

What is certification?

The first in a series of articles where we examine the entire certification process in detail, taking the themes of our Beginners Guide and expanding on them to provide more detail.

So, we begin at the beginning by examining what certification actually is, and why it is an essential component in bringing a product successfully to market.

Background

Before the advent of certification, anybody could sell anything to anyone, with no consideration towards testing for safety, or any means of distinguishing quality products from badly designed ones.

Product testing has a longer history than you might expect, the first test lab, Bureau Veritas, was actually established in Antwerp in 1828 for checking the reliability of ships and equipment.

In Germany, TÜVs were established in the 1860s to check that boilers were functioning effectively after catastrophic explosions.

Remember safety concerns lie at the very heart of certification, it's protection for manufacturer and consumer like!

We are not talking a new-fangled concept here!

with a certification showing what had been tested following shortly after.

So since certification predates even mass production, it has been around for quite some time, and is not a new problem for entrepreneurs to wrestle with!

I never thought of that....

If that's you, it is hardly surprising!

You had the idea, became excited and decided to take it further. But you don't immediately think of everything you need to do to bring your product to market when you're caught up in the excitement of your idea.

More bloody red tape....

If you look at certification in that way, you're really missing the point.

Certification isn't the invention of faceless bureaucrats who just take a delight in making conducting business as difficult as possible.

It exists to ensure that products adhere to certain pre-approved standards, which is in your interests, after all.

Why would you want to release a product on the market if you weren't absolutely sure that it was safe for your customers?

Not only can you not take your product to market without certification, without it why would a potential customer be interested, when there's no demonstrable measure of its quality?

No certification, no route to market, it's that simple!

Right certification, right market....

The type of certification you require will depend upon your chosen market. Different standards and certification apply according to where you wish to sell your product, Europe, The USA and China all have vastly different certification processes, so you need to be certain which market you are aiming for, and get the appropriate testing and certification for that market.

And if you are planning to bring your product to the European market, you've picked a good time to do so, because of the elephant in the room....

Brexit, of course, one of the consequences of which is the change in regulatory requirements from the CE to UKCA marks.

Testing testing testing....

For certification to be achieved, all components require testing, and there are many test labs out there to assist in this process.

How do you choose the one that's best for you?

The simple answer, of course, is research. Do they specialise in products in your market sector? What is your test budget? On a personal level, will you be able to work effectively together?

Make sure you complete a checklist of relevant issues such as these when you approach a test lab to make sure you are getting quoted on a like-for-like basis and to make sure all possible issues are covered early in the process.

It could potentially save much time and money further down the line!

All of which brings us to a fundamental question:

DIY or assisted certification?

Certification is a complex process, and you need to be 100% accurate and thorough to make sure that nothing is overlooked that can cause delays and expense.

Getting expert help from a consultant will add additional cost to the process.

Which has to be balanced against the possible additional costs of getting it wrong if you opt for the DIY route.

It all boils down to your confidence in your own abilities and attention to detail.

The advantage of working with a consultant is that they should fully understand the entire certification process, have contacts with appropriate test labs and be able to project manage the testing process on your behalf.

If you do require help in any step of the process I would be happy to assist.

Next we will deal in more detail with why certification is necessary.