton is managing director of Agua Fabrics, a London-based manufacturer and supplier of upholstery and curtain fabrics to the contract market. Trading for more than 70 years, the business employs eight people and has been working with standards for over 30 years.

"We first started using standards and BS 5867* when it was introduced in the 1980s to make sure our fabrics were flame retardant. But in 2008 we started using ISO 9001 – the quality management standard – to demonstrate that we have processes in place to monitor and improve the quality and performance in the purchase and supply of our textiles," says Suzanne.

According to her, there are a number of areas that Agua Fabrics has seen tangible benefits from the introduction of standards.

"We first started using standards and BS 5867 when it was introduced in the 1980s to make sure our fabrics were flame retardant. But in 2008 we started using ISO 9001 – the quality management standard – to demonstrate that we have processes in place to monitor and improve the quality and performance in the purchase and supply of our textiles"

*BS 5867 Specification for fabrics for curtains and drapes

Driving efficiency and improving quality

Using the ISO 9001 standard has enabled Agua to improve the efficiency of its business and consequently to raise the quality of its service.

"Perhaps the biggest way in which ISO 9001 has affected our operations is that we simplified internal processes and improved efficiencies," Suzanne explains. "For example, the retrieval of data needed to follow-up customer queries was made easier and quicker, leading to improved customer relations, with more and better satisfied customers."

"Not only that, through regular reporting on debtors, we reduced debtor days by five, which also impacted positively on cash flow."

There is a more fundamental benefit, too, she says. "In my opinion, many small firms can be quite disorganized, so introducing standards helps to improve the structure of the business."

"We're able to win new business and increase our profits"

Win new customers with standards

Using a formal standard like ISO 9001, and deciding to have it independently certified, has marketing benefits as well.

"Once you've introduced a standard into your business, it's important to publicize the fact," Suzanne stresses. "We put the information about our standards onto our letterheads, compliments slips and all our product sample cards because it makes a statement to existing and potential new customers about our commitment to quality."

This is particularly useful when pursuing new business. "Getting ISO 9001-certified provides us with independent assurance of reliability to our customers. It's also becoming a pre-requisite for many customers, so now that we have it we're able to win new business and increase our profits," she says.



To sign up to BSI's Quality Newsletter visit bsigroup.com/newsletters or for further information on quality standards, training and certification go to bsigroup.com/quality.

About standards



Standards made simple

Some people think that standards are only for big business or involve significant costs. Not true – standards are what you choose to make them.

Every ambitious business strives for quality, consistency, efficiency and best practice. Standards can help ensure that your business is getting the best results and show you how to keep improving. But you can choose how structured you want to make the process.

Formal and informal standards

Informal standards can be as straightforward as having company guidelines on how phone calls should be answered, or following your trade association's code of practice. They're essential if you want to achieve specific objectives and can be easily managed in-house.

Formal standards – which most people think of when 'standards' are mentioned – go a stage further by setting out criteria that's been agreed within your industry. They draw together best practice and expert knowledge from those in industry, government representatives, testing and certification organizations, academics, consumer groups, trade unions and most importantly businesses.

The result is a document that shows this agreed best practice. You can buy it, read it and apply it to relevant areas of your business. The price of standards varies, but is likely to be more cost-effective than you think. In fact, if you consider the business benefits of applying the standard, it could offer some of the best value for money your business can get.

With formal standards, you can also use testing or certification services from respected third parties. This gives independent proof to your customers and suppliers that you're meeting or exceeding best practice.

What formal standards can cover

Formal standards can cover your goods or services and specific parts of how you create, manage and deliver them to meet customers' needs. Or they can focus on the management systems that you have in place underpinning your business, such as quality management or environmental management.

Whatever you want to show your customers and suppliers that you do, there is probably a standard that covers it. There are more than 35,000 formal British Standards.

Find the right standards for you

If you take a methodical approach and think about what you want your business to achieve, it should be easy to find the best standard to help you do it. Begin by talking to your industry or trade association to find out if there are any essential requirements or recommended standards in your sector.



Names and numbers

Each formal standard has a unique number and a prefix which shows where the standard applies. British Standards have the prefix 'BS', while European standards carry the 'EN' prefix. International standards are preceded by the letters 'ISO' or 'IEC'. Standards can be a combination of British, European and international: the three prefixes in 'BS EN ISO 9001' show that this standard is simultaneously an international, European and British Standard.

To search for a British Standard visit [bsigroup.com/shop](https://www.bsigroup.com/shop).

Check out the competition

Which parts of your business could you improve to give you a more competitive edge? Perhaps raising service levels will attract more customers – or maybe you would like to see a reduction in the returns rate of your product.

If you're in a marketplace where your competitors are already using standards, it's crucial to see which ones they're using, and why. Would you get a competitive boost from adopting the same standard – or do you want to outstrip your competitors? Using a standard that proves you're doing something that your competitors are not could reap big benefits.

Consider your customers

What's going to impress your current customers, or spark interest among potential customers? Make sure you know what matters to your customers so that you can find a standard that will help you address their needs more effectively.

Bear in mind, too, that obtaining certification to a standard could provide opportunities to tender for contracts or join supply chains that would otherwise be closed to you. If you're part of a supply chain where standards are used throughout, you can be sure that your products, processes and technology are going to be compatible with the businesses that supply you, as well as being compatible with your customers later in the chain.

