

Alignment with or full certification to BS 25999? Which should I choose?

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People are using the expression “alignment to BS 25999” more and more. What does this actually mean and is it worth anything to be aligned or operating in line with BS 25999?

In this article we explore the implications of both approaches and the benefits and disadvantages of being aligned and certified.

Alignment to BS 25999

Operating “in line with” BS 25999 infers the adoption of the Business Continuity Management System (BCMS) principles. To be honest, this statement isn’t clear. Does it cover only parts of the business or all of a company’s key products or services?

Which part of BS 25999 do people believe they are aligning themselves with? Part 1 is the “Code of Practice” and offers guidance on how to implement business continuity. Part 2 is the “Specification” and this is what an organisation would need to comply with, to be compared with a certified organisation.

The drivers for implementing a BCMS differ between organisations. Some may begin within the business, others externally. Both are equally valid and may depend on the nature of the business or its customer base. These drivers may also determine whether the business chooses to be aligned to BS 25999 or whether they should take the step to become certified.

The difficulty comes when the word “alignment” is used without justification. An easy claim to make, but it can potentially devalue the hard work of the people working with the BCMS in the organisation. The question is: “Is it ok to expect to go through some form of external verification process, in order to adopt this terminology?”

A number of advantages of being aligned to BS 25999

- You have a benchmark against the respected British Standard BS 25999-2:2007
- It provides a framework for a robust BCMS
- There are no costs for certification
- Potentially you’ll get comfort factors from insurers, suppliers and other stakeholders
- You can get a competitive advantage
- You have no audit requirement
- It will be easier to do the BS 25999 certification process when you are ready.

The disadvantages of only being aligned to BS 25999

- You have no formal approval mark by a recognised third party
- Risk of lack of external controls may stop you doing the BCM system maintenance
- You can lose potential clients to BS 29555 certified organisations
- Often greater board level “management” is required to maintain the BCMS principles.

Certification to BS 25999-2

There's a misunderstanding that moving from alignment to certification to BS 25999-2 is a major exercise. This doesn't have to be the case.

If you're already aligned to the standard, then there is no reason why going for to certification should be a burden. You will need to make sure that you have suitable evidence, where the standard asks for it. It's only if you are not near any kind of alignment that you'll have to work hard do to satisfy the BS 25999 auditor.

Other issues to consider prior to certification:

- Is your BCMS embedded into your organisation? How do you demonstrate this?
- Have you addressed all the elements of a management system? How is this information made available to staff?
- Are you confident that your staff, if asked, could explain their role during an incident?
- Do you have documentary evidence of the outcomes of your audits, review meetings and exercises?

Winning more business with a business continuity management system

Many organisations require certification to BS 25999-2 for tendering or supply chain purposes. As the standard grows in popularity, this trend is likely to continue. Can your business afford not to be certified, if you are competing with organisations who are? There is also an element of pride by the staff of organisations who have achieved certification. The BS 25999 certificate is often displayed in public areas and they feel part of that success.

The advantages of being certified to BS 25999-2

- You'll have a consistent approach to BCM across the business
- Your BCMS is verified by a third party certification body
- It gives you a competitive edge
- You can use it in marketing and PR through the display of certificate and/or logo
- No quibble evidence available to submit for tenders, supplier questionnaires
- It gives you stronger brand and reputation protection if there is an incident
- A BCMS is a driver for continual improvement in the whole organisation.

The disadvantages of certification to BS 25999-2

- Initial and annual cost to achieve and maintain certification can be seen as a disadvantage. The cost can vary greatly depending on the scope of your BCMS and shouldn't be the sole reason for not pursuing certification.

Conclusion about whether to be certified or not to BS 25999

Achieving certification to BS 25999-2 moves your business up to the best in class in your industry. Whether the decision is made within the organisation or is driven by external factors, it will encourage a level of discipline which is unlikely to be there without it. You might be perfectly fine with the system you have in place but when you grow and get more demanding clients they might ask for the certificate.

And if you say you're aligned to BS 25999, you might be asked to prove it.