

## BS 5750/ISO 9002 - A LIBRARY SUPPLIER'S VIEW

*Chris Tyzack*

*Library suppliers are increasingly asked if they have BS 5750/ISO 9002 certification. Blackwell's invested 18 months in securing certification for its library bookselling and journal agency activity. The management of the process is described. The benefits are identified as better working practices, better understanding of roles and functions, and the extension of a culture of Quality.*

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Eighteen months ago Blackwell's set off on a course that, had we fully known what it involved, we might have thought more than once before starting. We decided that, as an organisation, we needed BS 5750/ISO 9002 certification for both our Library Bookselling and Periodicals Divisions. The reasons for this decision were twofold. Firstly, we thought that we could derive real benefit from the process and, from what we understood at that time, BS 5750 fitted in well with the other Quality Management practices and procedures that were being extended throughout the company. The second reason was simple: customers were increasingly asking us if we had certification. It was clearly commercially important for us to be able to reply in the affirmative.

I am writing this brief article as Marketing Director of Blackwell's. Given my position and aims, I probably reversed the priority of these two objectives. What interested and absorbed me during the process that took place was the way in which my own views changed. I had read a great deal of criticism of the way in which BS 5750 had been utilised and, it seemed, abused in other companies. Every other week *The Observer* appeared to carry an article suggesting that it formalised practice rather than contributed to any genuine improvement in quality. The articles seemed to imply that the most noticeable effect of achieving the standard was institutionalising what took place now and increasing paperwork while the assessment was carried out by organisations that would not themselves survive even the most cursory appraisal. So, there was a degree of concern in my approach in the early days that maybe we were simply allowing a marketing imperative to dictate bad business practice.

So, were those early fears justified? Were *The Observer* articles warranted? I cannot comment on anything other than the process that we went through but it seems absolutely clear to me now that the agony - and at times that was the only description that could be applied to it - was absolutely justified and that the benefits have been enormous. I sat outside most of what took place and so could observe with a degree of objectivity and, I think, this view is fair.

Firstly the process. We took a decision at Board level that we wanted BS 5750 certification. That was an easy decision to take but not one taken in ignorance. We asked a number of people to come



