

Australian Standard™

Quality of service—Guide to customer expectations

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PREFACE

This Standard was prepared by the Joint Standards Australia/Standards New Zealand Committee QR-002, Quality of Service.

This Standard provides guidance only. It recognizes the importance of identifying and fulfilling customer expectations as a means of achieving customer satisfaction, and of monitoring the effectiveness of an organization's quality management system.

AS 3906 does not require reference to other Standards. However, it is compatible with the AS/NZS ISO 9000 series of quality management system Standards, and is referenced in the handbook, HB 251—2004, *Customer satisfaction measurement*.

This second edition has received mainly those editorial changes made necessary by the withdrawal of AS 3904.2/NZS 9004.2/ISO 9004.2, *Quality management and quality system elements*, Part 2: *Guidelines for services*, e.g. deletion of direct references and Appendix A, the service quality loop.

Clause 8.4, *Customer delight*, has been added to help readers to consider customer satisfaction and dissatisfaction in context. Satisfaction of customers' requirements and reasonable expectations is their right, and should be seen as the normal case. Dissatisfaction is a customer's negative response to a failure to achieve this, and so should not be considered to be the opposite of satisfaction. There is a school of thought that sees this as a continuum, with the opposite positive response being 'customer delight'. Techniques for achieving customer delight can create loyalty and help to increase market share, but may also have a tendency to increase costs and raise customer expectations.

In the AS/NZS ISO 9000 series, by definition, 'product' includes services (e.g. transport), software (e.g. a computer program), hardware (e.g. an engine part) and processed materials (e.g. fuel). AS 3906 uses 'services and products' to emphasize that virtually all products comprise both hardware and service components, and that service aspects are often the key to customer satisfaction.

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FOREWORD

A primary concern of any company or organization must be the quality of its services and products. In order to be successful, an organization must offer services and products that—

- (a) meet a well-defined need, use or purpose;
- (b) satisfy customer expectations and requirements;
- (c) comply with Standards, specifications, regulations and the requirements of society; and
- (d) are provided at a price which will be competitive and commercially viable.

This guidance Standard addresses the identification and evaluation of customer expectations as key aspects of a structured approach to achieving customer satisfaction. This approach includes using such information in the design and development of services, products and processes, and in developing and improving an organization's management system. It recognizes the importance of customer focus in the design, development, and realization of services and products, in monitoring customer satisfaction, and in performance analysis and improvement.

The management of quality and the design, development and delivery of services or products is a complex activity requiring the knowledge and integration of factors such as administrative and design aspects, material and human resources, processes needed, and a system of coordinating and controlling the service delivery process.

Identification and satisfaction of customer requirements and expectations provides a common focus for all such activities, and a link to overall management policy and objectives.

Customer expectations are expressed as both primary needs and secondary preferences. Each organization needs to identify these expectations through a process that gathers information from customers and uses this in developing systems and processes which will deliver services and goods of consistent quality. This necessitates a sound knowledge of who the customers are, in the context of the overall business and marketing policies.

Most products are a combination of hardware goods, service, and other elements such as software. This guidance Standard emphasizes service aspects because service is frequently the deciding factor in the customer's perception of quality at the supplier/customer interface. For example, although engine parts are a typical 'hardware' product, service aspects such as availability, ease of identification and prompt delivery will be crucial to a customer depending on urgent repair of the engine.

Service providers need to be aware that customer expectations may reflect priorities that are different from their own, and that may vary with time, application and comparison with competitors' offerings. For example, customer perceptions of utilities such as water and electricity suppliers, which provide immediate service at the tap or the switch, may be based on service provided on the telephone or at the counter. Similar circumstances exist in manufacturing industries, however there is often more opportunity for testing and inspection of the product prior to the point of delivery than exists in service industries.

The personal contacts between an organization and its customers are often very important in service transactions. However, in business, customers are increasingly taking a formal, structured approach to analyzing their needs and expectations and the assurance that they require with regard to quality. Most service transactions provide opportunities for evaluation of customer satisfaction from person-to-person contact, although special cases, such as financial institutions providing service through automatic teller machines, require special procedures for evaluating customer expectations and satisfaction.

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1 SCOPE

This Standard gives guidance to organizations in the identification and development of customer expectations. It also addresses those factors in the supply and delivery of services and products which influence customer quality perceptions.

2 OBJECTIVE

The objective of this Standard is to provide an understanding of the expectations of customers, intended to be of use to suppliers of services and products in the course of planning services and conducting transactions.

This Standard should be particularly useful to those personnel involved in the design of services and products, and those responsible for dealing with external customers. However, as all personnel in an organization have customers and are suppliers at some point, this Standard is relevant to all personnel in an organization.

3 REFERENCED DOCUMENT

The following document is referred to in this Standard:

AS/NZS ISO
9001 Quality management systems—Requirements

4 WHAT ARE CUSTOMER EXPECTATIONS?

4.1 General

The quality of a service or product can be defined as the totality of the features and characteristics that bear on its ability to satisfy customer needs. Customer expectations are the totality of all those needs and preferences, both tangible and intangible, which a customer brings to bear on the supplier of services and goods.

Needs and preferences are conceived by the customer and translated into a personalized wish list associated with the proposed transaction. Expectations are rarely well defined and may evolve as the transaction progresses.

4.2 Scope of possible expectations

Some examples of the range of expected features of services or goods are provided below. The following may be needs or preferences depending on the customers' perceptions in respect of the proposed transaction:

- (a) *Performance*—primary operating characteristics.
- (b) *Features*—supplements, attributes, distinctiveness, differences.
- (c) *Conformance*—compliance with pre-established specifications, standards.
- (d) *Aesthetics*—appeal to the human senses, elegance, tastefulness.
- (e) *Reliability*—ability to meet criteria consistently; dependability, trustworthiness.
- (f) *Durability*—useful operating life; endurance, hardiness, toughness.
- (g) *Maintainability*—ease and convenience of repair/rectification.



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