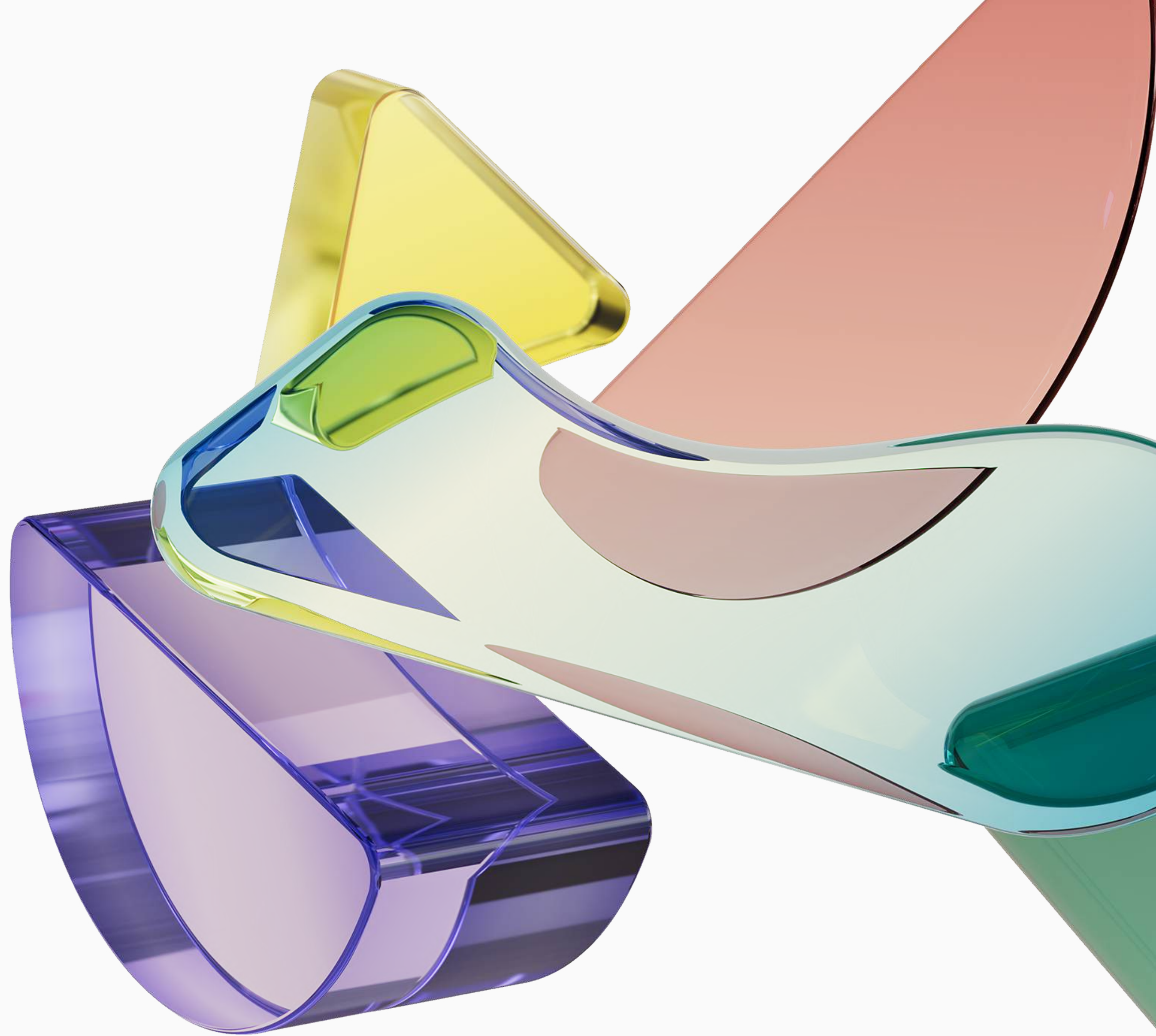




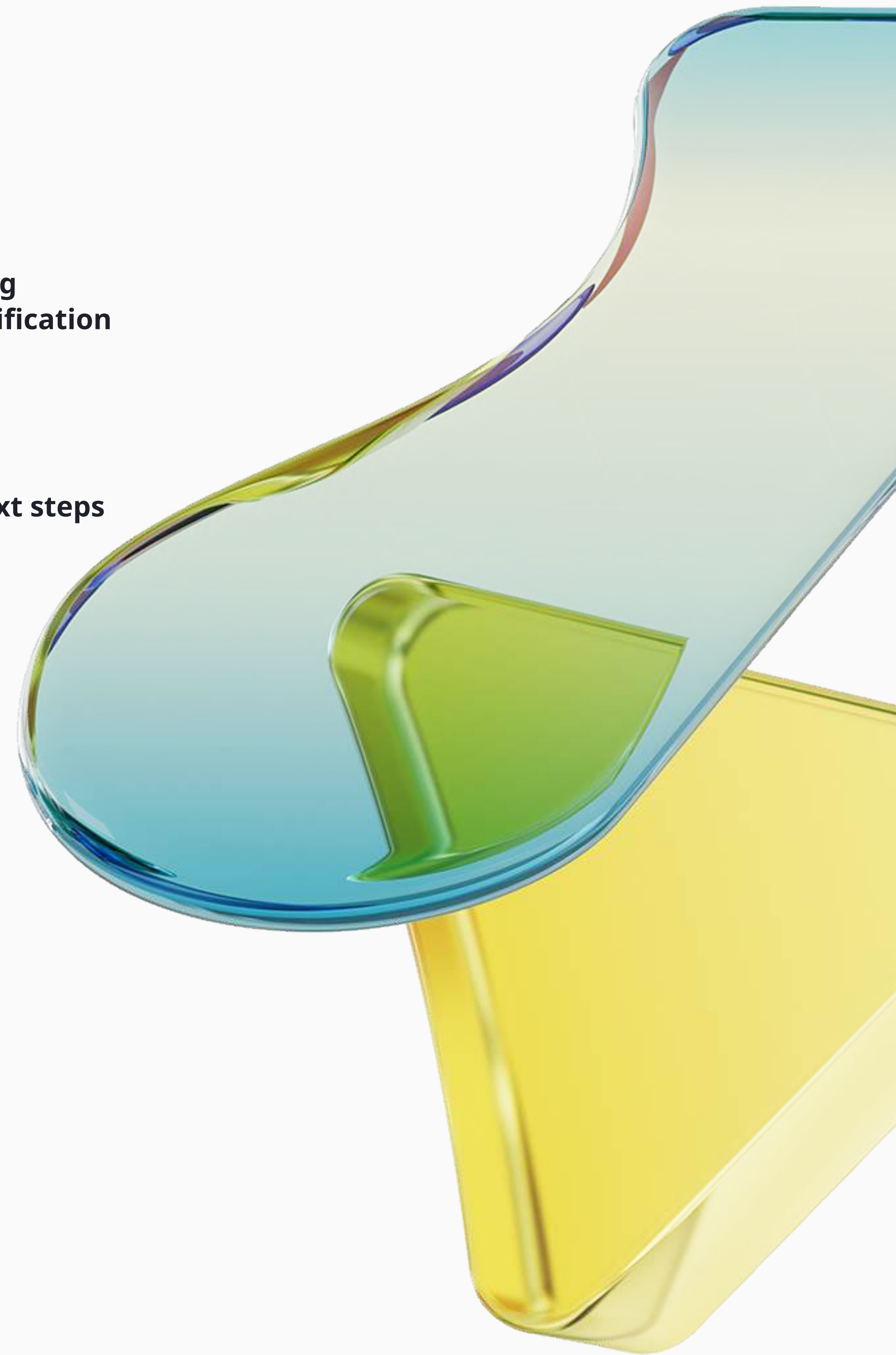
Your partner
in progress

A Beginner's Guide to Standards



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Introduction

If you're just stepping into the world of standards, welcome — you're in good company. Standards might sound technical or even confusing at first, but they're actually one of the most powerful tools we have. They shape the products we use, the services we rely on, and the systems that keep everything running smoothly.

Yet for many people, what standards are and how they work remains a mystery.

This guide is intended for those who are new to standards and are seeking practical, easy-to-understand insights. Whether you're leading compliance efforts, optimizing operations, or exploring ways to strengthen your organization's performance, this resource provides a clear and practical introduction to standards. It explains what they are, why they matter, and how they can help your organization grow, compete, and thrive.

This guide is your first step toward understanding and confidently engaging with standards, helping you turn knowledge into action.



Prefer to watch or listen,
rather than read? We've got
you covered.



What are standards?

Standards are documents that contain agreed-upon guidelines that help everyone do things the best way — whether it's making a cup of tea, building a bridge, or launching a spaceship.

Standards make sure that things fit together, work properly, and are safe to use, no matter who made them or where they came from.

For instance, a manufacturer producing medical equipment can follow a recognized standard to demonstrate that their products meet rigorous safety and performance requirements. By adhering to standards organizations can build trust, show quality, and open doors to new markets.

In this section:

- Who's using standards?
- Popular standards
- Why do standards matter?
- How do governments use standards
- Understanding the different types of standards

In short, standards are like the invisible enablers of the game that help us **collaborate, innovate, and stay safe.**



Who's using standards?

Many of the world's leading organizations integrate standards into their operations to drive excellence, ensure safety, and gain a competitive edge. Here are just a few well-known organizations that have adopted international standards:



Popular standards

To give you an idea of the range of subjects that standards cover, here’s a list of some of the most adopted and widely recognized standards across industries.



