

THE VALUE OF STANDARDS FOR BUSINESS

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INTRODUCTION

Product and service standards have been one of the biggest life-savers of the last 100 years. Standards impact us in everyday life, in the workplace, at home or while travelling. From innovation to metals and materials, from environmental management to health and safety, from data security to making a perfect cup of coffee¹, there are currently around 1 million standards globally.

WHAT IS A STANDARD?

A standard is a document that sets out the requirements, rules, guidelines, definitions or specifications, written by consensus, to ensure products, materials, processes or services are fit for purpose, consistent and repeatable.

THE IMPACT OF STANDARDS

Standards specify the design, use, manufacture and handling of almost everything man-made and impact our everyday lives in a multitude of ways. The purpose of developing and adhering to standards is to set minimum acceptable performance benchmarks to meet safety requirements or to ensure conformity, repeatability and consistency of products, systems or processes.

Some standards produce results that are seemingly so simple they are easily taken for granted, eg the fact pencils fit into sharpeners;² the shape, weight, and material of a cricket ball;³ or the tensile strength and 'stretch at break' of toilet paper!⁴

Other standards are more apparent and demonstrate clear benefits by ensuring health and safety, eg by specifying the safe use of tower cranes;⁵ or the minimum personal safety equipment requirements for protective clothing to be worn while welding;⁶ or by ensuring uniformity eg setting the dimensions for rechargeable batteries,⁷ or specifications for electrical plug sockets.⁸

And others, like the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) management system standards,⁹ outline model procedures to follow when setting up and running a business.

TYPES AND CATEGORIES OF STANDARDS

Standards can be categorised by their jurisdiction as international, regional and national standards. There are also corporate standards and standards developed by non-governmental organisations.

INTERNATIONAL, REGIONAL AND NATIONAL STANDARDS

International standards are developed by international standards organisations and can be used worldwide by direct adoption or by developing a modified version to suit the local requirements. International standards bodies include ISO, IEC (the International Electrotechnical Commission) and ITU (the International Telecommunication Union). There are also others.



1 I.S. EN 60661:2014 Methods for Measuring the Performance of Electric Household Coffee Makers
 2 GB/T 22767-2008 Manual pencil sharpeners
 3 BS 5993-1994 Specification for cricket balls
 4 ISO 1265-12:2010 Tissue paper and tissue products – Part 12: Determination of tensile strength of perforated lines – Calculation of perforation efficiency
 5 ISO 12480-3:2016 Cranes – Safe use – Part 3: Tower cranes
 6 ISO 11611:2015 Protective clothing for use in welding and allied processes
 7 ANSI C18.2M-1-2013 Portable Rechargeable Cells and Batteries – General and Specifications
 8 AS/NZS 3100-2009 Approval and test specification – General requirements for electrical equipment
 9 For eg ISO 9001:2015 Quality management systems – Requirements and ISO 14001 Environmental management systems – Requirements with guidance for use

ISO is made up of national standards bodies (one per member country or economy) and the IEC consists of national committees (also one vote per member country or economy).¹⁰ The ITU was established under an international treaty and is a permanent agency of the United Nations.¹¹

Regional standards bodies such as the European Committee for Standardization (CEN) and the African Organization for Standardization (ARSO) create standards for a specific region, known as harmonised regional standards. Harmonised regional standards support trading blocks of countries, such as the European Union, by ensuring that there is a common set of standards without country-specific variances. This is critical to trading across the region and is growing in popularity within product and service specifications.

In the recent Brexit debate, many British companies commented they were considering moving to more EU harmonised standards, known as ENs, to support their future trading activities if the country had a 'hard exit' from the Union. Joint Australian and New Zealand standards are considered to be regional standards.¹²

National standards can be developed by National Standards Bodies (NSBs) or other accredited bodies such as Standards Developing Organisations (SDOs).

NATIONAL STANDARDS BODIES AND STANDARDS DEVELOPING ORGANISATIONS

National Standards Bodies

Generally each country has one NSB, which is that country's member of ISO. NSBs may be either public or private sector organisations. The NSBs bring together experts, specialists and other interested parties from various industries to form industry-specific technical committees.

