

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQs) – Page 1

IRF Trusted Mark Secretariat (henceforth will be written as **TM Secretariat**) would like to ensure that the '**TRUSTED MARK**' Certification is easy to understand and in line with that thought, here are the most frequently asked questions that retailer applicants seek answers to. If your question does not appear here, please contact us and we will endeavour to answer it.

What is the 'Trusted Mark' Certification Scheme?

>> **Trust 100 – Trusted Scheme Manual** - The 'Trusted Mark' Certification is a seal of approval from an impartial third party that a certified retail brand has adequate systems and infrastructure in place to provide confidence to its customers in the quality of service provided by the retail brand. The 'Trusted Mark' certification shall endeavour to facilitate trade, fair competition and consumer acceptance on a national, regional and international level.

The 'TRUSTED MARK' Certification Scheme - setting global standards in retail with world's first consumer centric '**TRUSTED MARK**' - was launched for roll-out in India in September 2016. As per experts this will be the most widely accepted and visible consumer mark in times to come.

Who has developed this scheme? Who is the scheme owner?

The '**TRUSTED MARK**' Certification Scheme has been developed by the **IRF Trusted Mark LLP** for the purpose of certifying retailers operating in India on set standards. **IRF TRUSTED MARK LLP** is the International Retail Forum setting 'Customer Centric' Standards in Retail and is the scheme owner of the 'TRUSTED MARK' Certification Scheme for Retailers. The office of the IRF Trusted Mark Certification will henceforth be mentioned as **TM Secretariat**.

How credible is the 'Trusted Mark' Certification Scheme?

The '**TRUSTED MARK**' Scheme has been developed in compliance with ISO/IEC 17065:2012 in consultation with technically competent multi stakeholders and an effective mechanism exists for its periodic review/revision.

The Trusted Board with its sub committees is co-chaired by **Mr. Krish Iyer**, President and CEO, Walmart India and QCI Chairman, **Adil Zainulbhai** (Chairman Network18 and TV18 and Senior advisor McKinsey). The board and its committees represent India's top trade bodies, corporate counsels, economists, consumer, academic, consulting & research organizations, NGOs, over 100 top global and Indian retail organisations, certification bodies, Quality Council of India and its National Accreditation Board of Certification Bodies.

To understand the relevance of the scheme please read [Mr. Amitabh Kant's Message](#).

To view dignitaries in the Trusted Board and its Committees and their roles in development, ratification and approval process please visit [Focused Retail Committee](#), [Technical Committee](#), [Certification Committee](#) and [Mediation Committee](#). The development process of this mega scheme has been adequately explained on scheme website www.irftrustedmark.org. The yearlong ratification process included multi stakeholder consultation, continuous improvisation of the scheme documents, inviting public comments and a series of marathon meets of its various committees. To get a feel of participation of multi stakeholders in development and ratification process please visit [Photo Gallery of Trusted Meets](#)

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What's the credibility of the scheme owner?

IRF TRUSTED MARK LLP is promoted by the IMAGES Group, the premier knowledge, networking and business platform for India's burgeoning retail, consumer brands and Shopping Centre industries. Recognised by the international retail community through its B2B Magazines, Conferences, Exhibitions, Research Volumes, Web Portals & Online Services, the Images Group is trusted as the catalyst for profitable growth of modern retail through knowledge platform leadership.

Images Group presents the most comprehensive opportunities for retailers, consumer-facing businesses and support organizations to intelligently navigate the changing marketplace dynamics, and capitalize on emerging consumer expectations and aspirations. A strong portfolio of business publications have served since 1992 to inform, advise and inspire leaders and decision makers of the retail industry. Focused media serves the Retail industry across various verticals like Textiles & Fashion, Shoes & Accessories, Sportswear, Food & Grocery, Beauty & Wellness, Food Service and also others like Consumer & Personal Electronics, Books, Music, Toys & Gifts, Home & Office Improvement etc. through its various print and online publications and websites.

Images Group covers various aspects of retail business like space, location, market & consumer/ shopping trends, store design, shopfit & VM, product sourcing, merchandising, marketing & promotions, branding, supply chain & logistics, retail business models (Franchising, distribution, Licensing, Joint Ventures etc.), IT, CRM, HR etc.

The need to connect with businesses, people, knowledge and ideas associated with modern retail is served by its Business Exhibitions and networking meets. Images organises annual mega confluences of different retail sectors that bring together the most successful and influential retail visionaries, consumer and retail experts and the industry's powerful decision makers on one mega platform as a means to retail enlightenment.