ISO 9001

Quality management systems — Requirement
Focuses on customer satisfaction, continual improvement, and consistent quality.

ISO 14001

Environmental management systems — Requirements with guidance for use
Helps organizations reduce their environmental impact and improve sustainability.

ISO 45001

Occupational health & safety management systems — Requirements with guidance for use. Protects workers and improves workplace safety and well-being.

ISO 50001

Energy management systems — Requirements with guidance for use
Helps organizations improve energy efficiency and reduce energy use.

ISO 31000

Risk management — Guidelines
Provides principles and guidelines for managing all types of risks.

ISO 22301

Security & resilience — Business continuity management systems requirements
Ensures an organization can keep operating during disruptions and recover effectively.

ISO 22000

Food safety management systems — Requirements for any organization in the food chain. Ensures food products are safe across the supply chain.

EN 71 Series

Safety of toys
Covers mechanical, chemical, and electrical safety requirements for toys.

ISO 13485

Medical devices — Quality management systems — Requirements for regulatory purposes. Ensures consistent quality and safety of medical devices.

Why do standards matter?

Standards are important because they create a common language and trusted way of doing things, making life safer, simpler, and more efficient for everyone.

They help ensure quality and safety, so products work as expected and don't put people at risk. They drive efficiency, reducing waste, errors, and duplication in processes.

Standards also support innovation by giving businesses a solid foundation to build on while encouraging new ideas and technologies to fit into existing systems. Importantly, they enable trust between organizations, customers, regulators, and across borders, because everyone knows the same rules are being followed.

Without standards, systems wouldn't connect, products might fail, and businesses would struggle to compete or cooperate.

The tangible benefits from using standards are significant. Organizations that use standards often see **faster time to market**, **improved operational performance**, and **easier access to international trade**.

Standards can also help reduce costs by:

- ✓ streamlining production
- ✓ improving consistency
- ✓ minimizing errors or product failures

For small and medium businesses, they create new opportunities by **demonstrating reliability and compliance** to customers, regulators, and global partners.

