First published in 2001, the BRC IOP Global Standard for Packaging and Packaging Materials has since become the main standard for packaging businesses worldwide that supply into the food and drinks industry. In recent years, the standard has also been growing in popularity abroad, especially in companies operating in countries that supply UK markets.

According to the standard itself, it’s used to “assist businesses in the safe production of food grade packaging”. It helps with the safety, quality and operational criteria required to achieve the legal and compliance obligations of packaging businesses and is ultimately designed to protect the consumer.

The standards are compiled collaboratively between retailers, manufacturers and industry experts, with the BRC acting as the standard owner and enforcer. This approach ensures that the standards can be established and adhered to, as well as providing a relatively level playing field for packaging companies to compete in.

The standard is revised regularly in order to improve it. This has been effective in driving product safety and quality standards. Designed to be a Product Safety and Quality Management framework, the standard does not dictate how companies will meet its requirements, therefore it is not surprising that businesses take differing approaches to its implementation and maintenance.

These differing approaches to implementing and maintaining the standard occur as naturally as the variation of the companies themselves, each having their own set of constraints and cultural attitudes to compliance and how they implement and manage it.
The Risk of a Non-Integrated Approach

Many businesses are still operating to the standard using manual paper based and fragmented systems such as spreadsheets and Word documents. Others still use systems built in-house that cover some, but not all of the required areas.

These approaches can lead to several issues that are likely to be reflected in audit results and also in day-to-day operations such as:

- **Non-conformity due to a lack of document control** – One of the most common problems, this regularly causes issues at audit. It is important because documents are the bedrock of any quality and safety management system. They define what the operational plans are and set quality and product safety standards. If documents are out-of-date or not being followed then this significantly increases product safety and quality risk and can be the direct cause of many costly, but otherwise preventable, product safety and quality incidents, such as product rejection or recall.

- **Training records not being kept up-to-date** – Even when the documentation is both fit for purpose and kept up-to-date, it can be completely ineffective if relevant staff are not aware or trained in the procedures they contain. For this reason training activities need to be closely aligned with the operational plans embedded in both the procedures and content of documents. This is a commonly underestimated task that contributes to problems on a regular basis in all industries.

- **A lack of proper management review** – Whether it is market conditions, changes in legislation, changes in interpretation of the BRC/IOP Global Standard for Packaging itself or new innovations in plant and equipment, nothing stays the same for very long. It’s therefore vital that operational systems that help manage quality and product safety are properly reviewed on a regular basis. Not doing so risks drifting into problems and business issues that puts jobs, reputations and consumers at risk.
A lack of true analysis information that is used to drive continuous improvement – Analysis takes place in almost every other part of a business: from annual accounts to weekly production and sales meetings, it’s simply part of the culture. In these scenarios, much information is gathered in order to understand why the business is successful or not. The information is then used to direct future actions and strategy. Whilst many quality and technical departments do carry out such analysis it’s often compiled manually and is fixed in its scope. True analysis allows the business to drill into underlying data in order to quickly expose problems and opportunities, as well as to give the high level performance picture. The inability of businesses to do this kind of analysis limits responsiveness and reduces scope for improvement.

Poor engagement by the business outside the quality department – This can be a major issue in many businesses and is, in part at least, brought about by cultural attitudes to any departmental demarcation lines. The very fact that ‘quality departments’ exist drives attitudes that absolve others of responsibility, leaving the action to the quality department. Quality is, in fact, central to all other operations in a business and should oversee all quality related activities and tasks, most of which should be actioned by other departments of the business that are in the best position to influence outcomes. Hard pressed quality managers the world over struggle with their colleagues on a daily basis because of this damaging issue that causes stagnation or even a decline in standards over time.

Poorly managed Supplier Assurance Programmes – A significant number of problems in any manufacturing business can be traced to poorly performing suppliers. Yet the disconnect between different parts of the business, for example quality and procurement, can cause major issues that can cost the business significant amounts of time, money, waste and reputation. Proactive and collaborative management of suppliers and their assurance programmes are therefore key to ensuring a consistent and profitable business.

Many of these issues can be traced back to a lack of integration between disciplines such as Internal Audit and Document Control, Supplier Assurance Programmes, People and Training, Assets and Equipment.

Corrective action programmes represent the core mechanism for gathering information whilst dealing with the issues, as well as providing an opportunity to learn from what is actually happening in the business, at its suppliers and customers. Corrective action programmes do this by providing information that is gathered in a structured way that is directly aligned to business objectives. This then allows for real time monitoring and root cause analysis to uncover opportunities, trends and monitor performance.

What This Guide is for and How to Use it

This guide highlights how Gael’s Q-Pulse solution presents a way to manage a successful implementation and maintenance of the standard. It can also be a much more cost effective way that truly helps drive continuous improvement and increases the prospects of growth in your business.

This guide will walk through each section of the BRC IOP Global Standard for Packaging and highlight how Q-Pulse can help with each area so that you are aware of the tools and techniques that can be used to automate many of the low-value tasks that your business does each and every day.

This approach helps release time and resource, and produces relevant analysis information to both identify opportunities for improvement and intervene in emerging problems that, if unchecked, will end up costing your business money, time and reputation, thus stifling opportunity for improvement and growth.