The committees develop standards and technical documents by a process of consensus. These documents can be in the form of specifications, handbooks or procedural requirements. The NSBs involve the technical committees in regular reviews of standards to ensure they remain current and

relevant for industry needs. It is here where the standards are redeveloped and updated.

Standards Development Organisations

SDOs are member-led industry or sector-based organisations which develop standards for industry. As independent organisations they react to recognised market needs from within their industry.

SDOs are generally coordinated by an NSB and may be accredited by an NSB to develop standards, however some international industry-based SDOs liaise with international standards organisations directly, without going through an NSB. Whilst some countries have only one NSB and no SDOs, large-economy countries may have many SDOs (possibly hundreds). Their committees are made up by industry experts and they often provide training and advisory services around the standards.

Non-Governmental Organisations

Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and funded charities often create standards and guidance for environmental, social and economic issues. Fairtrade is an example of an NGO that has created a series of standards for the global food and drink industry. These standards are often created in collaboration with corporates but with a view to harmonise and benchmark commercial activity.

Corporate standards

Corporate standards often refer to published standards which are then revised and updated for specific business requirements. With the need to manage large and complex global supply chains, corporate standards are often seen as a consistent benchmark of quality in a particular sector or industry. The Ford Motor company provides a good example of a suite of standards created and published by a company for use in its industry.

Corporate standards tend to be limited to Fortune 500 companies due to the cost of entry of creating and maintaining standards. Additionally many large corporates work with standards bodies not only on technical committees, but in the development of their own corporate standards and guidelines.

CATEGORIES OF STANDARDS

In addition to their jurisdictional differences, standards can be categorised by their form and intended function. They may take the following forms (amongst others):

- **Specifications** – highly prescriptive, setting out absolute requirements and commonly used in product safety standards;
- **Methods** – highly prescriptive, setting out ways to measure, test or specify processes to ensure reliable repeatability or safety. For example, it is compulsory under Australian Work Health and Safety legislation to prepare safe work method statements for high risk activities such as high rise construction, working in confined spaces or working with electrical cables;
- **Codes of practice** – generally more flexible and setting out a baseline of good practice, recommended by competent and conscientious practitioners and common in construction and civil engineering; and
- **Guides** – generally flexible and advisory, based on current thinking and practice of experts on the subject in a particular industry.

Standards can also be categorised by their intended function or functional groups including:

- **Construction standards** – which prescribe requirements for the built environment, including the building, plumbing and electrical codes;

Standards can affect an organisation's quality, lead-time, supply chain management and costs

¹⁰ <http://www.iec.ch/about/>

¹¹ <http://www.itu.int>

¹² <http://www.standards.org.au/StandardsDevelopment/>



- **Product-based standards** – which detail requirements for manufactured goods eg white goods, SIM cards, or car tyres and rims;
- **Performance-based standards** – which specify performance and testing requirements rather than setting out requirements of a manufacturing process eg carbon emission or energy efficiency requirements, toy or food safety requirements;
- **Personnel certification standards** – which ensure certified personnel operate in a consistent, comparable and reliable manner worldwide, eg working safely at heights, forklift driving or crane operation, or food handling; and
- **Management system standards** – which provide a model to follow when establishing operational procedures to enable an organisation to meet its objectives. There are a range of international management system standards, which can combined into an integrated management system, eg ISO 9001 quality management systems, ISO 14001 environmental management systems; ISO 45001 occupational health and safety management systems.

BENEFITS OF STANDARDS

Compliance with standards has a range of benefits for organisations, consumers, governments and the community at large. Standards can affect an organisation's quality, lead-time, supply chain management and costs. They make trade across international borders easier and promote global competition, having a positive impact on economies. Standards provide consumers with confidence in the quality and safety of products and services. And in doing all of this, standards impact communities and economies across the globe.

Looking at the impact to business only, standards help organisations by:

- Lowering costs through minimising errors, redundancies and increasing productivity;
- Improving quality, safety, and lead-time of products and services;
- Identifying and mitigating risks within their business and supply chain;
- Lowering research and development costs and improving speed to market by building on previously standardised technology or systems;
- Promoting acceptance of product or services into the marketplace by increasing customer confidence in their safety and quality;

- Providing uniformity of units of measurement, enabling accuracy and confidence in commercial transactions locally and globally;
- Helping products, services and staff move across trade borders, reducing technical barriers to international trade; and
- Improving supply chain management by establishing common requirements for all vendors to comply with.

