



STANDARDS HELP DELIVER BUSINESS EXCELLENCE

The Goldsmiths' Company Assay Office is accredited to International Standard "ISO 17025:2005 - General requirements for the competence of testing and calibration laboratories" which is the main standard used by this industry sector. The Office is also certified to "ISO 9001:2008 Quality management systems - Requirements" which essentially state that the Assay Office adopts a best practice approach to managing its business processes in order to ensure that it meets the needs of customers and other stakeholders.

The adoption and implementation of standards by the Assay Office is an on-going element of daily business practice. The Deputy Warden, Dr Robert Organ, is also Chairman of the BSI Committee: STI/53 "Specifications and test methods for jewellery and horology". This committee helps co-ordinate the British response to domestic and international standards that affect jewellery and horology. Over the past year, activities have included the update of numerous standards used for assaying precious metals for hallmarking and other purposes, diamond grading nomenclature, watch batteries and nickel release testing.

THE IMPORTANCE OF STANDARDS

Standards impact the lives of everyone. They help businesses to mitigate risk and grow in a sustainable way, they also give consumers the assurance they are getting products and services of the highest quality and they enable and simplify communication and trade whilst allowing resources to be used more efficiently. Along with patents and measurements, standards are recognized as a core part of the infrastructure that supports innovation in the UK.

All businesses can benefit from adopting standards, regardless of their size and industry sector; from ambitious start-ups to long-established household names; from hospitality catering and retail businesses, construction, manufacturing and engineering firms to hi-tech innovators.

Recent research has shown that many businesses of all sizes lack sufficient information to make effective use of standardization. However standards provide real societal benefits to both businesses and individuals including helping businesses to protect data, keeping children safe online and ensuring hospitals and airports stay open whatever the weather. If a business is not using standards, then serious consideration should be given to adopting them, wherever possible. The business benefits that can result include:

- Standards can be used to reduce the time, effort and money that has to be invested in the research and development of new products, while increasing their likelihood of success in the marketplace;

- Standards can provide best-practice guidance helping businesses to assess their processes, allowing them to take steps to increase efficiency and become more profitable;



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- Standards provide a reliable benchmark against which performance can be judged, enabling businesses to demonstrate product performance helping to retain existing clients and generate sales from new customers;

- Being able to claim compliance with widely recognized and respected standards is an effective way of supporting the quality of goods, services or processes. If compliance cannot be supported in this way, customers only have the manufacturers' /suppliers' word regarding the quality of their goods, products or services;

- Some customers will only buy from suppliers that comply with the requirements of certain standards;

- Complying with recognized standards can provide a competitive advantage and could well be a deciding factor when a buyer has to choose between two comparable suppliers;

- Standards provide businesses with a reliable and consistent reference point which can help to reduce the risk of making an error. As a result, businesses can save both time and money as well as reducing the likelihood of damaging their reputation;

- By applying the requirements of a technical standard, a business can ensure that its products or services are compatible (or 'interoperable') with those manufactured or provided by others. This is one of the most effective ways to maximize the size of the potential market and can be particularly beneficial when exporting;

- All standards are voluntary and businesses are not legally obliged to introduce them. However, compliance can help a business to meet its mandatory legal obligations regarding such things as product safety and environmental protection. It is not possible to sell goods in some markets unless they meet certain quality and safety criteria. Being standards-compliant can save time, effort and expense, while giving added peace of mind that responsibilities have been met;

- Standards may be national, international and/or European, so their application may be wider than the UK.

Standards enable innovation by defining and measuring product performance, leaving the user free to use a standard without divulging intellectual property. Arguably, the most innovative businesses have the most to gain from the strategic use of standards.

Standardization provides a means by which pioneering products can work seamlessly with related products in areas such as:

• new and emerging technologies (e.g. nano-technology);

• research and development;

• collaboration;



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- product market acceptance;
- intellectual property rights;
- meeting regulatory obligations.

CLASSIFICATION OF STANDARDS

FORMAL STANDARDS

Formal standards fall into two main categories. Technical standards detail requirements that businesses can use to shape their products or services so that they fit market or regulatory needs. Quality management system standards (QMS) establish recognized best practice for the way processes should be managed.

Formal standards are publicly available, published documents that are established by a broad consensus of industry experts and representatives of government, business, research, test and certification organizations; academia, consumer interest groups and trade unions. As a matter of course, all formal standards are reviewed every five years to suit changing circumstances.

INFORMAL STANDARDS

Businesses, associations or organizations can develop their own, informal, standards or they can employ external organizations, such as the British Standards Institute (BSI), to help them. An informal standard can be something as simple as a company having guidelines on how staff members should answer telephone calls or a trade association having a code of practice for its members. In many instances, informal standards can bring many benefits and help a business or organization to achieve its objectives.

COMPLYING WITH THE REQUIREMENTS OF A STANDARD

To claim compliance with a standard it is necessary to buy, read and implement its requirements in all relevant areas of the business. For added weight, some businesses choose to have their compliance verified by an outside auditor or test organization. Symbols, such as the BSI Kitemark or CE marking can be used to assure customers of compliance.

The Assay Office gains its ISO 17025:2005 accreditation through the United Kingdom Accreditation Service (UKAS) and its certification for ISO 9001:2008 by the certification body ISOQAR.

HOW STANDARDS ARE CREATED

BSI is the UK's National Standards Body (NSB). It is responsible for facilitating the drafting, publishing and marketing of British Standards. Although it is independent of government, BSI works closely with the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) and a wide range of Government departments and agencies in both the standards-making process and to



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ensure standards help deliver Government policy. BSI provides UK businesses and others with access to and influence on standardization in the UK, Europe and the world.

BSI co-ordinates the work of approximately 1,000 established technical committees that consider the views of all interested parties in their area of expertise and then agree the details of the new or revised standard in draft form. The technical committees agree the scope and purpose of a new standard. They communicate these to a working group, or drafting group, whose job it is to draw up the initial draft of a new standard.

Technical committee members include industry experts, representatives from business, government, research, test and certification organizations, universities and academic institutions, consumer interest groups and trade unions. Individual businesses are rarely directly represented on committees. Representation is usually through groups with a related interest (for example, trade associations) to ensure that as wide a consensus as practicable is reached. In some cases, where individuals have a particular expertise, they might be co-opted onto a committee so that they can contribute directly.

A draft version of each standard is made available for public comment at the mid stage of the development of a standard, at which time anyone with an interest can express their views. All feedback is considered before the finished standard is approved and published.

For further information about how standards can help your organization achieve business excellence, please see BSI's website - www.bsigroup.com