



How to think sustainably in a changing world

It's been over four years since the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were first introduced to address the pressing global challenges that confront humankind. From curbing climate change to reducing inequality, the SDGs exist to help facilitate sustainable development and promote inclusive societies; achieving a better future for everyone.

However, in just a matter of months, much of this progress has been upended. The economic, health and social crises caused by the recent pandemic has pushed us further away from reaching these essential targets. Its effects are predicted to throw millions into extreme poverty and have already derailed many environmental business initiatives, a far cry from the goal of inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable cities and communities as outlined in SDG 11.

It's vital that organizations everywhere harness the current situation to build back better. By embedding sustainability at their core, businesses can promote long-term recovery and resilience and simultaneously address societal needs.

Given their central role in the global economy, SMEs will be key players in driving this change. However, many may feel overwhelmed right now or not know where to start. We've listed some standards that can help you think sustainably in this ever-changing landscape.

Taking responsibility

In today's world, social responsibility matters. Consumers demand it; employees and investors value it.

With a smaller sphere of influence and less staff to engage in necessary efforts, SMEs can often implement socially responsible practices with greater ease than larger firms. BS EN ISO 26000:2020 offers guidance for building and delivering a long-term social responsibility strategy that contributes to the health and welfare of society and the environment at large.

By applying the principles of BS EN ISO 26000:2020, smaller businesses can achieve a sustained competitive advantage through ethical and transparent behaviour. Benefits include increased commitment and productivity from employees and winning greater trust and credibility among consumers.

Be more efficient

Addressing sustainability means improving operational efficiency and lowering costs – it's a win-win for people and planet. With Recycle Week coming up in April, many businesses and individuals might be thinking about how they manage and recycle plastic waste, but investing in sustainability goes far beyond this.

The framework of BS EN ISO 14001:2015 enables businesses of all sizes to implement an effective and robust environmental management system (EMS). With an EMS in place, SMEs can easily quantify, monitor and control the ongoing environmental impact of their operations. This leads to cost savings through the reduction of waste, energy and water consumption.

Other standards that can help small businesses embed sustainability into their existing operations include BS EN ISO 50001:2018 to manage and reduce energy use and BS 8001:2017 to implement circular economy principles.

Look after people

An ethical and socially responsible workplace is one that centres employee safety and wellbeing. BS ISO 45001:2018 enables SMEs to promote positive health and safety, whether staff are in the company's physical space or working remotely elsewhere. The upcoming BS ISO 45003 will focus on psychological health.

Both demonstrate a commitment to improving the employee experience that fits with a wider sustainability strategy. Extending this consideration across the entire supply chain with BS ISO 20400:2017 has the potential not only to improve business operations, but also the lives of everyone in the communities where they are situated.

Thinking sustainably can help all SMEs better respond to a complex, changing world. Using standards will help you embed purpose into everyday operations, so you can adapt and grow, no matter the situation.

Summary

- The impact of the recent pandemic is predicted to throw millions into extreme poverty and has already derailed many environmental business initiatives.
- It's vital that organizations everywhere harness the current situation to build back better.
- SMEs will be key players in driving this change. However, many may feel overwhelmed right now or not know where to start.
- With a smaller sphere of influence and less staff to engage in necessary efforts, SMEs can implement socially responsible practices with greater ease than larger firms.
- BS EN ISO 26000:2020 offers guidance for building and delivering a long-term social responsibility strategy.
- BS EN ISO 14001:2015 enables SMEs to implement an environmental management system (EMS) to quantify, monitor and control the ongoing environmental impact of their operations.
- Other standards that can help embed sustainability include BS EN ISO 50001:2018 to manage and reduce energy use and BS 8001:2017 to implement circular economy principles.
- On employee safety and wellbeing, BS ISO 45001:2018 enables SMEs to promote positive health and safety, and the upcoming BS ISO 45003 will focus on psychological health.
- Furthermore, BS ISO 20400:2017 has the potential not only to improve business operations, but also the lives of everyone in the communities where they are situated.

Unlock the power of sustainability and the circular economy in more detail here: <https://bit.ly/35DGuSH>