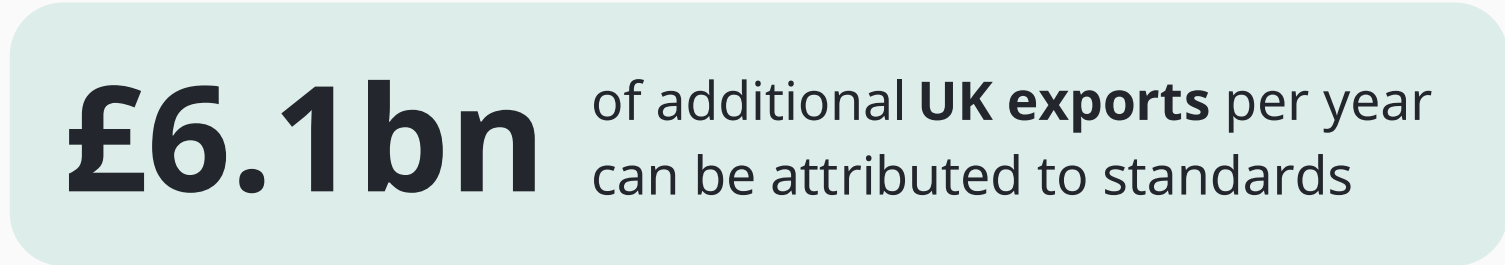
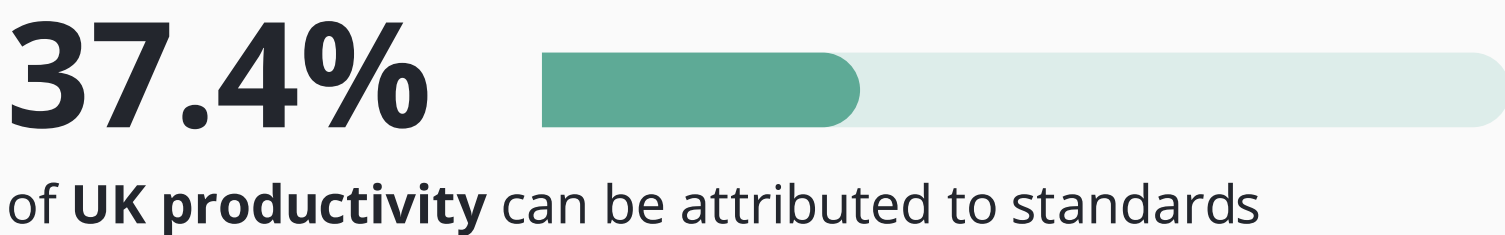
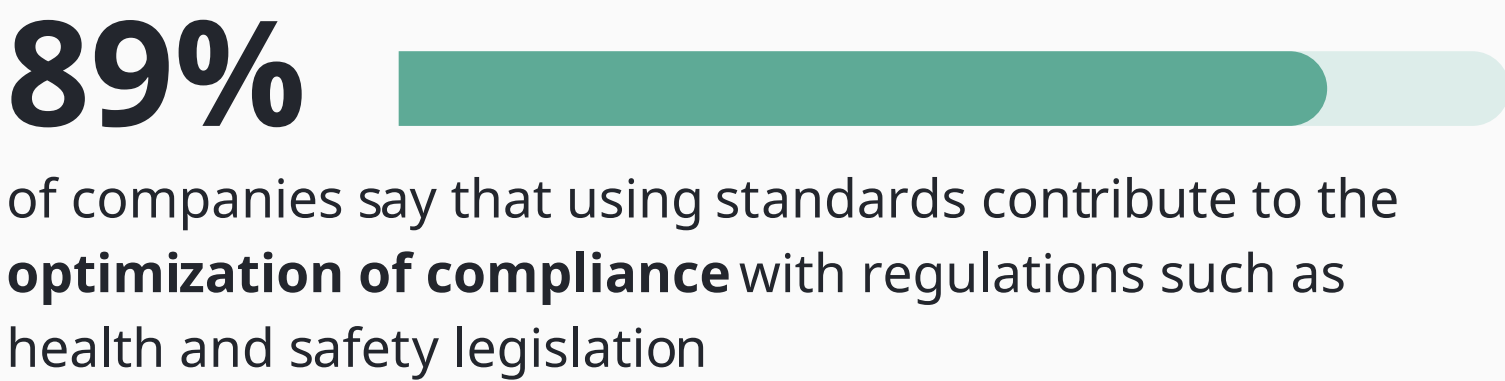
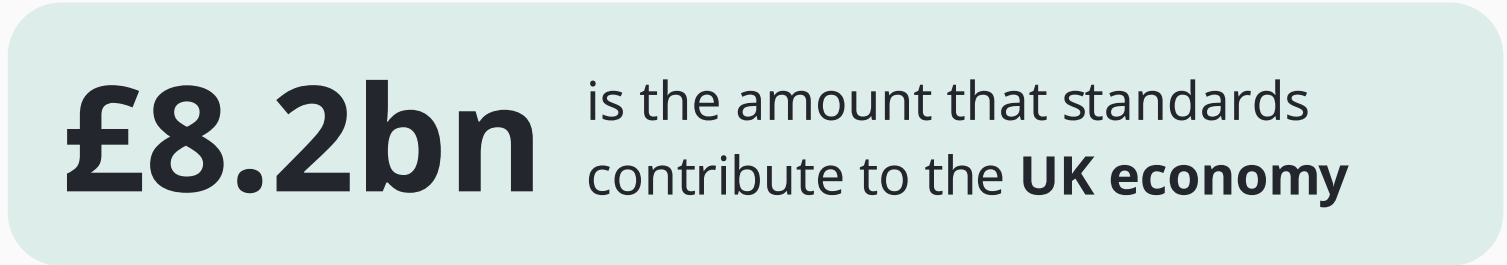
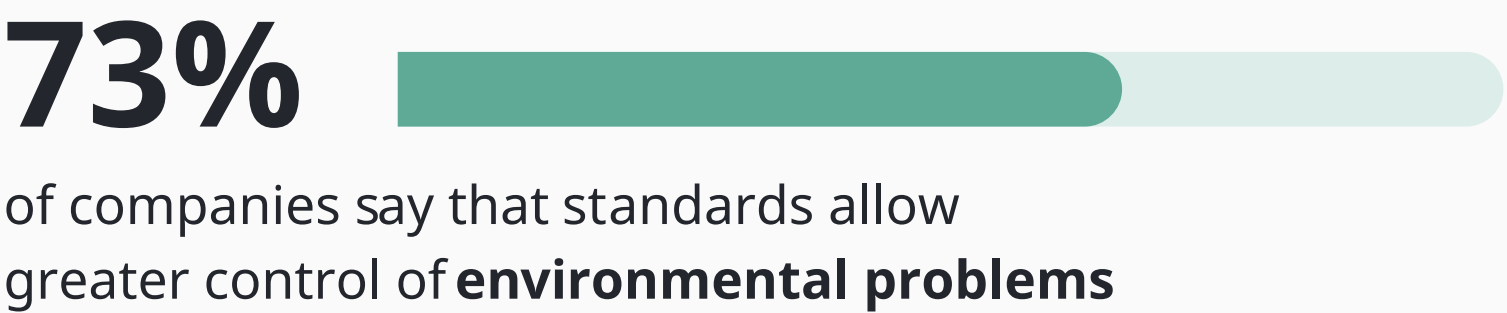
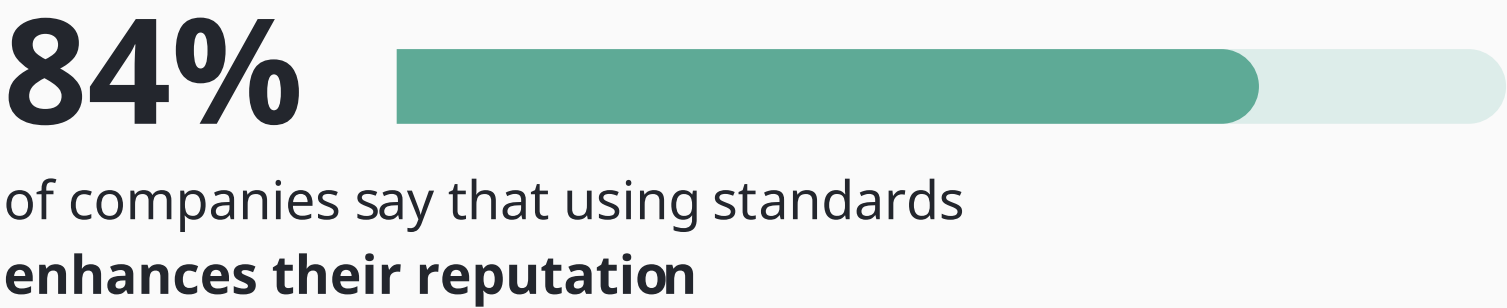
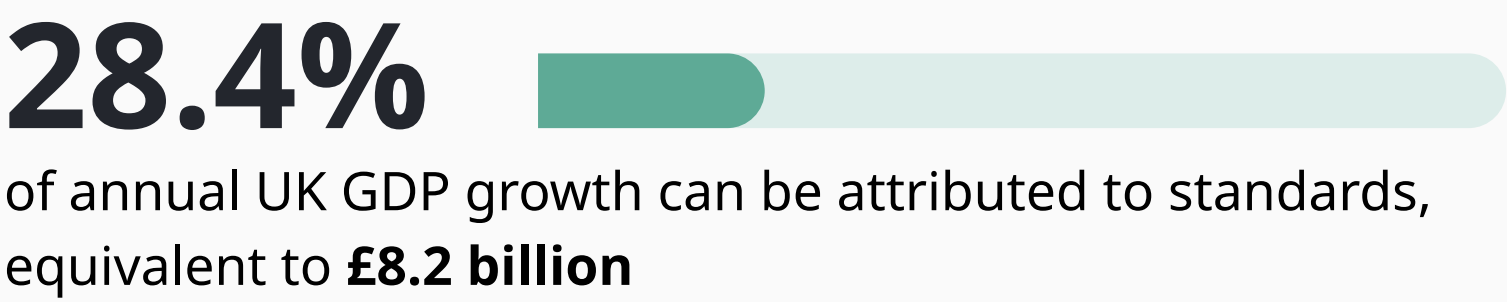
At a wider economic level, standards contribute to economic growth by improving productivity, enabling innovation, and creating a more level playing field across industries and borders. They also support sustainability goals by promoting resource efficiency and environmental best practice.

