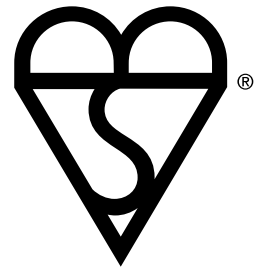


Recognized, trusted and true – 100 years on, the Kitemark® continues to reassure consumers. **Jo Russell** takes a look at some well-deserved results.



## >FLYING HIGH

### We're in an age driven by branding.

With greater access to information than ever before, as well as greater product variety and the creeping effects of globalization, consumers are left overwhelmed by choice.

In an attempt to build consumer awareness and loyalty to their products, and distinguish them from the competition, companies focus advertising and marketing spend on strengthening their brands.

And these days, the battle starts young: Dutch psychologists have recently discovered that toddlers as young as two can recognize two-thirds of popular brand logos, including McDonald's, Shell, Nike and even Mercedes.

It's not just about awareness either: the right associations have to be made too. Emotions triggered by the first sight of a logo have to be positive.

Ideally, the brand should encourage trust in consumers and make them feel safe. It should be something with which consumers would like to be associated.

Based on recent research, the Kitemark® is one such brand. More than 100 years old, the mark has become an enduring symbol which

80%

HAVE MORE TRUST  
IN A PRODUCT  
WITH A **KITEMARK®**  
THAN IN OTHER  
PRODUCTS

has entered the nation's psyche – for all the right reasons.

According to a survey conducted by leading research company GfK NOP on behalf of BSI Product Services, the Kitemark® was recognizable to 82 per cent of those consumers asked (*Source: GfK NOP Consumer Survey July 2006*). The same was true of three quarters of respondents aged under 45.

More importantly, the mark has become a symbol of trust and respected brand values. The survey of more than 1,000 participants found that of those aware of the Kitemark®, over 80 per cent believed that they would put greater trust in a product carrying the mark, that a product carrying the Kitemark® would represent higher quality than others, and that the presence of the Kitemark® would make them more likely to buy that product in the future.

Further, the presence of the Kitemark® logo on products sent out a message of reassurance on safety and quality to those aware of it. Over 90 per cent of "Kitemark®-aware" respondents believed that seeing the mark would mean that the product had been tested

# 85%

THINK A PRODUCT WITH A KITEMARK® HAS A HIGHER **QUALITY** THAN OTHER PRODUCTS/SERVICES

# 73%

ARE MORE WILLING TO **RECOMMEND** A PRODUCT WITH A KITEMARK® THAN OTHERS

# 93%

**BELIEVE** THAT A PRODUCT WITH A KITEMARK® IS SAFER THAN OTHER PRODUCTS/SERVICES

and was safer than other products, while over 85 per cent believed that it would have come from a reputable company, should perform consistently well and would be reliable.

Almost 70 per cent were prepared to pay more for these perceived quality guarantees.

The importance of this connection for business users of the Kitemark® licence is self-evident. As Stewart Norris, managing director of plastic building products company FloPast, puts it, "In competitive markets, the Kitemark® is often used to differentiate quality products and for this reason, the value and importance of the Kitemark® in enabling us to access new markets cannot be underestimated."

#### THE WHOLE STORY

The word Kitemark® is defined in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as "an official kite-shaped mark on goods which are approved by the British Standards Institution." But this doesn't tell the whole story.

Kitemark® schemes may be developed for products, processes or services, based on publicly available specifications, such as British

Standards, international standards or industry standards recognized nationally.

The Kitemark® is applied to more than 2,600 products under licence and has more recently been extended to cover services schemes including automotive garage services, vehicle body repair, print services, electrical installers, window installers and fire alarm installers.

Each Kitemark® scheme involves an initial assessment of conformity to the relevant standard and an assessment of the quality management system operated by the supplier. Successful Kitemark® licensees are regularly audited and undergo surveillance visits to provide feedback and monitoring.

The fact that the Kitemark is awarded by BSI, which owns the trademark to both the word Kitemark® and the Kitemark® symbol, is seen as a key asset by both businesses and consumers.

"The strength of the Kitemark® scheme is its independence," says Jack Kyriacos, owner of East London Garages. "BSI is outside the motor industry and is therefore recognized by the public as impartial.... We've seen a significant increase in business,

aided by an advertising campaign using the Kitemark®," he adds.

In an age when consumers are ever more discerning and more informed, an emphasis on, and demand for, quality has gone hand in hand. The good news, according to Simon Wright, owner of White's Motors, Southsea, Hampshire, is that satisfying customer demands and putting quality first does not have to affect the bottom line.

"Gaining the Kitemark® is probably the most important thing I've ever done," says Wright. "Organizational weaknesses have become easier to correct, staff motivation is better and our service is more consistent. The resulting increase in turnover more than covers the cost of the process."

Some cynics suggest that a brand is nothing more than a misleading signpost, and that in a fading brand it can say things that are no longer true.

The Kitemark® has been in existence for over 100 years yet all the evidence suggests it is as relevant to product quality and safety today as it was then, and makes good business sense.