International standards, in particular, help organisations by:

- Providing a level playing field for free and fair global trade;
- Helping organisations access new markets globally;
- Ensuring the safety and quality of products and services; and
- Facilitating international trade and improving the environment in which we live.¹³

ECONOMIC BENEFITS FOR BUSINESS

Many organisations consider standardisation as part of their core business strategy, while others consider standardisation as having a beneficial impact on activities and performance.¹⁴ However, some organisations consider standards as a burden which involve additional expense or obligation with no clear benefits.

¹³ www.iso.org

¹⁴ ISO, Economic Benefits of Standards (2014), p 1.



ISO undertook a study to quantify the economic value of standards to a business, undertaking case studies over a range of business (from small companies of 25 employees and annual revenue of US\$4.5 million, to more than 3,000 employees and annual revenue of more than US\$2.5 billion).¹⁵ The case studies consistently showed quantifiable economic value derived from using standards, with the reported contribution of standards to gross profit ranging from 0.15% and 5% of annual revenue (with exceptional cases up to 33%).¹⁶ The three key benefits found in the case studies were:

1. **Streamlining internal operations** – reducing time needed to perform activities, decreasing waste, reducing procurement costs and increasing productivity;
2. **Innovating and scaling up operations** – mitigating risk of introducing new products to market, enabling expansion of network to introduce or manage new product lines; and
3. **Creating or entering new markets** – using standards as the basis for new product development, supporting market uptake or creating new markets.¹⁷

The study revealed that 21 out of the 24 organisations reviewed listed management

systems standards as providing the greatest economic benefits to their business. These are highly regarded, voluntary standards, which have been proven to create benefits – both organisational and economic – for businesses and the communities they serve.

COMPLYING WITH STANDARDS

Standards can be either mandatory or voluntary. Standards themselves are not legal documents and compliance with standards is generally voluntary, unless standards have been referenced in legislation or compliance is stipulated within the terms of a contract. This renders them mandatory.

VOLUNTARY STANDARDS

Voluntary standards may sometimes be referred to as ‘consensus’ or ‘industry standards’. Voluntary standards set out specifications and procedures that have been identified by experts within an industry as good practice. In addition to the benefits noted above, many organisations elect to comply with voluntary standards, and use certification against a standard as a marketing tool. Their compliance with the standard offers customers and consumers a degree of certainty in the quality of the product, service or process.

It is still legal to supply products that do not meet voluntary standards. However, some organisations require their third party suppliers to comply with certain standards in order to do business with them. The standards themselves may be voluntary, but when they are stipulated in a contract with a third party supplier, they become mandatory to that supplier.

De facto standards are another form of voluntary standard which evolve from within an industry or market. De facto standards are generally not created by an authorised standards body, but emerge in the market after being created by an organisation to address a need and then become widely accepted and adopted across an industry.

MANDATORY STANDARDS

Mandatory standards are compulsory and are prerequisites for operating in certain industries or for selling certain products.

Formal, Regulatory or De Jure

Standards which have been developed by an authorised industry regulator or government body may be referred to as ‘formal standards’, ‘regulatory standards’, or ‘de jure (from law) standards’. Governments may create their own regulatory standards or refer to voluntary standards within legislation. Standards may be referenced in legislation (Acts or Regulations) as legally mandatory or prescriptive.

Examples include the Australian Wiring Rules,¹⁸ and British Standard BS 7671 (known commonly as the wiring regulations in the UK),¹⁹ which set out the minimum requirements for safe electrical installation. Although non-statutory, the UK wiring regulations are mandatory and have legal force because they are referenced in several UK statutory instruments.

By contrast, in the United States the National Electric Code (NEC) is not a Federal Code but a regionally adoptable standard which can be adopted, amended or rejected altogether by individual states. It is part of the National Fire Codes series published by the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), a private trade

¹⁵ ISO, Economic Benefits of Standards (2014), p 9.

¹⁶ ISO, Economic Benefits of Standards (2014), p 9.

¹⁷ ISO, Economic Benefits of Standards (2014), p 9.