Over **35,000** formal British Standards

Sustainability

Safeguarding the future

More of your customers are casting a serious eye to the future. Using sustainability standards – which cover the economic, social and environmental impacts of your business – can show them that you're exactly the type of firm they want to do business with.

Businesses do not exist in isolation. Their actions have far wider consequences and this responsibility should be taken seriously. It's becoming clear that people prefer to buy from businesses with sound environmental, social and ethical credentials.

Using environmental standards can help you to understand and improve your environmental impacts. This can win you new customers, reduce your costs significantly and increase your efficiency and profitability. Standards can also help you to be a sustainable business, one that makes good use of resources rather than wasting them, which can provide sizeable cost benefits.

Environmental management standard ISO 14001 enables businesses to limit their environmental impact.

"We introduced ISO 14001 in 2012, a few years after ISO 9001, and it's been great for our business," says Tony Peters, sales and marketing director of Shades of Comfort. Established in 2004, this 29-strong Gloucestershire-based company – made up of six employees and 23 sub-contractors – helps turn external space into extended customer entertainment areas. They provide a diverse range of products from awnings and umbrellas through to heating and lighting to achieve the perfect outdoor space.

Implementing ISO 14001, alongside ISO 9001, was an integral part of Shades of Comfort's business plan. Tony continues, "We recognized that working with the standards and achieving certification would provide business credibility in terms of performance and efficiency to larger clients, as well as clear evidence of continued commitment to the environment. We are now in a much stronger position to target customers.

"It has not always been easy to source sustainable materials and products. In an ideal world, all outdoor leisure products would be eco-friendly and 100% recycled. However, this is not the case. We've had to search high and low when sourcing materials and creating our products, to ensure they live up to the standards of quality expected from us and also fit the criteria expected from ISO 14001. Our recycled furniture is testament to our dedication in actively lowering our carbon footprint and developing our company for the better."

As a result of certification, they have secured business that we could not have obtained otherwise. Tony says, "Put simply, we've gained not only prestigious contracts, but also credibility and confidence in the workplace."

The company has expanded rapidly and now services major retail and leisure companies. They've also been awarded sole provision for umbrellas and awnings to Costa Coffee – a contract that covers in excess of 1,200 UK outlets. Their increased use of better geographically-placed sub-contractors to fulfil such contracts as well as suppliers shipping direct to site have enabled Shades of Comfort to lower their carbon footprint as well as save costs.

Tony stresses that they use the standard to ensure there is commitment throughout the business to help seek ways in which they can reduce their environmental impact. "Everyone has signed into quality as an objective for our business, the way we conduct ourselves and the way customers view us. We also believe that as a company, we must actively seek to lower our impact on the eco structure, and go further to encourage ranges of recycled and sustainable products to our customers."

"We've gained prestigious contracts as well as credibility and confidence in the workplace"

To sign up to BSI's Sustainability Newsletter visit bsigroup.com/newsletters or for further information on sustainability standards, training and certification go to bsigroup.com/sustainability.



Business continuity

If the worst happens

A major unexpected incident can cripple any business. But using business continuity standards can at least provide reassurance to you – and your customers – that in the event of a disaster, your essential business operations can continue.

Imagine if a disaster were to strike your business. It could be a fire gutting your premises or a serious flood, similar to those experienced in recent years, which signalled the demise of many small firms all over the country. Or someone could vandalize your premises or hack into your IT system and steal or delete important information. You or another key member of the team might become ill or one of your products or services could harm a customer.

What would you do? If you don't know, you're not alone. Surprisingly few small firms in the UK have business continuity plans, even though they can provide a critical 'lifeline' when things go wrong.

Continuity is not just an issue for larger organizations; in fact, most smaller business would not survive a major disruption without a firm continuity plan. Believing that 'It won't happen to me' is unwise. It might.

Standards can play an important role in helping you to stay afloat should serious disruption occur. They can guide you through the process of identifying risks and devising plans to enable you to weather the storm and get up and running quickly. Standards will also ensure that you safeguard stakeholders, your brand and your reputation.

BS ISO 22301 is the international standard for a business continuity management (BCM) system. By helping managers to put in place a basic BCM system, BS ISO 22301 enables businesses to remain operational no matter how difficult the circumstances.

For Lettergold Plastics, a long-established engineering company based in Newmarket and employing around 25 people, the driver for adopting BS ISO 22301 was to increase resilience and minimize the impact of a business disruption. It also wanted to reassure customers and other stakeholders that it had business continuity plans in place should the worst happen.

"The standard has provided us with tried and tested methods of minimizing the adverse impact of an incident on our operations, as well as protecting the interests of customers and stakeholders," says Andy Drummond, managing director of Lettergold Plastics.

"It's reinforced the confidence of customers seeking certainty of supply from us. Our BCM system is a great reassurance to them and to ourselves. Previously, recovery plans probably only existed in my head. Like many small firms, we were over-reliant on a few individuals, especially the business owner."

Lettergold Plastics has used its BCM system to ensure that it has plans to mitigate problems quickly if they occur, such as access to key utilities including a second water supply and electricity back-up. Lettergold has also used it for testing the strength of its supply chain for more specialized materials. For example, it has tested alternative sources for industrial chemicals normally imported from Belgium. "These are things we wouldn't have done otherwise if it wasn't for the standard," says Andy.