In short, standards don't just improve how things are done but also deliver **measurable results**.





The commercial value of standards:



Source: [The contribution of standards to the UK economy report](#)

How do governments use standards?

Governments use standards as practical tools to help shape policy, ensure public safety, and improve the delivery of services.

Rather than developing detailed technical requirements from scratch, governments often reference established standards in regulations or official guidance. This allows them to draw on the expertise of industry, academia, and international bodies, while keeping legislation more flexible and easier to update.

Standards also play a vital role in public procurement. Governments often require suppliers to meet recognized standards — for example, in quality, safety, or sustainability — to ensure reliable, responsible delivery of services and infrastructure.



Curious about how standards differ from regulations? [Read our blog](#) on the key differences, and why understanding both is essential for navigating today's business landscape.



Understanding the different types of standards

Not all standards are the same and knowing the differences can help you find the right one for your organization. Some standards provide broad frameworks for managing risk or improving quality, while others offer highly specific technical requirements or guidelines for particular industries, products or activities.

There are seven types of British standard:

- Specifications
- Management systems standards
- Methods
- Guides
- Vocabularies
- Codes of Practice
- Classifications

You can usually decipher which type of standard you are looking at by reading the full standard name, e.g., BS EN ISO 9001 Quality management systems — Requirements. Standard naming conventions can tell you a lot about where the standard comes from and what it covers. This systematic approach promotes clarity, consistency, and ease of identification. It enables you to quickly determine the relevance and applicability of a standard within your specific field or project.

Standard acronym buster

BS	British Standard, developed by BSI and originating in the UK.
BS EN	British Standard adopted from a European Standard (EN).
EN ISO	An international standard adopted by CEN, the European Committee for Standardization.*
BS EN ISO	An EN ISO standard that's been adopted as a British Standard by BSI.**
PAS	Open to all organizations, a PAS standard is a sponsored piece of work allowing organizations flexibility in the rapid creation of a standard.
BSI Flex	Fast-track standard developed by BSI using an iterative process to keep pace with a rapidly changing area.
ISO	Standard developed by the International Organization for Standardization.
IEC	Standard developed by the International Electrotechnical Commission.
EN IEC	An international standard adopted by CENELEC - the European Committee for Electrotechnical Standardization - for use across Europe.
BS EN IEC	A European (EN IEC) standard that has also been adopted as a British Standard.



*When an international standard is adopted at a regional level, it obtains a prefix to indicate association
** An EN ISO must be released in one of the official languages of the EU



What are the benefits of standards?

Adopting standards isn't about ticking boxes. It's a strategic move that can unlock real, measurable value for your organization.

For professionals across every sector, standards offer a toolkit for doing things better: enabling better quality, better performance, and better outcomes. They help you work more efficiently, manage risk, and stay ahead in competitive or fast-moving markets. They also simplify complex challenges, offering ready-made guidance that's been developed by experts and tested in practice.

In this section:

- An example: Building better with standards
- How standards can help small businesses
- The value of standards to your small business

We don't shy away from the fact that implementing standards can be difficult and time-consuming. Depending on the size and nature of your organization, the process can require a lot of effort, and resources — from aligning internal processes to training staff or investing in new systems.

But we also know that the rewards outweigh the challenges. Aligning your business with recognized best practice can lead to stronger performance, greater trust, and long-term resilience.

Whether you're designing a product, improving a process, or entering a new market, standards help remove uncertainty and reduce the time, cost, and effort involved in getting it right. They provide a trusted foundation to build on, so you can focus on innovation and growth, without reinventing the wheel.

Businesses also don't have to adopt the whole standard at once. Many choose to implement standards gradually, prioritizing quick wins or focusing on the most relevant parts first.

By using standards, your organization can:

- Strengthen customer confidence by demonstrating quality, reliability, and safety.
- Improve operational efficiency by streamlining processes and reducing waste or duplication.
- Accelerate innovation by ensuring new ideas work within existing systems and frameworks.
- Facilitate compliance with regulatory or legal requirements.
- Unlock new markets by meeting regional and international expectations and requirements.
- Enhance collaboration by speaking the same language with partners, suppliers, and customers.

In essence, standards help good organizations become great - providing clarity, consistency, and confidence every step of the way.



But don't just take our word for it.
Browse our library of standard success stories

An example: Building better with standards

Imagine a medium-sized construction company, operating across the UK. With around 120 employees and a growing portfolio of residential and commercial developments, the business has built a solid reputation for quality craftsmanship.

But as it begins to bid for larger contracts — including government-funded housing and infrastructure work — it starts running into new challenges.

Clients are demanding greater proof of health and safety practices, environmental responsibility, and quality assurance. Internally, the construction company's management team also sees a growing need to streamline project management processes, reduce waste on-site, and improve communication with subcontractors.

To meet these demands and prepare for sustainable growth, it decides to implement a suite of recognized standards:

ISO 9001 for quality management, to introduce consistency and continual improvement across projects.

ISO 45001 for occupational health and safety, ensuring better protection for site workers and legal compliance.

ISO 14001 for environmental management, helping them reduce environmental impact and improve site waste handling.

The implementation process can require time, documentation, training, and process change across the company. But within a year, the results are clear. It wins two major tenders that required ISO certifications, reduces on-site accidents, and cuts material waste. Employee confidence improves, and the company builds stronger relationships with clients and suppliers who now see them as a more professional, reliable partner.

