



The Consultancy Management Standard

The Consultancy Management Standard (CMS) combines elements of ISO 9000 and Investors in People with criteria specific to public relations consultancy. Developed by the Public Relations Consultants Association of the UK, it was introduced in 1997 as the industry's first quality certification system for public relations firms and is now being rolled out worldwide.

The Standard is available exclusively to member consultancies of trade associations affiliated to ICCO and has already been adopted – either on a mandatory or voluntary basis – by associations in Austria, the Czech Republic, Finland, Germany, India, Ireland, Italy, Norway, Slovakia, Switzerland, Turkey and the UK, among others.

CMS accreditation provides a badge of professionalism for the public relations industry. It helps to improve consultancy businesses while assuring both clients and employees that audited firms offer quality management and performance.

The assessment process is conducted by independent auditor DNV, one of the world's leading risk management firms, and covers 8 key business areas:

Leadership & Communications

The auditors look for evidence that the consultancy is well-managed. Responsibilities at all levels must be clearly defined, and all employees must not only understand their accountabilities but also know how and when they will be judged on their performance.

Business Planning

The consultancy must prove that its Business Plan is a realistic, long-term programme based on a clear view of the firm's direction and potential. It must define business goals that are specific, measurable, achievable, viable and time-framed. The plan must be used systematically by management to run the business.

Business Improvement

CMS demands a programme of continuous business improvement, with evidence of long-term goals and the steps the consultancy is taking to achieve them. The Standard's key values are trust, excellence, professionalism, growth, development, enthusiasm, commitment and ownership. All of these affect the quality of the consultancy's service to clients and must be measurably enhanced over a three-to-five year timescale.

Financial Systems

The consultancy's systems are evaluated on financial forecasting and management of financial fundamentals. Checks and balances must be in place, enabling the consultancy to withstand periods of low or negative economic growth. Key financial ratios are scrutinised to ensure that the consultancy can and does invest in its future.

Campaign Management

The consultancy must demonstrate systems for planning and managing programmes against agreed targets as well as for measuring and evaluating results in terms of ROI.

Client Satisfaction

Client satisfaction must be tracked on a consistent and continuous basis.

New Business

There must be proof that the consultancy conducts negotiations with new clients and offers service agreements which reflect the high standards exacted by the professional codes of ICCO and comply with current best practice in the public relations profession.

People Management

The consultancy must have a clearly-defined and universally understood system of appraisal, training and career development for all employees. Evidence must be given that high standards and an appropriate level of investment are in place at every stage from recruitment onwards.

An optional ninth element is also available since 2008:

International Campaigns

The quality and breadth of resources; agency partnerships; the robustness of international reporting mechanisms; and the ability to execute and measure complex client programmes across national boundaries are all evaluated. This element verifies a consultancy's ability to deliver international public relations support successfully.

The re-assessment period for maintaining CMS certification is every two years.

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