¹⁸ AS/NZS 3000:2007 Electrical Installations (Known as the Australian/New Zealand Wiring Rules)

¹⁹ BS 7671 “Requirements for Electrical Installations. IET Wiring Regulations” (UK Wiring Regulations)

association. Compliance with the Codes are voluntary rather than mandatory.

Performance-Based

Standards may also be referenced in legislation as ‘acceptable solutions’ or ‘means of compliance’²⁰ under a ‘deemed to satisfy’ provision. This means compliance with the requirements of the legislation is compulsory, but a variety of methods can be used to demonstrate compliance to meet the specified legislative criteria. These are often referred to as ‘performance-based’ standards, which focus on measurable outcomes rather than on prescriptive processes.

An example of this in Australia is the National Construction Code²¹ which refers to many voluntary standards. This Code is given legal effect by relevant legislation which prescribes the NCC to fulfil any technical requirements that are required to be satisfied when undertaking building work or plumbing and drainage installations.²² Meeting the requirements of the standards is compulsory, but the method of compliance is flexible. Similarly, the United States National Fire Codes are voluntary, as long any alternative approaches are proven to provide an equivalent level of safety.

Product or Information

Regulatory standards are most frequently concerned with the health and safety of people and the environment and can either be mandatory product or information standards.

- **Mandatory product standards** make specified safety features of information requirements (labelling etc) compulsory in order to sell product within a jurisdiction. Safety standards set minimum requirements that products must meet to ensure they prevent or reduce risk of injury to consumers. Criteria covered by product safety standards can include performance of a product, its composition, methods of manufacture/processing or packaging and labelling.
- **Mandatory information standards** determine what information needs to be included on product labels so consumers can make informed purchasing decisions.

These do not only relate to safety but can include care labelling for textiles or ingredients for cosmetics.²³ Worldwide, Environmental Protection Agencies and equivalent regulatory bodies have established mandatory environmental standards for their respective countries to regulate the effect of human activity on the environment. Examples include standards which specify acceptable measures of air quality (including ambient measures and emission levels), or water quality (drinking water, water for industrial use, sewage etc).²⁴

CONFORMITY ASSESSMENTS AND CERTIFICATION

Some standards require proof of conformance by conducting ‘conformity assessments’ to assure an organisation meets the requirements of a standard. Other standards operate as guidelines rather than setting out any requirements and therefore have no measures for proving conformance. Put simply, ‘conformity assessment means checking that products, materials, services, systems or people measure up to the specifications of a relevant standard’.²⁵

Conformity assessments may be required by voluntary standards as well as mandatory standards. Conformity assessment schemes can be set up as voluntary self-regulation to satisfy market and peer pressure. Where implementation of a standard is mandatory, regulators may introduce specific conformity assessment approaches to enable compliance with legal requirements. Conformity assessment schemes may take a number of different forms, depending upon the regulatory or market requirements, including audits, assessments, inspections, and testing.²⁶ In areas of high risk, statutory inspection or certification schemes will be mandated.

Regulations can specify how conformance or compliance is to be demonstrated and communicated. Regulators will consider risks to workers, consumers, the environment and the economy posed by deficient goods, services or processes and the measures adopted will need to be directly proportionate. One example is product testing, where

product testing and marking must be performed at a recognised testing laboratory.

Another example includes management systems (eg ISO 9001:2015), where a standard specifies a process for demonstrating the requirements of a standard have been met. The process may include various steps such as implementation, gap analysis, internal and external audit, corrective actions, and preparation of objective evidence.

A third-party certification body, like SAI Global, then audits the organisation and certifies it against the standard. Re-certification audits are required periodically, with interim surveillance audits between these, ensuring organisations continue to meet the standard requirements. Failure to respond to major non-conformances with suitable corrective action can result in the organisation losing its certification.

Establishing methods to keep track of standards, related legislation and regulatory requirements are an essential component of managing risk

²⁰ <https://www.standards.govt.nz/news/regulations-and-standards>

²¹ <http://www.abcb.gov.au/NCC>

²² <http://www.abcb.gov.au/NCC/Regulatory-Framework>

²³ <https://www.productsafety.gov.au/product-safety-laws/safety-standards-bans/mandatory-standards/about-mandatory-standards>

²⁴ See eg US EPA National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) at <https://www.epa.gov/naaqs>, and Standards for Water Body Health at <https://www.epa.gov/standards-water-body-health>.