Small firms would be wise to identify their risks and formulate a planned response now, because you never know when disaster might strike.

To sign up to BSI's Business Continuity Newsletter visit bsigroup.com/newsletters or for further information on business continuity standards, training and certification go to bsigroup.com/bcm.

Number crunching

According to the BSI sponsored CMI Business Continuity Management Survey 2013, 63 per cent of respondents report that their organization has BCM arrangements in place. In the previous 12 months, extreme weather was the biggest source of disruption, followed by loss of people and loss of IT. 87 per cent of managers whose organizations had activated their BCM arrangements in the last 12 months agreed that it had effectively reduced disruption and 81 per cent said that the BCM costs had been justified by the benefits to the organization. Of those with BCM arrangements in place, 86 per cent believe it has improved business resilience, 74 per cent say it has helped protect their reputation, and 72 per cent believe it has helped in meeting customer requirements. In 2013 small organizations overtook medium-sized organizations in terms of the overall percentage using BCM.

81%

said that the BCM costs had been justified by the benefits to the organization.

Innovate to accumulate

Some believe that standards mean everything is the same, and so hinder innovation. That's not the case at all – in fact, standards in their many forms are some of the most valuable tools and a best friend that innovative small firms can have, as they can keep you at the forefront of fresh and best practices.

Few sectors can rival telecommunications for innovation such as mobile telephones, with new functions arriving with impressive regularity. Yet most new products are able to work alongside others. Standardization makes this possible for most of the world's mobile phones.

Standards are used during the research and development (R&D), design and testing of mobile phones and a wide range of other products. They remove the time and cost of starting from scratch and enable products to get to market quicker so developers can recoup their costs sooner.

The common understanding supplied by standards even enables innovators to work together and share R&D costs. This managed technological development is good for customers, who will pay less for a wider range of compatible products in the marketplace.

Aided by BS 4046, the specification for compressed straw building slabs, Suffolk-based Stramit Limited enables customers from all over the world to set up strawboard manufacturing plants. In some regions, this

provides a vital source of affordable and sustainable housing.

"Some businesses might fear that working with standardization will act as a barrier to innovation – but this is not our experience," says one of their senior executives. "Some standards provide guidance on how to manufacture a product, but others simply state levels of performance a product or service must meet."

Stramit's use of recycled straw to make panels for screens, walls, roofing, partitions and doors is considered innovative. "We were ahead of our time in designing sustainable, recyclable and energy-saving products and processes.

"We were the only company ever to manufacture strawboard in the UK, so the standard we work with – BS 4046 – has become synonymous with Stramit. But in other parts of the world, it provides a benchmark our clients can use to produce strawboard that meets strict performance criteria."

Stramit even played a role in developing the standard. "You could be forgiven for thinking that helping to develop a standard requires disclosing your intellectual property, but it didn't.

"BS 4046 doesn't actually reveal how we manufacture our products, it simply sets out characteristics such as strength and level of fire resistance that must be reached if other manufacturers want to claim compliance. Innovative businesses such as ours are not hindered by standards. They can enable businesses to make the most out of their ideas."

To get involved with developing standards visit bsigroup.com/getinvolved.



Creative thinking

Another major consideration is the management of innovation itself. Guidance and support on the recognition, fostering and development of innovation with regard to new or existing products, services and techniques can be found in standards such as the 'Guide to managing innovation' (BS 7000-1).

Services

At your service

It's not simply technical issues that standards support – increasingly standards can prove to your customer base that you're taking a lead in customer service.

Research conducted by BSI on customer service suggests that more than 60 per cent of us believe that customer service in the UK is getting worse. More than 70 per cent have taken our custom elsewhere as a result, while more than half of us have not been satisfied with how a complaint was handled.

Keeping customers happy makes good business sense. Estimates vary, but attracting a new customer could cost up to six times as much as selling to an existing customer. Firms with a reputation for customer service have a valuable competitive advantage that can make winning new business significantly easier.

As well as 'universal' standards such as BS ISO 10001 and BS ISO 10003, there are sector-specific standards that enable business of all sizes to ensure that their services are world-class. Quality standard BS ISO 22222, for example, specifies the ethical behaviour and competence of professional financial planners. Use of the standard has raised service levels significantly in this fragmented market, as well as establishing an international benchmark that goes beyond regulatory requirements.

"With the exception of my degree, BS ISO 22222 is the qualification that has added the most value to my business," says Keith Churchouse of Guildford-based Chapters Financial Limited (formerly Churchouse Financial Planning Ltd), specialist in pensions and retirement planning.

"It's at the coalface where British Standards win every time – and BS ISO 22222 has a lot of resonance in the market. It gives customers added confidence in the business's competence, experience and ethics."

The key concern for those seeking financial advice is reliability of information provided. "Ours is a people business," Keith adds. "The standard functions as a badge of trust." Keith's wife and fellow company director, Esther, also recognizes the benefits of standardization. "The quality of our existing processes was already very high, which meant achieving the standard happened almost immediately," she explains.

