

ISAS BC 9001 and ISAS P 9001: UNIVERSAL QUALITY MANAGEMENT STANDARDS FOR PRINT MEDIA, BROADCASTING AND THE INTERNET

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***Summary:** The essential role of media in social development and democracy is widely recognized, but political and economic powers often hamper their most important service to society, which is to give a faithful representation of the world, to induce citizens' participation in political decisions, and to create an open space for democratic debate.*

Independence and accuracy of information, quality and creativity of programmes and publications are keys to the mission of print, broadcasted and electronic media. It is not acceptable to see them reduced either to propaganda outlets or to entertainment carriers without content.

To assist broadcasters and press and magazine publishers in resisting outside pressures and serving society efficiently, a group of prominent media professionals have introduced two universal quality management standards, ISAS BC 9001: 2003, specially designed for broadcasters and internet content providers, and ISAS P 9001: 2005 for print media.

Those „tools to generate trust“ – a definition coined by a television CEO– will give the public an internationally recognized guarantee that the content it watches or listens to has been produced in accordance with a world standard of good governance within the media. Media themselves, by submitting their internal quality processes to a neutral, independent, professional control, will increase their credibility for a larger audience.

All over the world, people use the same criteria to measure the quality of their media. In comparing the editorial charters of various broadcasters on five continents, the Commonwealth Broadcasting Association observed „very little difference between broadcasters, although there are big differences between the societies to which they are broadcasting“. A research conducted by the World Radio and Television Council reached the same conclusion: everywhere around the globe, professionals, experts, and listeners-viewers judge radio and television from the point of view of their contribution to social development and democracy and use identical criteria, such as quality and accuracy of information, innovation and creativity, editorial independence, management transparency, promotion and respect of ethical and professional standards.

This is the basis upon which the Media and Society Foundation, a Geneva-based non-profit institution created by media professionals, has launched two international quality media management standards, ISAS BC 9001 and ISAS P 9001. They are completed by a set of guidelines, collecting the best practices used all over the world within the media industry.

ISAS BC 9001 and ISAS P 9001 are adaptations of ISO 9001, the world reference for quality management systems, which, in the last twelve years, has been adopted by 850.000 companies, both public and private, in 160 countries. ISAS BC 9001 & P 9001 measure how radios, televisions, newspapers, magazines and internet content providers meet the ISO 9001 criteria of good management, while at the same time respecting specific media quality criteria, which are universally recognized.

ISAS BC 9001 & P 9001 set clear, measurable objectives. Media companies that agree with them can request their certification through independent auditors and, if meeting the standard's criteria, obtain from the Media and Society Foundation a certificate of conformity, valid for three years, under provision of yearly checks. The certification process, conducted on a purely voluntary basis, is entrusted to private companies operating under the control and moral authority of the Media and Society Foundation.

ISAS BC 9001 & P 9001 do not certify the content of media, i.e. the quality of a given information or entertainment programme, but the production process which results in such a programme. The public thus knows

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that the programme it watches or listens to or the information it reads has been produced according to strict rules of independence, transparency and professional ethics.

This is a clear advantage for readers, listeners and viewers, as well as for journalists and producers, who will find professional support in the standard's implementation. Media companies themselves, both public and private, will also gain from its implementation: in order to be certified, they will review their management processes from the ISO perspective, mixing ethical requirements, audience satisfaction and economic rationality. This approach will bring them new opportunities for improved management and market development.

An ISO type quality standard allows professionals from all over the world to support each other in the defence of the professional quality they are striving for, while meeting at the same time the economic imperatives which none of them can avoid.

ISAS BC 9001 and ISAS P 9001 are concrete answers to the weakening of professional standards in the media industry. Favouring good governance and transparency within the media themselves helps them contribute more efficiently to good governance and democratic debate within the societies they are serving.