In adopting standards, this construction company doesn't just tick a compliance box. It futureproofs its business, improves day-to-day operations, and gains the trust needed to grow in a competitive industry.



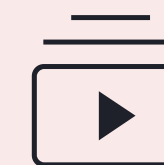


How standards can help small businesses

Think standards are just for large organizations? Think again.

For startups and small businesses, standards can be a powerful accelerator. They provide ready-made frameworks that help you build credibility, improve consistency, and scale operations more smoothly, without having to figure everything out from scratch.

Whether it's demonstrating product quality, managing data securely, or meeting regulatory requirements, standards can open doors to new markets, build trust with customers and investors, and give you a competitive edge. Adopting the right standards early on helps lay a strong foundation for sustainable growth.



Want to see the impact of standards in action? Watch how SME Fairford Medical transformed its operations, improved customer confidence, and unlocked new business opportunities by adopting ISO 9001.

The value of standards to your small business

Discover why small businesses are choosing to implement standards - and how they might benefit yours.

Drive growth

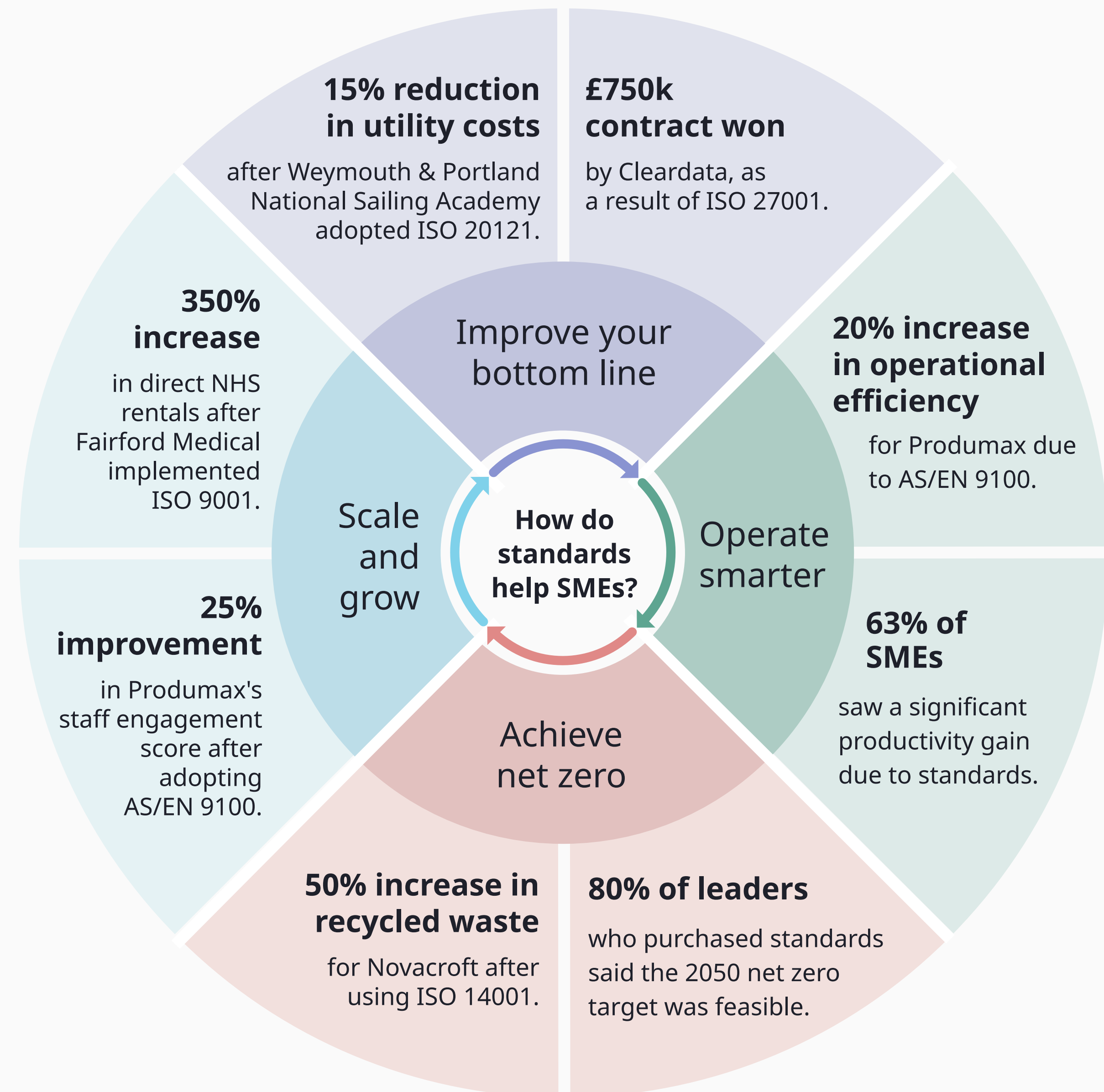
Standards boost productivity and help facilitate international trade.

Gain a competitive edge

Stand out to clients and investors by operating in the best way possible for long-term success.

Comply with regulations

Align with relevant regulations to operate with confidence and increase opportunities.



Source: BSI case studies

How are standards developed?

Standards are developed through collaboration. People from different industries, government, and communities come together on a voluntary basis to share knowledge and agree on the best way to do something.

This process is open and based on consensus, meaning no single voice dominates, and every viewpoint is considered.

In this section:

- The standard development process stages
- Why do you have to pay for standards?
- A standard-maker's story
- How to get involved in standards development

Developing a standard - whether it's for an industry, a process, a product, or a service - typically involves several structured stages to ensure it is effective, inclusive, and widely accepted.

Standards-makers might meet in person or online, often through standard development organizations like BSI or ISO, to write, review, and refine each standard until everyone agrees it's clear, practical, and beneficial.

The reason for all this effort? To solve shared problems, improve safety, support innovation, and make sure things work the same way everywhere, so people, products, and systems can connect and succeed across the planet.

Why do you have to pay for standards?

While the development process is largely volunteer led, maintaining, publishing, and distributing standards involves time, expertise, and resources. That's why most standards come at a cost.

Purchasing a standard ensures you have access to the official, up-to-date version, and helps fund the continued development of high-quality standards that benefit everyone.



The standard development process stages:

Proposal

Draft

Draft for public comment

Comment resolution

Approval

Publication



A standard-maker's story

Antony Kirrane is the convener of CEN/TC 52/WG 3, the committee responsible for the mechanical, physical, and general safety of toys.

He leads the development and oversight of the EN 71-1 standard, which sets out key requirements to ensure toys are physically and mechanically safe for children.

In this role, Antony works closely with experts from across the sector to identify risks and address potential hazards in toy design and manufacturing. His work plays a direct role in protecting the safety and wellbeing of children across Europe.



Discover the voices behind the standards. Tune in to our **Standards Show Podcast** and explore the 'Why I'm a Standards-Maker' episodes to hear first-hand stories from the experts shaping best practices across industries.