²⁵ http://www.iso.org/iso/support/faqs/faqs_conformity_assessment_and_certification.htm

²⁶ See http://www.iso.org/sites/cascoregulators/01_0_conformity-assessment-basic-concepts.html

Certification bodies, like SAI Global, are accredited by a regulator (UKAS in the United Kingdom, JAS-ANZ in Australia and New Zealand, ANSI in the United States etc), which provide a symbol of assurance that certifiers and inspectors are independent and competent to perform their duties.

COMMENCEMENT AND CHANGING STANDARDS

COMMENCEMENT

Unless specified within a standard, the commencement date of a standard is the date of publication.

Standards referenced in legislation may be affected by commencement dates specified by the legislation, so organisations must also keep track of any legislation affecting them.

CONTRIBUTION

Because most standards take effect upon publication, NSBs release draft versions for public comment when standards are being updated. This not only enables members of the public to contribute to the standard-writing process, but acts as advance warning of the pending update so organisations can prepare themselves for any new requirements.

CHANGES

It is essential that organisations are aware of changes to business-critical information provided by the standards. When standards are updated, some standards allow a twelve month period for the changes to take effect, known as the 'transition period'. Any applicable transition period will be explicit in the standard itself. Businesses are expected to have implemented the changes required across their products, process and people by that date. There are often transition resources and training courses available, provided by external aggregators (such as SAI Global) to support these changes.

Every organisation must keep up to date with changes to mandatory standards. Mandatory standards, particularly those relating to safety, will most likely not allow a long transition period for compliance and instead will come into effect upon publication. If an organisation is seeking certification to a voluntary standard, they need to incorporate their changes before their next certification audit.



FAILURE TO COMPLY

Failure to comply with current standards can have multiple consequences for a business. If not operating in line with voluntary standards, an organisation may fall behind good industry practice and suffer loss of consumer confidence. Non-compliance with mandatory standards can have far more disastrous results, particularly if any breach results in significant damage to property or injury to person. Enormous fines and potential criminal charges can be issued where non-compliance is significant.

Establishing methods to keep track of standards, related legislation and regulatory requirements are an essential component of managing risk. Aggregators like SAI Global offer a range of tools to help businesses track and manage their obligations.

UNDERSTANDING THE STATUS OF STANDARDS

Standards are continuously reviewed and developed. To identify whether a standard is current or what stage of its lifecycle it has reached, all standards are allocated a status. Common status keywords and what they mean are as follows:

- **Current** – the current, most recently published standard available;
- **Superseded** – the standard has been replaced by one or more other standards;

- **Withdrawn** – the document is no longer current and has been withdrawn;
- **Confirmed** – the standard has been reviewed and confirmed as being current, and no changes are required;
- **Revised** – the standard has been revised and republished;
- **Draft** – a copy of the draft standard has been issued for public comment;
- **Obsolescent** – the standard is not recommended for use for new equipment, but needs to be retained to provide for the servicing of equipment that is expected to have a long working life, or due to legislative issues; or
- **Historical** – these are the previous versions of standards that are often still required to be referenced many years after they have been superseded.

THE PRICE OF STANDARDS

Many NSBs and SDOs sell their own publications directly and can be referred to as 'publishers'. Nearly all of them use 'aggregators' like SAI Global, who bring together standards from multiple publishers for the benefit and ease of the business community.

NSBs and SDOs set the recommended retail price of standards each year, whether they sell these directly or via aggregators. The money raised from the price of a standard goes back into the publisher's research and development



process. As already mentioned, the publishers bring together experts, specialists and other interested parties from various industries to form technical committees who develop and redevelop the standards and documents by consensus. On average, 20% of a publisher's list of standards are reviewed or updated on each year.

Standards are sold in hard copy versions, soft copy PDFs or in network licence subscriptions for enterprise access. Different methods are offered by different publishers. Subscription prices are mostly calculated by seats, sites and country of purchase and can differ based on the publishers. Prices are also subject to exchange rates which are dependent on where the publishers are based.

