

Certification: yes or no?



There is a lot of debate around whether you need formal certification process to be green. The answer is no you don't. However, what certification does is to provide credible, most often third party audited, authentication showing that what you say is true. It certainly ticks a box for many customers.

Certification, however, does take time and money, and some companies feel that their processes already exceed what certification asks of you – so it is worth considering the following:

Against certification	For certification
It will cost you time, effort, manpower and money.	It can be worth it because it will make you consider all areas of your business and how you work. It may open your eyes.
Many customers don't ask if you are certified or not.	Depending on your business type, it can be necessary for many tenders or to work with public sector bodies.
Which do you go for? There are so many.	Choosing the certification that is right for your business can be complicated. Check out our guide to logos. A credible mark can help business.
If you go for a cheaper certification and it is not recognised, then it is not worth the paper it is written on.	If you go for a good, reputable, yet cheaper certification option, then you can still reap some of the credibility benefits.
There can be lots of red tape and lots of paperwork to deal with.	Ultimately, this may save you waste, lower your energy bills, and make you more organised.
I am green already, I don't need to have certification.	No you don't. But, it is a credible, third party audited way of proving what you say and giving complete transparency to your green

Instead of environmental certification, what about 'Lean' accreditation?

Being sustainable is not just about the environment – it is about having a good business that works productively and cuts out waste and inefficiencies. This underscores the principles of Lean manufacturing.

Lean is all about giving the best – in service, products and employee satisfaction – whilst running your business in the most productive and efficient way by cutting waste, maximising time and resources, and making the most of people.

You can of course, work with a consultant, but this will cost you money. So, first you need to decide whether the project is to go full out 'Lean' or whether you would just like to use similar principles to make your business better. If the latter, self-assess and consider the following:

1. Look at what you do now and identify where you are most inefficient.
2. Look at what you do now and see where you are most efficient.
3. Find out which parts of your business are most cost effective, where the real value lies.
4. Look at your customer base – be critical – are there ones who are not worth having? If so, make them ex-customers.
5. Look at your stock holding. Do you have overstock? Are there better ways of ordering-in inventory? Have you got things lurking at the back of the shelf that have been there for years?
6. Do you know what work you have coming in – repeats/longstanding orders?
7. Are your staff always busy, or do they have periods in-between jobs where they don't have much to do? Are they motivated?
8. What about management? Do they really know their roles? Are they motivated?
9. What is your current lead time for general projects?
10. Are there bottlenecks in your business and could your systems be re-designed to make a better, more streamlined workflow?
11. What is causing the bottlenecks? Is a particular person/department overworked and overstretched? Is it a piece of equipment or machinery that has seen better days?
12. Are there lots of mistakes and errors made in your business?
13. How automated are your systems? Not just machinery, but admin, workflow, and accounts?
14. Could you be more intelligent in the way you deliver products/services?
15. Do you know where you would like your business to be next year, in five years, in 10 years? Do you have a plan?
16. What do you see as the biggest challenge within your company right now?
17. Is yours a business that is improving, or is it all going the other way?

When considering the answers to these questions, you will be able to challenge any areas where you are not as efficient as you could be. Now, whilst this is not immediately 'green', it will give you a more informed overview of your business. By having improved information quality and by being able to see exactly what your business is doing, you are able to establish where you are wasting resources (as well as the time and cost). This means savings in the use of power, water, paper, chemicals, inks, and more – all of which will mean that you cut the use of important resources and make the production of your job more green.

When you can easily identify problem areas and take steps to redress the balance – you automatically become more sustainable.