I remember not long after I started in standardization, there was – dare I say – a crisis in the toy industry regarding the safety of magnets. Strong magnets were causing serious injuries for children, and we needed to react very quickly.

There was a collaborative effort in Europe and everywhere else to develop a requirement very quickly to protect children, and it was at that point that I thought yeah, we are doing something good here!

Antony Kirrane,
Quality Assurance &
Regulatory Affairs Professional

How to get involved in standards development

Anyone can contribute to developing a standard. By getting involved in standards development, you can help shape the future of your industry.

Through our website, you can:

Learn more about the different ways you can get involved in standards development.

Access our Standards Development Portal, where you can comment on proposed and draft standards.

Join our committees and help shape the standards that impact your industry.



Visit our website

A man and a woman are standing in a field of tall grass, looking at a tablet. A drone is flying in the air above them. The background is a vast green field under a sunset sky.

Your NSB in action: Free standards for real impact

As the UK's National Standards Body (NSB), we're here to empower businesses, policymakers, and consumers alike, fostering innovation, building trust, and driving economic growth through the power of standards.

In this section:

- A list of freely available standards
- A good place to start

Whether you're a startup exploring new markets or a government shaping the future, we are your partner in progress, ready to guide, support, and champion your journey every step of the way.

At BSI, our mission goes beyond helping organizations improve performance. At our core we champion impact for a fair society and sustainable world. That's why we are continually developing purpose standards: freely available standards that tackle urgent global challenges and support the wellbeing of people, businesses, communities, and the planet.

These standards are created with one goal in mind: to make a **positive impact where it matters most**.

From fighting modern slavery to promoting ethical governance, they offer practical guidance that organizations of all sizes can adopt, no matter their sector. And because these issues affect everyone, we've made these standards free to access, so that you can be part of the solution.



ISO IWA 42, Net zero guidelines

A global reference point for planning and delivering credible net zero strategies. Designed to align efforts across sectors and borders.

Ideal for: Sustainability leads, net zero strategy teams

BS 30416, Menstruation, menstrual health and menopause in the workplace — Guide

Offers practical guidance to support menstrual and menopausal health at work, improving inclusion, wellbeing, and policy development.

Ideal for: HR, wellbeing, and DEI professionals

PAS 808 Purpose-driven organizations — Worldviews, principles and behaviours for delivering sustainability — Guide

Guidance for leaders on aligning business decisions with purpose to drive sustainability and social value.

Ideal for: Board members, CEOs, ESG teams



//

BS 30416 has helped break the stigma around menopause, menstrual health and women's health in general and make women more comfortable at work

Levina Fowler, Head of Colleague Engagement & Wellbeing, Marks & Spencer

//

From SMEs to large-scale organizations, this standard allows organizations to embed purpose and position themselves as leaders in sustainability

Andy Brown, Chief Sustainability Officer, Anglian Water

PAS 1948, Diversity, equity and inclusion in the workplace — Code of practice

Helps embed effective DEI frameworks through practical, action-oriented guidance for any workplace.

Ideal for: DEI leads, HR teams, and leadership

BS 25700, Organizational responses to modern slavery — Guidance

Supports ethical operations by helping organizations identify and address modern slavery risks in their supply chains and practices.

Ideal for: Procurement, compliance, and risk teams

BS 25800, Safeguarding for organizations — Guide

Provides guidance on building and maintaining robust safeguarding practices to protect individuals from harm.

Ideal for: Safeguarding leads, charities, public-facing services

A good place to start

If you've never seen a standard before, these purpose standards are a great way to dip your toe into the world of standardization, with no cost involved.

They're practical, accessible, and a powerful starting point for understanding how standards can make a real difference.



Learn more about these impactful standards and [download your free copies here](#)



How standards can help to achieve your organizational goals

In this section:

- Common reasons why organizations implement standards
- Turning ambition into action: examples of how four organizations are using standards
- How a small business put standards into action



Common reasons why organizations implement standards

There are many reasons why an organization might implement a standard, but the three most common ones tend to be to:

1. Meet regulatory compliance
2. Win new business
3. Optimizing how things are done internally

Standards often provide a clear, trusted framework for navigating complex regulatory landscapes, helping organizations stay compliant and avoid costly penalties.

For instance, many businesses adopt technical specifications and testing standards to ensure their products meet defined safety, performance, or quality requirements, especially in sectors where compliance is critical.

For organizations focused on growth, standards can also open the door to new opportunities.

Certification to a recognized standard can help a business **enter new markets, build trust** with international partners, or **meet eligibility requirements** for public and private sector tenders.

Turning ambition into action

The following **four examples** show how businesses in different sectors are using standards to tackle real-world challenges and drive meaningful results.

