

Kitemark[®] – a quality tool

Introduction

Today everyone wants and expects quality to the extent that the real meaning and value of delivering quality products and services has become more blurred. Many organisations claim quality but how do their customers realistically assess these claims to make a sound purchasing decisions? How does one claim of quality stack up against a competitor's quality offering? What is needed is consistent, reliable and independent proof.

Embedding quality at the heart of business

Academic research and evidence has often shown that organisations with ISO9001, a specification for a Quality Management System (QMS), have improved their bottom line, increased morale and boosted customer satisfaction. There is a huge amount of research into why one million people have obtained certificates for ISO9001, why this QMS works for their business and how it can boost revenue and profitability. Academics have known this for years, but does the average business owner, managing director or quality manager?

Largely based on, and first known as, BS5750, the standard was first published in 1979 and since 2000 the number of certificates issued for the standard has rocketed from 457,834 to 1,064,785 across the world. The overwhelming view of ISO9001 is that it reaps financial and non-financial rewards and recent customer research by BSI¹ has shown that companies who have certification to ISO9001 have a 1.6 per cent higher return on sales than those without it.

BSI's recent research also clearly demonstrates that a certified QMS can lead to improved operational performance, an enhanced ability to attract new customers and retain existing business, as well as reap significant cost savings.

One million ISO9001 certificates is an impressive number, but what about those millions of companies globally who are performing their day to day business without this standard? John Osborne, product marketing manager at BSI, points out how many businesses are missing a trick by failing to assess how their business model would benefit financially from this standard.

"The above figures are impressive and it has been shown time and time again that ISO 9001 really does deliver tangible business benefits no matter what size your organisation."

No matter what size the business, the benefits remain the same but one of the challenges is to understand what tools are available to help business delivery quality and what does quality really mean in today's commercial world?

Quality tools

Standards matter. They contribute at least £2.5bn each year to the UK economy and play a key role in improving competitiveness, increasing reliability, ensuring safety, improving accessibility, controlling quality, managing risk and improving business performance. Standards are not about introducing bureaucracy but about changing hearts, minds and outcomes to gain the greatest benefits and secure continuing and lasting success. They are documents which outline the most effective and efficient way to make a product or perform a task.

Alongside standards is undoubtedly independent third-party certification – without such proof how else can the world know for sure if an organisation complies with a management system

standard or that products and services meet these standards? How else can companies achieve such differentiation and how can the lives of everyone be enhanced and protected?

Management systems assessments are extremely useful to organisations as they provide a roadmap for implementing core best practice in an increasing number of areas such as sustainability, risk management and quality. With the growing interest in business performance comes the need to be able to apply best practice throughout an organisation and to be able to demonstrate your organisation's commitment to improvement.

Kitemark® certification - proving it

Embedded into every Kitemark scheme is the requirement for a robust QMS, while this does not have to be ISO 9001 it must be as substantial to ensure that the business delivers the right level of quality and consistency.

Untested products and services can hurt people and impact an organisation's reputation. They can disappoint customers and harm a brand. At worst, some products that are unfit for purpose quite simply have the power to cause fatalities. For this reason BSI has been testing and certifying products with the prestigious Kitemark for over 100 years. BSI tests products so that our customers can access markets with confidence and so that their customers are protected. Kitemark works hard to ensure the success of thousands of products and services and the safety of millions of people – surely one of the strongest quality statements around.

The Kitemark – long considered the UK's premier symbol of product or service quality - is a certification mark that shows that a product or service meets the appropriate standards of quality and safety – it is also a registered trademark of BSI. If a product or service carries a Kitemark you will know that it's been independently tested, audited on a regular basis and that it will perform to that consistent quality every time. BSI is also UKAS accredited so you can be sure that our assessments or products or organisations are as rigorously audited as our clients.

Because of the stringent criteria that must be met to achieve product or service certification, the presence of a Kitemark can help businesses to meet some of their quality goals in the following ways:

Operating costs: a fundamental part of any Kitemark scheme is the embedded quality management system. This combined with the Kitemark scheme requirements, means that Kitemark products are produced with efficient processes and production methods and so reduces material as well as time wastage.