"However, in some areas we were able to raise the bar just that little bit higher, which has enhanced our customer service and increased customer satisfaction levels, too. We're committed to providing our customers with the best financial planning advice, service and support – the standard helps us to achieve this."

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"It's at the coalface where British Standards win every time – and BS ISO 22222 has a lot of resonance in the market. It gives customers added confidence in the business's competence, experience and ethics"

Satisfaction guaranteed

Available from BSI, BS ISO 10001 and BS ISO 10003 are part of a group of customer satisfaction standards. Used alongside BS ISO 10002, 'Guidelines for complaints handling in organizations', they enable businesses to put in place effective systems for dealing with customer satisfaction – from complaint prevention and handling through to dispute resolution.





What is the BSI Kitemark™?



The BSI Kitemark shows that a product or service has been tested independently and audited by BSI to ensure it meets the appropriate standards of quality and safety. It is a registered trademark of BSI and has been reassuring consumers and businesses since 1903. The BSI Kitemark is recognized and trusted by over 88% of the UK population and, of those who recognize it, 93% felt products with a BSI Kitemark were safer while 91% felt they would be better quality.

Flying a kite for quality

Frank Kelly is CEO of UK Flood Barriers. With 28 members of staff, this Worcestershire-based flood protection company designs and manufactures flood mitigation products. As well as having certification to ISO 9001, the company complies with the PAS 1188 standard for flood protection products for which it holds nine BSI Kitemarks based on this standard.



"Under the Flood Angel® brand we supply and install products to prevent flooding. This includes doorways and other openings, brick defence and sewage defence. In addition to carrying out site surveys to advise on flood mitigation solutions, we also provide a range of other services such as sealants, silicones and post-flood restoration products.

"We knew from early on that if we wanted to become the world's leading provider of flood defence solutions we'd need to focus on innovation and new product development.

"With 2012 being the second wettest year on record, and a growing number of properties at risk from flooding, we also knew that any new products that we brought to market would need to be trusted to perform as soon as they were launched.

"That's why we chose the BSI Kitemark. BSI Kitemark certification of our products and systems gives our customers the trust and confidence that they've been tested to the highest standards, demonstrates their quality and reassures them that they'll work. It's a stamp of credibility on our products.

"Our BSI Kitemark certification has proved to be a highly influential tool for us and has helped us win new business particularly in the local authority sector and via the Environment Agency framework. Quite simply, it's a trusted mark of quality.

"We want customers to see that we work to high standards and that we've been independently verified, so we display the BSI Kitemark on our website and include it in all our marketing materials."

For more information on the BSI Kitemark visit bsigroup.com/kitemark or our consumer website kitemark.com.

"BSI Kitemark certification has proved to be a highly influential tool for us and has helped us win new business"

Health and safety

Transporting excellence

Lyndon Wild is Managing Director at Laminar Medica, a specialist in insulated shipping systems. The Hertfordshire-based company employs 80 people in the UK and has introduced ISO 9001, ISO 22301, ISO 14001 and the OHSAS 18001 health and safety management standard. Lyndon explains how OHSAS 18001 benefits Laminar Medica.



“We specialize in the design, test, manufacture and qualification of insulated shipping systems which are used by the pharmaceutical and biotech industries globally. Our products protect vaccines, drugs, blood and other medical products from extremes of temperature during transportation.

“It’s therefore essential that our customers have confidence in the quality and reliability of our products to ensure the safe delivery of often life-saving drugs, while at the same time looking after our people and the environment.

“Laminar Medica has been established since 1975, however we only decided to introduce OHSAS 18001 a few years ago. We already had ISO 9001 and BS 25999 (the previous standard for business continuity management) and thought that the OHSAS 18001 health and safety standard, together with ISO 14001, would sit well alongside them.

“One of the main reasons we decided to introduce OHSAS 18001 and other standards is because the industry demands that we work to high standards. Specifically for OHSAS 18001, it helps us manage our risks, legal compliance, and reduce accidents and incidents. We believe in the concept of total quality and making sure everything we do as a business is right – not just our products and services.

“Because we’d already implemented ISO 9001 and BS 25999, we found it relatively easy to bring OHSAS 18001 into the business. In many ways, it was just a case of formalizing things that we did already and then checking that they were correct.

“Having the standard in place plays an important role when we are bidding for work and it has almost certainly brought us new business. When we tender for contracts I’m sure we gain points because we comply with all four.

“As well as implementing the standards, we’ve also been independently certified. We make sure that we let customers know about our high standards because we use the logos on our website for example, to show that our compliance has been assessed and certified. Our customers have the re-assurance of a third party – they don’t just have to take our word for it.”

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“Having management systems in place gives the customers the confidence that the company have the controls in place to provide continuity, good quality and service at the same time as looking after its people and the environment”

Safe and secure

Fredrickson is a leading debt collection agency. Based in Surrey, with three offices across the county, the company is certified to the international information security standard, BS ISO/IEC 27001.

Fredrickson's sales and marketing director, Jan-Michael Lacey, outlines some of the benefits that using the standard provides to the business and its customers.



"Information security is fundamental to the success of Fredrickson. Much of our work involves receiving, analysing and storing sensitive consumer and business credit information. So it's vital that we have appropriate controls in place to protect our systems from hackers, and prevent personal information from those systems falling into the wrong hands where it could be used by criminals to commit identity fraud.

