

# A Standards Primer for Small



## What are standards? How are they different from regulations? Who develops them?

A standard is any guideline that sets out minimum requirements or best practices. Some standards, like your company's hours of business, are informal standards. The standards we are discussing in *CONSENSUS* are formal standards related to your products, services or business practices, which have been developed by national or international bodies.

Unlike regulations, these formal standards are usually not mandatory, but the business benefits they offer make voluntary adoption attractive to small and medium-sized enterprises. Standards may be referenced in regulations. When this is the case, adherence becomes a legal requirement.

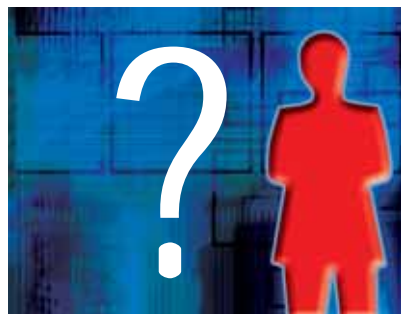
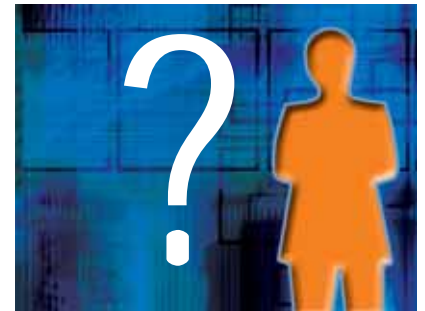
Standards are developed by people, who like yourself, have expertise and interest in their outcome. In order for standards to be widely accepted, organizations that coordinate standards development ensure as many relevant points of view are reflected in the discussion as possible. This means that regardless of the size of your business, you can have a voice in the process.

## How are standards relevant or useful to my small business?

Whether your company has three or 3,000 employees, standards can help improve the efficiency, safety and quality of your business.

If you are a manufacturer, standards may help you be more competitive and enable you to access foreign markets. If you provide a service, standards related to the certification of your employees could increase your credibility.

Management system standards for quality management, environmental management, occupational health and safety and food safety are just a few other examples of standards that offer value and opportunity to organizations of different types and sizes.



## How can I find out which standards are right for my business?

Depending on your type of business, there may be different standards options to consider. The Standards Council of Canada's website ([www.scc.ca](http://www.scc.ca)) and its information officers can help you identify which standards address your business needs.

Another important source of information is your competition! Ask yourself:

- Are their products certified to a specific standard?
- Are they using an accredited laboratory for their testing needs?
- Have they put in place a management system to increase productivity, manage risk or address environmental concerns?
- More importantly, have their profits increased or market expanded as a result?

Talking to your industry or trade association is good way to tap into what others are doing.

# and Medium-sized Business



## Where can I purchase standards? Are they expensive?

Once you have decided on a standard, you can purchase a copy online at StandardsStore.ca in either digital or paper format. StandardsStore, a joint initiative of the Standards Council of Canada and IHS Canada, sells national and international standards. Standards can also be purchased directly from the national and international standards development bodies.

The cost of standards varies, but with some exceptions, usually fall within the \$25-\$140 range.

## I've bought the standard, what next?

Read the standard. This will help you determine:

- Which requirements of the standard you are already meeting.
- Which specific areas will require improvements or changes to meet the requirements.
- Whether you have the expertise and experience necessary to make any necessary adjustments.

Many smaller companies do not require assistance to implement standards, but if you do have questions or want some help in making the necessary changes, there are different resources available depending on the standards. In some cases there are guidebooks you can consider, or you may decide to hire an expert in your field or a consultant in the area of standards to guide you through the process.



## How can I prove that I am using the standards correctly?

There are a number of different options when it comes to demonstrating conformance to a standard.

- You can self-declare your compliance.
- You can have one of your clients verify your compliance.
- You can seek third-party certification or testing.

Each option has advantages and drawbacks, including the amount of credibility associated with your verification method and the amount of time and money required.

When making your choice about verifying conformity, you should take into account your own needs and those of the market you serve.