Quality goods and services: Kitemark is all about quality – both of product, service and process. In fact 91%* of UK adults state that Kitemark reassures them of quality. Using quality products that have been independently certified means that they should perform more reliably so you can avoid unnecessary and frequent replacements costs as well as save money. Furthermore, as Kitemark products are more reliable they will perform for longer and therefore contribute to minimising product obsolescence which meets the quality interpretation of longevity.

Regulatory compliance: Because Kitemark is an independently operated, third-party certification it acts as proof that a product or service meets the standard as well as Kitemark criteria. So, where compliance is legislated or required, Kitemark licence holders can prove – without doubt – that they comply and specifiers and procurement staff can make safer purchases. Where compliance with a legislation or code of practice is required Kitemark certification can help licence holders access certain business streams as specifiers, procurement professionals and consumers are increasingly seeking reassurance and proof that products have been tested to the appropriate standards.

Minimise legislative breaches and prosecutions: Because every Kitemark scheme is based on a standard or a PAS (Publicly Available Standard) you can be sure that these fundamental documents will include actions and processes to ensure compliance with current

legislation. As standards are “living” documents, they are reviewed and updated to ensure they remain up to date, relevant and effective and any changes to a standard are reflected in the Kitemark scheme.

Company & brand reputation: Being associated to the UK’s premier symbol of quality and safety can only enhance an organisation’s reputation by showing that quality and safety are taken seriously. Kitemark demonstrates a company’s commitment to delivering safe, quality products and the infrastructure behind this ensures that quality is driven through every level of the business. Kitemark licence holders are permitted to use the highly-recognised Kitemark symbol in their corporate and promotional materials so they can benefit from the transferable benefits of the Kitemark brand. As for reputation, 88%* of UK adults believe that it shows the product comes from a reputable company.

Retain staff: Kitemark licence holders state frequently that the change in staff attitudes once they have achieved Kitemark certification is staggering. Most quote greater commitment and motivation as well as being more proactive – all of which lead to a happier, more settled and more valued staff.

Increase productivity and profitability: Once all the elements of a Kitemark scheme have been adopted – covering reduction of waste, operational streamlining and increased business - Kitemark licence holders have no difficulty in seeing the tangible results in their productivity and profitability.

Increased competitive advantage: Not everyone can gain a Kitemark – some products just are not good enough. This is what makes Kitemark so special and so valued by those that have achieved its certification. It really does help products and services stand out from the competition no matter whether your customer is another business, a purchasing professional or a member of the general public. It’s called the Kitemark advantage.

Economic aspects of quality:

There is a clear case for third-party certification as an economic necessity because without this level of independent, ongoing proof how will customers know which products and services are up to the job and which will help them deliver the quality that is demanded? In the UK, Kitemark is the premier symbol of quality and safety and one that has been helping business, specifiers and the general public to choose quality, safe and reliable products for over 100 years.

By choosing to manufacture or buy third-party certified products you can be sure that they will operate for longer, be more reliable and so not need frequent replacement. This all helps to stop the built-in-obsolence trend and customers feel that they have a quality product – one that they trust to do what it needs to do and comes from a reputable company all of which mark it out as a product of quality.

But quality goes beyond the products a company produces. It needs to address the ongoing stability of that business so that staff turnover, costs and administration costs are reduced. Kitemark is increasingly being used by procurement professionals to identify appropriate quality products. It saves them time in doing their own testing as they can rely on the consistent quality and reliability of these products. As they more frequently specify the use of “Kitemark or equivalent products” businesses who want to be eligible to tender for such work will need to have third-party – preferably Kitemark – certification. In this way they can secure not only their future turnover, but jobs as well – so positively contributing to the economy and taking responsibility for delivering quality at all levels.

1,690 words

* GfK NOP Survey 2006 (1,000 face to face interviews, UK)

† Figure from the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA)

¹ BSI took an average of over 2,500 organisations currently using ISO9001 and assessed their financial and non-financial performance.

NOTES TO EDITORS

About BSI Group

BSI Group is a global independent business services organization which enables businesses, governments and other organizations to increase profits and market access, and to enhance reputation with its standards-based solutions and assurance services. From its origins as the world's first National Standards Body, BSI Group draws upon over 100 years' experience to partner with 66,000 organizations in 147 countries from its 50 offices. Today, through its independence, innovation and integrity, BSI continues to improve the lives of millions by raising standards worldwide.

Further information on BSI's products can be found at www.bsigroup.com or www.Kitemark.com