"We've to be able to assure our customers and the general public that we take the security of their personal information seriously. Rather than simply saying that we are compliant with the information security standard BS ISO/IEC 27001, we felt it would provide the market with the confidence it needed if we got independent assessment and certification.

"As a result, clients and the general public can now have total confidence in our information security practices and the way their personal information is managed.

"Being able to show that we are BS ISO/IEC 27001 certified has significantly reduced the man hours needed to complete IT security questionnaires required by clients in bidding for work and on an ongoing basis after a contract has been awarded.

"Introducing the standard also brought us immediate financial benefits. Since we achieved certification we have won some of our largest deals. Clients now include a central government department, well respected UK financial institutions and several FTSE 100 companies.

"We are committed to setting the standard and becoming the most compliant agency in the UK. We believe that in the near future BS ISO/IEC 27001 certification will be a pre-requisite imposed by many of our clients when selecting outsourced partners.

"There have been several high profile instances of data loss within our industry and as such reducing the risk of this happening and proving we have the highest levels of security in place is important in demonstrating to clients that we are fit for purpose.

"The standard isn't just for firms like ours – any business can benefit from it. Compliance also helps businesses to meet legal requirements such as data protection regulations and the Freedom of Information Act."

To sign up to BSI's Information Security Newsletter visit bsigroup.com/newsletters or for further information on information security standards, training and certification go to bsigroup.com/informationsecurity.



What is BS ISO/IEC 27001?

BS ISO/IEC 27001 is the international standard for establishing, operating and maintaining an information security management system, whether electronic or paper-based. It gives best practice advice about information-security management, to ensure business continuity, to minimize damage and to maximize return on investments.

Anti-bribery

An ethical response

Steve Walker is managing director of Collinson Hall, a privately-owned estate agency based in St Albans employing 24 people. Steve was keen to use the new British Standard for anti-bribery, BS 10500, to see how compliant they were with best practice in a subject that can bring down any small firm.



“We operate in a sector which has numerous bribery risks and one where the public often perceives that unethical practices occur. While we already had in place management, financial and commercial controls to prevent bribery, we hadn’t formally implemented an anti-bribery compliance programme.

“We were, therefore, keen to use the new British Standard BS 10500 to help implement an anti-bribery management system to ensure that we were following best practice to help prevent bribery occurring. We could then use this as a positive marketing tool to reassure the public and promote the company as a highly ethical practice.

“While we already had many policies and procedures in place, our independent consultant told us that these would need to be formalized and documented so as to become part of the official management process. We took this on board and immediately implemented the necessary changes.

“Ultimately, we want our compliance with BS 10500 to be certified by a reputable independent certification body, as we see a positive marketing and business advantage in doing so.

“BS 10500 is an appropriate tool for us, or any small business, to help enhance our anti-bribery programme and prevent us falling foul of the Bribery Act 2010. For example, it helps put in place appropriate procedures so that staff know how to handle incidents of corruption and when to report wrongdoing.

“It is clearly written and understandable, and scalable to the size of the company and the risks faced by it. BS 10500 processes only need to be implemented to the extent reasonable and proportionate to a company’s business size and bribery risks.

“While compliance with BS 10500 can’t provide a cast iron guarantee that bribery won’t occur, it can help any small firm demonstrate that it has implemented reasonable and proportionate measures designed to prevent bribery.”

For further information on anti-bribery standards, training and certification go to bsigroup.com/bs10500.

“BS 10500 is an appropriate tool for us, or any small business”

Setting firm foundations

Jane Wernick is director of Jane Wernick Associates, a consulting structural engineering company based in London. The firm, which now has eight employees, follows around 30 standards in the course of its day-to-day work. Jane explains why standards are essential to her company.



"The business was set up in 1998. I already knew that standards were essential, because I'd used them throughout my career.

"When you design a structure you need to assess the loads and work out how big the columns and beams need to be. This requires us to refer to the standards we use on a daily basis. While we were working on the Young Vic Theatre in London, for example, we used a British Standard to determine the wind loads and live loads.

Live loads are non-permanent loads that move around; they include such things as people and snow. We also used British Standards for concrete and structural timber. We also applied standards for all of the other materials we used.

"We carry out calculations that are submitted for approval to our local council's building control department. We're obliged to follow best practice, so a checking engineer will use standards to make sure that we are doing this.

"Although the standards we follow aren't regulations, they do help us to meet our legal obligations. They're also helpful because they represent the accumulation of knowledge and experience gathered by industry.

"Sometimes we might design a structure that doesn't fit the guidance given in a standard. But, ultimately, we're responsible for making sure it is safe and strong enough. If something goes wrong and you haven't followed the relevant standards you might be accused of not following best practice.

"We sometimes have to buy new standards before we start a new contract or type of work. If I don't already know which one might be needed, I ask our librarian for advice. When the standards we already use are updated, we usually find out through the Institution of Structural Engineers' magazine.

"When we buy a new standard, the member of our staff who will be using it reads it through to check they understand everything. When clarification is needed, we might contact the Institution of Structural Engineers' representative on the BSI technical committee responsible for that particular standard. Alternatively, we phone one of the other structural engineers we know to discuss it."