COPYRIGHT IN STANDARDS

Standards are governed by strict copyright rules to protect a publisher's intellectual property rights in the standard. There are guidelines for the use of downloading documents, circulating documents and reusing elements within documents from all the various publishers and there are penalties enforced if copyright is breached.

The rights and use of standards permitted may vary between publishers. Aggregators, like SAI Global, have license obligations to honour the publisher's rights and use of their standards.

These are passed through to transactional and subscription services offered by aggregators, an example being SAI Global's standards management platforms.

Publishers do not always have a common copyright policy and consumers of standards need to be aware of what they can or cannot do. The following guidelines detail how copyright can be breached:

- Any commercial use or resale of the licensed material in any format;
- If a client's employee passes a PDF or hardcopy print out of the licensed material to another individual or organisation outside of the client's organisation, whether it's for commercial or non-commercial purposes;
- If a client's employee uses more than 10% of licensed materials for internal documents without gaining written permission from the Administrator or SAI Global;
- If a client's employee uses more than 5% of licensed materials for external documents without gaining written permission from the Administrator or SAI Global;
- If a client's employee leaves the client's employment, contract or otherwise and does not delete from their files PDF or hardcopy versions of the licensed materials; or

- If licensed materials are stored on a company network, shared folders or other shared storage and retrieval systems without a Network Licence subscription.

These requirements may appear onerous, but aggregators like SAI Global can assist you with standards use and copyright queries. Any organisation that is unsure whether they are entitled to make standards available to employees or how content may be repurposed can contact the relevant standards aggregator to arrange appropriate licences for their particular use of standards content.

STANDARDS AND RISK BASED THINKING

Standards help organisations align their governance, risk and compliance management within their business objectives and strategy execution.

Regulators, customers, suppliers, staff and the global community expect an organisation's processes, products and services to comply with local and global industry standards and regulations. These expectations are reflected in the trust of the brand, the reputation the brand has and subsequently the sustainability of the growth of a brand in a complex world.

Protecting business value and building customer trust often becomes part of a risk management

process. Many standards reference risk management²⁷ and in particular ISO refers to this across many of the business management system standards as 'risk based thinking'.

Risk based thinking is part of the process map that makes preventive actions central to organisational planning, routine and measurement analysis. Risk based thinking helps business assure a consistent quality of products and services and build a culture of improvement and prevention.

Whether a large or small to medium enterprise, risk management is a part of day to day business activities. Standards certainly help provide consistency and a quality check to the outputs.



CONCLUSION

Standards are documents written by International, Regional or National Standards Bodies (NSBs) and Standards Developing Organisations (SDOs) which set out specifications and procedures or processes. They are intended to achieve minimum objectives of safety, quality or performance of a product or service. They impact almost everything made by man, and can be either voluntary or mandated by legislation or under a contract.

The effective implementation of appropriate standards has real benefits for a business, increasing opportunity for international trade and providing a range of operational efficiencies and measurable economic advantages.

Organisations must keep continually abreast of changes to standards that affect their industry to maintain these benefits, and to avoid penalties where they apply.

Standards are more than onerous sets of compliance obligations. They are tools for helping your organisation maximise its potential, cross borders, operate efficiently, effectively, safely and sustainably, and set benchmarks for others in the industry to aspire to. As such, all staff should be aware of standards that affect the way they work and why, to ensure efficiency and safety of processes and product.

Good standards management, including making standard content and training available to all relevant employees within an organisation, is an important first step.

²⁷ ISO 31000:2009 Risk management – Principles and guidelines

ABOUT SAI GLOBAL

At SAI Global, we make Intelligent Risk possible by helping organisations proactively manage risk to achieve business excellence, growth, sustainability and ultimately, create trust.

Our integrated risk management solutions are a combination of world-class

tech platforms, services and advisory capabilities that operate across the entire lifecycle allowing businesses to focus on opportunities presented by uncertainty. Together, these tools and knowledge enable customers to develop a holistic, integrated view of risk. In Australia, we are also a leading provider of settlement

related services; company, personal and property information.

SAI Global Limited's head office is located in Sydney, Australia. We employ more than 2,000 people across 29 countries and 51 locations across Europe, the Middle East, Africa, the Americas, Asia and the Pacific.

For more information about SAI Global please go to www.saiglobal.com