01 Achieve net zero

Business: A regional logistics company

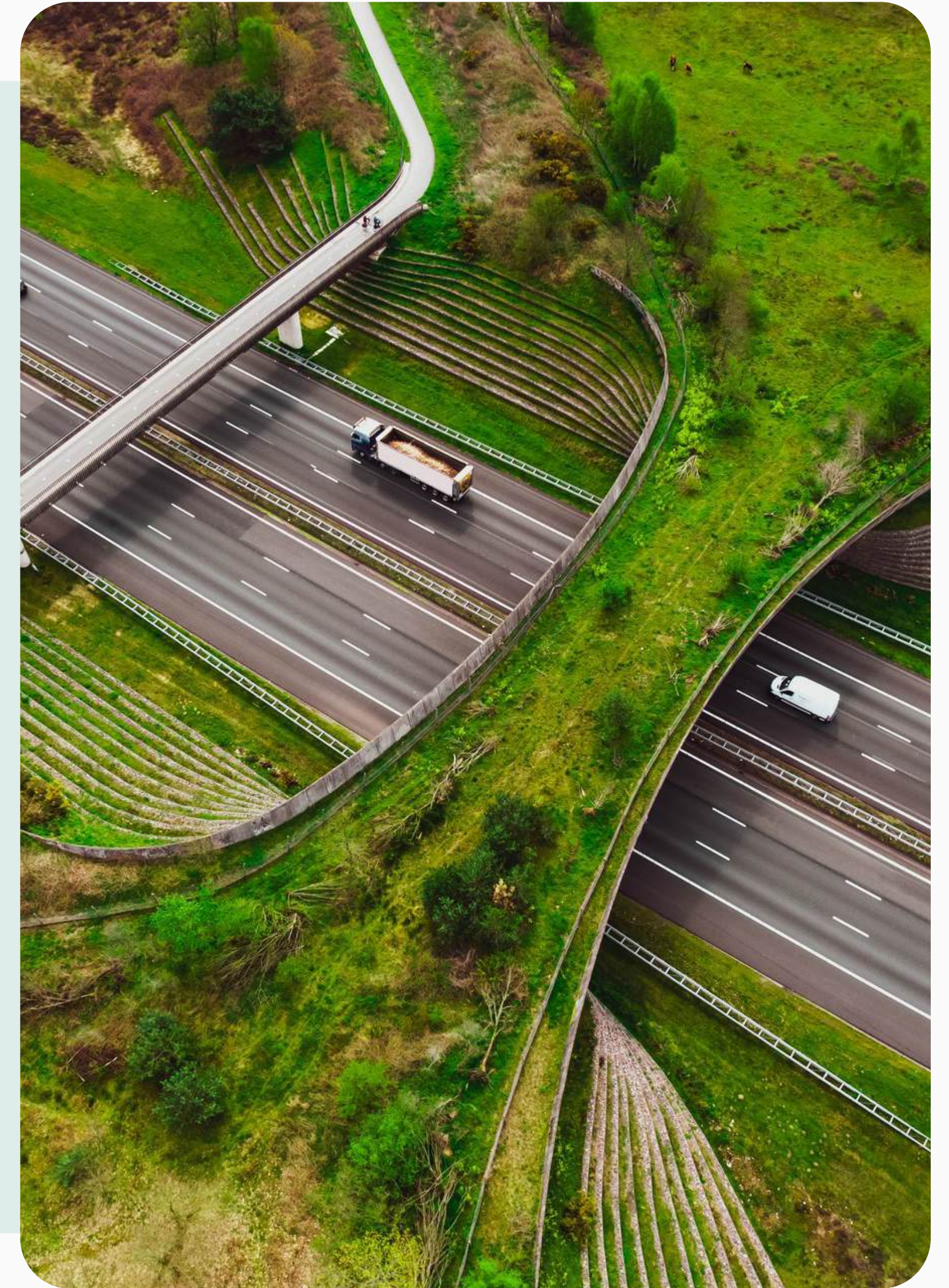
Sector: Transport & Supply Chain

To meet national sustainability targets and reduce emissions from its fleet, the company adopts ISO 14001 (environmental management) and IWA 42 (net zero guidelines). These standards help the business build a clear carbon reduction roadmap, track energy use, and implement greener delivery practices.

By aligning with recognized net zero frameworks, the company not only lowers its environmental impact but also gains credibility with clients who are prioritizing sustainable suppliers.

ISO 14001: Environmental Management

IWA 42: Net Zero Guidelines



02 Strengthen cybersecurity

Business: A growing financial tech startup
Sector: Financial technology

As the startup scales its digital payment platform, handling sensitive financial and personal data becomes a top priority.

To strengthen its data protection practices, the company adopts ISO/IEC 27001 (information security management). This helps establish a formal, risk-based approach to cybersecurity, identifying vulnerabilities, improving internal controls, and preparing for regulatory audits.

ISO/IEC 27001: Information Security Management

By aligning with a globally recognized standard, the fintech startup not only protects itself against cyber threats but also builds trust with customers, partners, and investors - a critical step in winning business in a highly regulated industry.



03 Improve client satisfaction

Business: A small marketing and design agency

Sector: Professional and creative services

To enhance client experience and ensure consistent project delivery, the agency adopts ISO 9001 (quality management systems). The standard helps introduce more structured project reviews, clearer approval processes, and regular client feedback loops.

These changes reduce last minute revisions, improve team coordination, and ensure creative outputs meet client expectations. As a result, the agency delivers work more efficiently, boosts client satisfaction, and builds stronger relationships, leading to repeat business and more referrals.

ISO 9001: Quality Management Systems



04 Drive innovation

Business: A mid-sized kitchen appliance manufacturer

Sector: Manufacturing

As market demand grows for more sustainable and energy-efficient home appliances, this kitchen appliance manufacturer is looking to boost its innovation capabilities across design, materials, and production methods.

To support this, the company adopts ISO 56002 (innovation management systems), which provides a structured framework to embed innovation into its core operations.

The standard helps the company formalize its idea generation process, improve collaboration between R&D, design, and marketing teams, and evaluate new product concepts more effectively.

By applying a consistent approach to innovation, the business reduces time to market, improves product-market fit, and strengthens its reputation as a forward-thinking, customer-focused brand.

BS ISO 56002: Innovation Management Systems



Want to see how a small business put standards into action?

Read how John Pass Jewellers used standards to shape a practical, purpose-led approach to transitioning to net zero - finding not only a path to reduce their environmental impact, but also a new sense of direction for their business.



Discover how John Pass Jewellers found a new direction for transitioning to net zero

How to find the right standard for your organization

With over **100,000 standards** available, there's a wealth of opportunity to support your organization's success.

The best part? You don't need to be an expert to find the right one. By focusing on your organization's goals, challenges, and sector-specific needs, you can quickly identify the standards that will make the biggest impact.

In this section:

- A step-by-step guide to find the right standard

01 Clarify your objectives

Start by identifying what you're trying to achieve.

- Are you looking to improve quality?
- Meet legal requirements?
- Strengthen your sustainability credentials?

Understanding your priorities will help narrow your search.

02 Consider your sector

Some industries have well-established standards that are widely used and often expected, such as ISO 13485 for medical devices or ISO 22000 for food safety.

Check if your trade body, regulator, or peers recommend particular standards.

Visit BSI Knowledge to browse standards by topic, sector, or keyword. You can also **speak to a BSI expert** for guidance on choosing the right standard for your needs.

03 Decide if certification is important

Some standards support third-party certification, where an accredited body audits your organization to verify compliance.

This can be useful for demonstrating credibility to customers, regulators, or when bidding for contracts.

However, **certification isn't essential**.

Many organizations implement standards without it and still reap significant benefits.

04 Look at the type of standard

Do you need a management system standard, a product or technical specification, or a code of practice?

Understanding the type of document you're working with will help you know how to apply it.

05 Explore free and purpose standards first

As covered in the previous section, we offer a growing collection of freely available standards that are a great starting point if you're new to standards.

These can help you get familiar with how standards work, without financial commitment.

06 Preview a standard before you purchase

Before investing in a standard, take advantage of the preview section available on BSI Knowledge.

The scope and introduction are often accessible, allowing you to determine whether the standard is relevant to your needs before making a purchase.

How to implement a standard in your organization

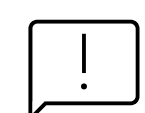
Deciding to adopt a standard is a great first step. However, to experience real benefits, it needs to be implemented effectively.

Whether you're aiming for third-party certification by an accredited body or simply want to align your operations with best practice guidance, implementing a standard is about more than just reading a document. It's about embedding its principles into your organization's day-to-day operations, culture, and mindset.

In this section:

- A simple step-by-step overview to help you get started
- How long does it take and how much does it cost to implement a standard?

Here's a simple, step-by-step overview to help you get started.



Top tip! We know that the language of standards is often technical and detailed, which can make them hard to interpret. If it's your first time working with a standard, consider involving someone with experience, or attending a short training course or workshop if these are available.