To sign up to BSI's Engineering and Construction Newsletters visit bsigroup.com/newsletters. For further information on standards, training and certification go to bsigroup.com/engineering or bsigroup.com/construction.

"We refer to the standards on a daily basis"

What is BS EN 1992-1-1?

It gives recommendations for the structural use of concrete in buildings and structures.

Fire

Fighting fire with fire

Mike Chilman is managing director of MC Fire Protection. The Oxfordshire-based business, which employs nine people, supplies and maintains fire safety equipment and provides fire risk assessments and consultancy services. As well as complying with several standards specific to the fire protection industry, MC Fire Protection uses ISO 9001. Mike explains why.



"In 2001, soon after the business started, we bought a number of standards used in the fire protection industry.

"These are BS 5839, which relates to fire alarms, BS 5306, which relates to fire extinguishers, and BS 5588 [now BS 9999], a standard that concerns building regulations. Then, in 2004, we decided that we could also benefit from compliance with ISO 9001.

"The fire safety-related standards that we use allow us to give our clients the right advice when we assess them or when they buy products from us. For example, by referring to our copy of BS 5306, we can tell which fire extinguishers a customer needs, how many they need, where they should be placed and how often they should be serviced and maintained.

"Basically, I was prompted into finding out more about ISO 9001 because many of our competitors were starting to publicize the fact that they complied with it. Now that we can do the same, we are finding that we are attracting lots of business from larger companies that want the reassurance of dealing with a firm that can demonstrate it complies with appropriate standards.

"A lot of businesses choose to trade with companies that comply with recognized standards ahead of those that don't – especially in a trade like ours, where we deal with life-saving devices.

"On a practical level, ISO 9001 has made positive changes to the business. For example, it has improved the way our workshop and storage areas are organized and has systemized the way we keep records.

"All the standards we apply have brought us extra reassurance. They help us to show that we're more professional, while our customers are assured that the services we provide are high quality.

"I would recommend standards to other businesses operating in the fire protection industry – in fact, it's becoming more and more of a necessity. One thing that can be extremely useful, especially to small firms, is bringing in outside expertise to help with the implementation of a standard. That is what we did and found it very beneficial – and it wasn't as expensive as we'd thought."

To sign up to BSI's Fire Safety Newsletter visit bsigroup.com/newsletters or for further information on fire safety standards, training and certification go to bsigroup.com/fire.

What are BS 5839 and BS 5306?

BS 5839 is a code of practice for the system design, installation, commissioning and maintenance of fire detection and fire alarm systems for buildings. BS 5306 is a code of practice for the inspection and maintenance of portable fire extinguishers on premises.



Selling surgical success

Warren Gray is managing director of MCS Medical, a Worcestershire-based business that manufactures surgical implants and medical components such as bone screws and pins. MCS Medical has 34 employees and was set up as an offshoot of automotive precision engineers, Machined Component Systems. Warren explains why BS EN ISO 13485 continues to be important in gaining the trust of the market.



When our parent company, Machine Component Systems, was in the process of diversifying, we carried out a lot of market research. One thing we realized was that we needed more of a medical profile. You can't sell a bone screw to an orthopaedic surgeon just as an engineered part. You need to sell it as they see it – a product that will make someone better.

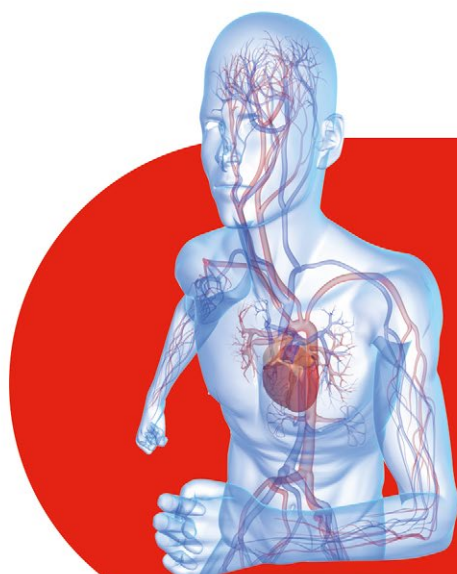
"We also realized that, without the medical devices standard BS EN ISO 13485, we might not be able to attract the type of customers we wanted to reach. As a business we are trying to sell to a number of major, world-class companies. I am confident that they wouldn't even sit down at the table with us if we didn't use the standard.

"When such businesses procure, they have to start with a list of questions and one of those is whether the company they are considering meets BS EN ISO 13485. Through our compliance with this standard, we are allowing them to tick another box.

"The standard itself is all about inspiring confidence. It allows anyone who buys from us to see an audit trail that shows where each part has come from. It shows where we bought it, where it was made and from which material. It also means that if ever there is a problem with a particular part, we can trace where this happened."

To sign up to BSI's Medical Devices Newsletter visit [bsigroup.com/newsletters](https://www.bsigroup.com/newsletters) or for further information on medical devices standards, training and certification go to [bsigroup.com/medicaldevices](https://www.bsigroup.com/medicaldevices).

Inspiring confidence



What is BS EN ISO 13485?

It specifies requirements for quality management systems for companies that need to show that they can provide medical devices and related services that consistently meet regulatory and customer requirements.

Certification

Get certified

Having independent certification to prove that you're complying with a standard can give you a powerful marketing hook. It tells customers and suppliers that your business can be trusted because your processes have been checked by a third party and found to be meeting or exceeding industry best practice.

