

Creating world class quality standards

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Introduction

Customers expect to be able to buy products that meet certain standards. Standards can be written down and published for use by manufacturers and service providers. They can be used as guidance. BSI stands for British Standards Institution. It was the world's first Standards body, and is the National Standards Body for the UK. BSI works in three main fields:

- * setting British and international standards
- * product testing
- * quality management systems (QMS). Standards are based on agreed best practice. Businesses are keen to use standards to show they have a place in global markets. There are thousands of standards covering all manner of goods and services.

Quality

A quality product or service does what the customer wants it to do. This may differ from market to market. For instance, a cheap football provides enough 'quality' for a village match. For a league match, a better ball would be needed. Many organizations try to build quality into everything they do. They do this by using a QMS. This provides a framework that helps the business to improve in all areas. BSI helps organizations to identify best practice and translates this into standards. BSI publishes almost 20,000 standards and each year adds 2,000 new or revised standards to this list.

The importance of standards

Standards exist at a number of levels. These include:

- * International Standards, (ISO). These need to be agreed between countries, so are the most complex
- * European Standards (EN)
- * British Standards (BS). BSI contributes to all three.

Standards help protect consumers' safety. They also promote research. They promote the sharing of knowledge. They help businesses to compete. In markets where it is hard to compete on price, businesses can use standards to help them compete on quality.

The Kitemark®

BSI is independent. It works with both the private and public sector. It makes sure that safety and quality standards in the UK and around the world are built into products. BSI also owns the famous Kitemark® symbol which you see on many products. It shows that a business has had a product tested to the relevant standard. Schemes cover various products and services. Examples include lighting, 13 amp plugs, motor cycle helmets and car repair garages. The Kitemark® shows that the business sees safety and quality as vital. It shows the customer that the product or service has been tested and has reached the relevant Standard. Other symbols are required by law, for instance, CE marking. This shows that a product conforms to certain European Union regulations.

Processes

ISO 9001 is a key international standard. It shows that the business uses a QMS. It shows that quality is built into all aspects of operations. This must include all systems, whether inside or outside of the business. It therefore includes suppliers. There are eight quality measures that must be met to gain certification to ISO 9001.

Conclusion

Products include both goods and services. These can be made, operated and sold on a global basis. International standards for them are therefore vital. BSI helps to create these standards. Standards help businesses to build good reputations based on quality, safety and reliability.