1. Understand the standard

Start by reading the standard thoroughly and identifying which parts apply to your organization. Look for the key requirements, principles, and recommended practices.

2. Get leadership buy-in

Successful implementation requires support from the top. Make sure your leadership team understands the value the standard brings, whether that's reducing risk, improving performance, or meeting customer expectations. Clear leadership backing helps secure the time, resources, and commitment needed.

3. Appoint a project lead or team

Assign someone responsible for overseeing the implementation. Depending on the size of your organization, this might be an individual or a cross-functional team. Their role will be to coordinate activities, track progress, and ensure the standard is applied consistently.

4. Assess current processes

Carry out a gap analysis to compare your existing practices with the requirements of the standard. What are you already doing well? Where are the gaps? This assessment will help you prioritize what needs to change and avoid unnecessary work.

5. Develop an action plan

Based on your gap analysis, create a clear implementation plan. This should include specific actions, deadlines, and responsibilities. Make sure you communicate the plan across your organization and involve relevant teams early to build understanding and engagement.

6. Update and align your processes

Begin adapting your processes, documentation, or systems to meet the standard's requirements. This might involve updating policies, training staff, improving controls, or introducing new checks and procedures. Keep it practical – the goal is to improve, not overcomplicate.

7. Monitor progress and measure impact

Track how implementation is going. Are the changes being followed? Are they having the intended impact? Regular reviews will help you stay on course, make adjustments, and demonstrate the value of the standard.

8. Consider third-party certification*

If the standard supports certification and it's important for your business, you may want to proceed with an external audit by an accredited third-party certification body. If not, you can still benefit from the standard by conducting internal reviews or self-certifying.

*if applicable



How long does it take and how much does it cost to implement a standard?

There's no one-size-fits-all answer. The time and cost depend on the complexity of the standard and the size of your organization. Implementation can take anywhere from a few months to a couple of years, depending on your resources and how much groundwork is already in place.

In terms of cost, standards themselves typically range from **£50 to £2,000**, depending on the document. Implementation costs can vary widely based on the scope and complexity of your organization, including factors like training, system updates, documentation, and potential consultancy support.

For a full end-to-end implementation, a small business might spend **under £5,000**

While a larger or more complex organization could invest **£50,000+**

Please note, that these are rough estimates to guide planning.

It's important to note that even partial implementation can drive meaningful improvements, often at significantly lower cost.

Some standards are free to download, and in many cases, you may already meet parts of the standard without needing major changes.

While there is an upfront investment, the long-term benefits often make it well worth the effort.

- Long-term benefits:**
- ✓ Greater efficiency
 - ✓ Reduced risk
 - ✓ Stronger credibility

Understanding standard certification

As you explore implementing a standard, one of the first questions you might ask is: do we need to be certified?

The answer depends on your goals. Not all standards come with a certification pathway, and even when they do, certification isn't always necessary to benefit from what the standard offers.

For many organizations, just following the guidance of a standard, without pursuing third-party certification, can still lead to meaningful improvements.

In this section:

- What is certification?
- What is self-certification?
- How to decide what's right for you

What is certification?

Certification is a formal process where an independent, accredited body assesses your organization to verify that you meet all the requirements of a specific standard. If successful, you receive a certificate that shows you're officially compliant. This is often referred to as third-party certification.

Certification can be valuable when:

- Customers or clients require it (e.g. in tenders or contracts).
- You're entering regulated markets.
- You want to demonstrate a high level of credibility and assurance.
- External validation is important to your brand or stakeholders.

Common standards with widely recognized certification schemes include ISO 9001 (quality management), ISO 27001 (information security), and ISO 14001 (environmental management).

What is self-certification?

Self-certification means your organization implements a standard internally, without going through an external certification body. You may carry out internal audits, document your processes, and align with the standard's principles, but you don't pay for or undergo a formal audit to gain a certificate.

Self-certification is useful when:

- You want to follow best practice without the cost of certification
- You're early in your journey and testing out the standard
- You're preparing for formal certification at a later stage.
- The standard you are implementing does not have a third-party certification scheme.

While it doesn't carry the same external validation, self-certification still includes many of the operational and strategic benefits of a standard, including improved processes, risk reduction, and increased internal consistency.

How to decide what's right for you

Whether you pursue certification or not depends on your goals. If compliance, market access, or formal recognition is critical, certification might be the right path. If you're looking to improve internally and align with best practice without the extra cost, self-certification may be a strong first step.

The important thing is that implementing a standard adds value either way, by helping your organization:

- ✓ Work smarter
- ✓ Meet expectations
- ✓ Build a stronger foundation for growth

Suggested next steps

Whether you're ready to implement a standard, want to shape the future of your industry, or simply build your knowledge, there are plenty of ways to get involved with standards through BSI.

In this section:

- Browse or purchase standards on BSI Knowledge
- Comment on a draft standard
- Propose or help develop a standard
- Further reading

Here's how you can take the next step on your standards journey

Browse or purchase standards on BSI Knowledge

The BSI Knowledge platform is your gateway to thousands of standards across every sector.

- Search by keyword, industry or standard number (e.g. ISO 9001, Healthcare).
- Choose your preferred format – PDF or printed copy.
- Become a micro business subscriber – an affordable way for micro businesses to access and manage multiple standards. Get in touch with our Customer Relations team for more information: cservices@bsigroup.com.
- Become a BSI Member to receive extra support when implementing standards and a reputation boost.

Visit knowledge.bsigroup.com

Comment on a draft standard

Want to shape the future of standards? You can have your say before a standard is published. Your insights can help ensure standards are practical, inclusive, and aligned with real-world needs.

- Register for free on the BSI Standards Development Portal.
- Browse and comment on standard proposals and Drafts for Public Comment (DPCs).
- Open to everyone.

Visit standardsdevelopment.bsigroup.com

Propose or help develop a standard

If you see a gap in current guidance or want to influence best practice, you can propose a new standard or contribute to an existing one.

- Submit a proposal for a new standard.
- Join a technical committee to draft or revise standards.
- Contribute as a technical author, reviewer, or subject matter expert.

Visit standardsdevelopment.bsigroup.com/proposals

Become a standards maker

Get involved with standards and help drive progress for industry, innovation, the planet and wider society.

- ✓ Open to everyone
- ✓ Build your network
- ✓ Collaborate
- ✓ Learn how standards are created

Further reading

Explore these resources to learn more about standards, how they're developed, and how they can support your organization:

The Standards Knowledge Hub – A central resource for guides, insights, and practical tools on standards.

The Standards Show Podcast – A podcast about the role and impact of standards, hosted by BSI.

BS 0: A Standard for Standards – Principles of Standardization – Learn how standards are created and governed.

BSI Knowledge – Search and access over 100,000 British and international standards.

BSI Group Website – The website for the British Standards Institution, with information on standards, their development, and how they support industry and society.

Lead industry to accelerate progress

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