One of the best sales and marketing benefits of third-party certifiable standards is that they can provide you with independent verification, if you need it, that your business is meeting or exceeding them.

This means that customers and other businesses in your supply chain don't just have to take your word for it. The validation by respected, independent bodies can provide assurance to customers and boost your reputation. If your business tenders for contracts, you will probably be in a stronger position than a competitor if your firm's compliance with standards can be verified and theirs cannot.

Getting certified

Not all standards have an associated certification scheme. If a standard you choose does have one, however, you will have to decide whether your business will benefit from certification. Will customers be more impressed by external verification – or should you simply declare your own conformity?

There are many organizations that can provide certification including BSI, but it is a good idea to use someone recognized by a body such as the United Kingdom Accreditation Service (UKAS). This proves that the certification or verification has been carried out by a body that has been assessed and recognized ('accredited') itself.

You can find UKAS-accredited bodies on its website (ukas.com) or by phoning +44 20 8917 8400.

Set the ball rolling

Once you have found a body to carry out the certification or validation, you will need to apply for certification. The certification body should be able to advise you on implementing the standard. The cost will vary according to which body you use and the services they offer, the standard you are looking to certify to and the size of your business.

When the time comes for the formal assessment, a representative from the certifying body will then visit your business to examine how you're applying the standard.

After the visit, you will either receive a compliance certificate that proves that you're meeting the standard, or some guidance about the areas where you need to carry out more work to ensure that you achieve the standard. In this case, you will need to schedule another visit from the certification body when you have put the guidance into place.

Compliance certificates are time-limited and you will need to renew them after a defined period to continue to prove the independent validation.

CE marks and quality marks

CE marks and the BSI Kitemark are among some of the most familiar names associated with quality and safety marks.

CE marking is a legal requirement for some products. It provides proof that a product complies with relevant EU Directives. Products that require CE marking cannot, by law, be sold in the EU without it.

What you will need to prove to use the CE mark on your products depends on each specific product and directive. You can find out more about what you will need to do by visiting the BSI website at bsigroup.com/CEmarking.

The easiest way for you to demonstrate that your product complies with relevant directives is to use one of the harmonized European standards, developed specifically for this purpose. You can find out more by visiting newapproach.org.

In the UK, the BSI Kitemark is a widely known symbol of quality and safety. The BSI Kitemark is a registered trademark owned and operated by BSI and helps demonstrate that particular goods or services conform to the relevant standards.

To find out more about the BSI Kitemark visit bsigroup.com/kitemark or kitemark.com.

Making excellence a habit

How certification worked for me

"In the accident repair business, more insurers are making it mandatory for suppliers to have certified standards to protect them against legal claims – so in some respects certification is essential for me to stay in business.

"But it also proves to my customers that my business's processes are industry-leading. Since getting certification to ISO 9001 and, more recently, the vehicle-repair standard PAS 125, I've retained some key customers and gained a few new contracts, too. Everyone recognizes the BSI Kitemark which we've got with PAS 125.

"Certification for PAS 125 took about six months. Working with BSI to get certification was very good – they know their stuff. They may not be experts in repairing vehicles, but they're excellent on standards, how to apply them and how to assess processes fairly."

Tony Arnone, owner, Sapphire Garage, Manchester



Set your standard – and win new business

Now that you know a bit more about standards, you can start thinking about introducing them to your business. Follow our tips to get started and to use standards to drive new customers your way.

1 Review your business

What would you like to do better? Perhaps you want to improve your customer relations, or redesign a product to make it work more effectively.

2 Identify exactly what you want to achieve

Focus closely on the results you would like to see. If it's improved customer relations, should you be handling complaints more effectively? If it's a better product, are you looking for product-specific improvements? Identify clearly the benefit that you want the standard to provide.

3 Assess the competition

How will you compare with competitors once you have the standard? Will you be soaring ahead or drawing level? If the latter, refine your target even further to make a real competitive difference. Do a cost-benefit analysis based on the amount of new business that you think would open up to you if you achieved the standard.

4 Think about your customers

What benefits will a standard give your customers? Will it have an implication on your pricing? If so, be sure to factor this into your plans.

5 Consider your suppliers and the rest of the supply chain

Will applying the standard improve your position within a supply chain? Will it increase your ability to work with other businesses in the chain?

6 Search for the right standard

Once you have a picture of the business benefits, find the standard that best suits your objectives. You can browse standards on the BSI website at [bsigroup.com/shop](https://www.bsigroup.com/shop).

7 Weigh them up and make your choice

You might find more than one suitable standard that can help you meet your goals. Think about how much time and resource will be needed to implement each and how the benefits will compare. Some will require more commitment than others, but could bring greater rewards.

8 Implement your chosen standard

Follow the guidance and regularly review your progress. Celebrate your achievements as you progress.

9 Consider certification

Once your standard is fully in place, consider certification – it can make a real difference to how your firm is perceived. Complying with the standard on its own will certainly help, but certification can be additionally powerful.

10 Tell the world

Make sure your existing and potential customers know that you have achieved compliance with the standard. Look around for new business opportunities that may have opened up as a result of introducing it.

