

Quality through standards

What is quality?

Quality is defined by the customer. A quality product or service is one that meets customer requirements. Not all customers have the same requirements so two contrasting products may both be seen as quality products by their users. For example, one house-owner may be happy with a standard light bulb - they would see this as a quality product. Another customer may want an energy efficient light bulb with a longer life expectancy - this would be their view of quality. Quality can therefore be defined as being fit for the customer's purpose.

There are three main ways in which a business can create quality:



Market research involves a business in finding out what its customers want and expect. It can be carried out with a small group of customers, asking them to provide detailed information about products and services. The research should reveal what the customer's view of quality is and whether they are getting it. Obtaining lots of information from a small panel of customers is called qualitative research.

Market research can also be carried out with large numbers of customers through questionnaires. This is called quantitative research. Working to best practice standards is another way an organization can create quality. BSI works with industry specialists to create these standards. For example, it delivers the confidence of customers in a business through BS 7799. This is the standard for a company's management of information security. BSI developed this standard in 1995 to establish best practice for capturing, storing and handling data. This British Standard became the basis for the International Standard ISO/IEC17799. Today companies worldwide are seeking certification for their security management systems.