



Having a plan for growth

It's not just the big corporates who need to be concerned with maintaining productivity. Having a plan to keep output at the right levels can make a big difference to even the smallest of businesses. Introducing key standards to your planning processes can put you in a position to innovate, grow and compete with bigger rivals – both in the UK and overseas.

It's a misconception that standards are solely for larger, established corporations. SME owners who fall into this trap miss out on the long-term boost to innovation and growth which standards bring. But which standards can help a small business plan for growth?

One of the first priorities is your staff and making sure they can work optimally. Happy, safe and engaged employees are essential if you want your business to perform and grow. Business owners can use ISO 45001 to build an good working environment from a health and safety perspective. ISO 45003, which is under development, will focus on psychological health in the workplace.

Once you've got a positive and focused working environment sorted, it's worth turning your attention to the way your business runs. ISO 9001 helps you design and introduce a quality

management system, based on the idea of continual improvement. As well as improving efficiency and reducing risk, it inspires external confidence in prospective partners and customers.

SME owners looking to save time and reduce administration should also consider PAS 99, the world's first specification for integrated management systems, which helps cut red tape by removing the need to duplicate tasks.

Getting ahead of the competition means thinking creatively, as well as looking at every aspect of your business for elements to improve. Making positive changes in areas which might not immediately seem growth-related can set you apart from your rivals.

Certain standards can contribute to gains across several areas at the same time. For example,

those which can be used to support ethical operations, improved social responsibility (ISO 26000) and optimal environmental sustainability (ISO 14001) will simultaneously contribute towards efficiency, innovation and external perception.

It's also vital to protect your team's hard work, especially the information they create from creative research and innovation. Your staff can become your greatest cybersecurity asset when they are properly supported with the correct procedures and structures.

In addition, in this post-GDPR world, the consequences for poor data management are serious and can seriously hamper SME growth ambitions. The ISO/IEC 27000 series, which focuses on information security management, empowers small businesses to protect their own, and their customers', data - covering areas like cybersecurity and cloud services.

This is a great example of how standards provide small businesses with a platform for growth, while building greater resilience to protect productivity gains and growth strategies.

Similarly, for those small businesses engaged in larger supply chains – perhaps manufacturing a specific component for use in the aerospace or automotive industry – standards can also help from both a growth and a consolidation perspective.

ISO 28000 helps SME owners manage all the security risks associated with complex supply chains and mitigate the impact of any unforeseen events. It is also a signal to prospective new partners that your company is a credible and safe prospect.

It's common for small businesses and start-ups to take an ad-hoc approach to growth opportunities, especially while they struggle with resources and day-to-day customer service. However, the introduction of a standards strategy can prepare a business to proactively plan growth as opposed to responding to external events.

SME owners can use standards to get the most out of their workforce and capitalize on their potential – as well as protect the progress they've already made.