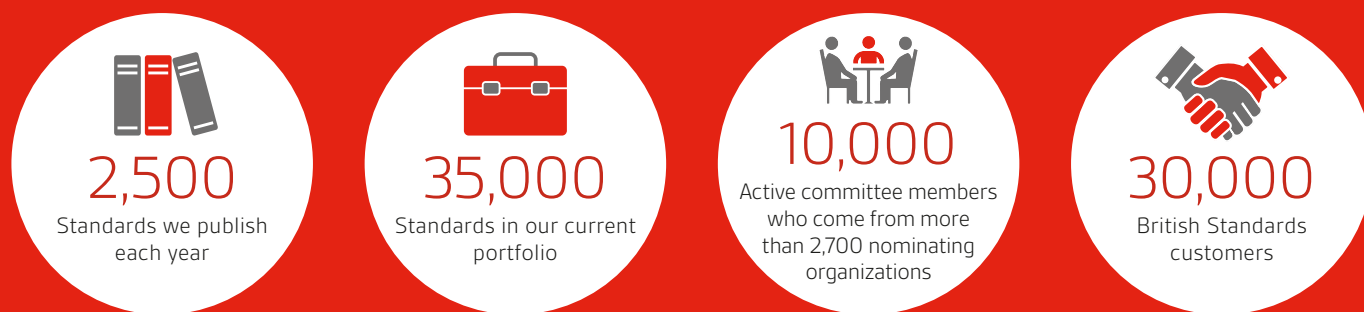
Sell your standard to new customers

The first step to gaining new business once you've attained compliance within your firm is to let everyone know.

You should make sure that you're mentioning your standards in all correspondence – on letterheads and business cards, in brochures and supporting material, on your website and in any advertising you do. This will not necessarily lead to an immediate influx of new business, but it will make everyone aware of your commitment and achievement.

If you have independent certification, you could consider issuing a press release to local press or trade magazines. If you're selling to other businesses, it's important that your peers know what you've achieved. If you're selling locally, it'll enhance your reputation and may help generate word-of-mouth recommendations.

Make the standard and what it achieves for your customers a central part of your sales story.



About BSI

BSI (British Standards Institution) is the business standards company that equips businesses with the necessary solutions to turn standards of best practice into habits of excellence. Formed in 1901, BSI was the world's first National Standards Body and a founding member of the International Organization for Standardization (ISO). Over a century later it continues to facilitate business improvement across the globe by helping its clients drive performance, manage risk and grow sustainably through the adoption of international management systems standards, many of which BSI originated. Renowned for its marks of excellence including the consumer-recognized BSI Kitemark™, BSI's influence spans multiple sectors including aerospace, construction, energy, engineering, finance, healthcare, IT and retail. With over 70,000 clients in 150 countries, BSI is an organization whose standards inspire excellence across the globe.

bsigroup.com

Find out more

Search for standards and buy them at bsigroup.com/shop or call +44 845 086 9001.

Find out about BSI's certification services at bsigroup.com/certification or call +44 845 080 9000.

Find out about BSI Kitemark at bsigroup.com/kitemark or call +44 845 0765 606.

Find out how standards can help you comply with EU Directives by visiting newapproach.org.

Find out about BSI's CE marking services for EU Directives at bsigroup.com/CEmarking or call +44 845 0765 606.

Find an organization that can verify your compliance by visiting the United Kingdom Accreditation Service (UKAS) website at ukas.com or call +44 20 8917 8400.

Training

We offer a range of training courses that can help small businesses get the most out of standards. Our introduction courses are perfect for those with limited knowledge. They provide the essential information that you need to understand the standard and its relevance and application to you and your organization. Courses range from basic knowledge to a more in-depth understanding of standards and their potential use and benefits. We also run courses to help you implement, monitor and audit your compliance to standards, so we're here to support you every step of the way.

Find out more at bsigroup.com/training or call +44 845 086 9000.

BSI Membership

BSI Membership will help you save money, and gives you access to a range of services that will make using standards easier and more effective.

Benefits include:

- 50% off British Standards, BSI conferences and subscriptions
- Discounts on foreign standards
- Access to our dedicated Knowledge Centre
- Free postage and credit facilities

Plus much more.

Find out more at bsigroup.com/membership or call +44 845 086 9001.

If you're a small business, have you ever thought of the competitive edge that standards can give your firm? Whether you want to:

- boost the efficiency of your operation
- improve the quality of your products or services
- cut your costs and increase your profits
- attract and retain customers,

standards can help you meet your goals, cost-effectively.

In this straightforward guide from BSI, you'll find out about what standards are, how they can meet the requirements of your small business and how you go about finding and using the standards that will work for you.

You'll also hear from a wide variety of small businesses about how they've benefited from introducing a range of standards to their operation. From customer service to innovation, from winning new customers to becoming more sustainable, and from cutting costs to keeping afloat when things go wrong, standards can help you improve every aspect of your business operation.

The overriding message is clear – standards are good for business.

The British Standards Institution (BSI, a company incorporated by Royal Charter), performs the National Standards Body activity (NSB) in the UK. BSI, together with other BSI Group Companies, also offers a broad portfolio of business solutions other than the NSB activity that help businesses worldwide to improve results through standards-based best practice (such as certification, self-assessment tools, software, product testing, information products and training).



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