Unprecedented consumer insights, retailing innovations and path-breaking retail technologies coalesce at every rendezvous to transform India's retail ecosystem. Images Awards are respected for their accurate, unbiased and transparent evaluation and recognition of retail performance.... And loved for the style with which these successes are celebrated. The sole objective of the Images Group is to modernize Indian retail; bring retailers across the country in to the fold of structured businesses with modern systems & processes following Govt rules and regulations. The 'Trusted Mark' certification scheme is a step forward to encourage retailers to be more customer centric and adhere to global best practices in all retail operations. Initially launched in India, the scheme aims to cover retailers all over the world in time to come.

Please visit www.imagesgroup.in for more information on the promoter group.

Who all can apply for this Scheme?

Retailer / retail organization of any size operating single or multiple retail outlets can apply to get their retail brand/s certified. However, establishing legal status of the applicant is mandatory. The retailer, before applying, will ensure that it has its own internal audit system and its outlets have undergone internal audit covering all Trusted Mark standards prescribed in Trust 150 and is confident of achieving minimum 70 score as per Self Evaluation criteria mentioned in Trust 204 to qualify for the Trusted Mark.

While the scheme will ultimately cover all channels like brick and mortar, online and omni-channel, in the first phase the scheme is open to retail brands in brick and mortar space - spanning across all retail formats including hypermarkets, super markets, department stores, speciality stores (fashion/ shoes & accessories/ sportswear/ home & interiors, consumer electronics (CDIT)/ furniture & furnishings, luggage, books, music gifts, restaurants, jewelers, pharmacies, salons, spas, fitness centers, FECs and cineplexes.

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What the ‘Trusted Mark’ Certification Scheme aims to serve?

The 'TRUSTED MARK' Scheme primarily aims to serve two purposes:

- i) To award certification to retailers who demonstrate superior quality and other characteristics which meet the rigorous requirements of the Trusted Scheme. This aim will further include spreading awareness amongst stakeholders in the industry about the Trusted Scheme and encouraging them to improve the quality of their practices, systems & infrastructure.
- ii) To inform and assure consumers through the certification that retailers, as certified under the Trusted Scheme, are in compliance with the comprehensive quality requirements of the Trusted Scheme, which in turn are inherently consumer oriented and focused.

What would be the advantage of the 'TRUSTED MARK' to a retailer?

Once the Trusted Mark standard is implemented, the credibility of retailers increases. Customers would then be very vigilant and inquisitive and would want to shop from the Certified retailers with ‘Trusted Mark’.

1. Strengthens internal systems & processes wrt to customer care
2. Nothing left to chance wrt Customer promise vs delivery
3. Everything in black & white – well drafted, communicated and understood policies/ manuals/ SOPs
4. Clear-cut Responsibilities and Accountabilities
5. Establish full trustworthiness before earning the Trusted Mark

Customer Pull: For consumers, this is assurance that the retailer meets the stringent requirements of the ‘Trusted Mark’ Scheme. The TM Secretariat aims to undertake a nationwide campaign to establish the ‘Trusted Mark’ as the seal for consumer trust – generating consumer awareness and assurance needed to encourage consumers to confidently shop, eat and enjoy products and services of outlets with ‘Trusted Mark’.

The key to certification is not only adhering to statutory requirements but also the requirements as mentioned in each of the technical standard. This will help in bringing in transparency so that the consumers know what to expect from their purchase/ service from the point of browsing and buying to after-sales.

What is the difference between 'TRUSTED MARK' and other marks like Hallmark in jewellery, Agmark in food and ISI mark in industrial produces?

Unlike marks mentioned in the question that certifies products, the ‘Trusted Mark’ Certification is a Retail Brand Certification. Trusted Mark logo cannot be used on the product. They will always be used with the retail brand name and not the products that the retailer sells. The Mark shall be displayed on outlet fronts/ e-page and all marketing and communication materials as an outward sign of certified establishment’s commitment to the Mark.

Is the 'TRUSTED MARK' applicable to any other allied industry?

No. This is specifically for retail brands catering to end-consumer.

Is it a single or multiple Certificate/s Scheme?

Though it is a single Certification Scheme but it covers 10 different retail segments namely Trusted shop, spa, salon, care, restaurant, cineplex, funzone, jeweller, pharmacy and e-shop. The organization can apply under either of the segments in relation to the type of retail business it operates under the applying retail brand.

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What is the definition of retail brand in this Scheme?

Retail brand is the name on outlet / website fascia identifiable by customer and not the brand/s that the outlet sells.

If there are more than one retail brands with an organization, can all of them apply for Certification?

Yes, but in that case each brand will have to apply separately for Certification and under the relevant segment.

An applicant retailer or a franchisee with multiple brands/ sub brands/ formats can apply with single application fee. For such cases, management fee and Trusted Mark usage fee will also be charged based on total turnover (across all brands/ sub brands/ formats) as mentioned in the Application – and not per retail brand – subject to total turnover across all brands/ formats of an applicant not exceeding Rs. 100 crore . However sampling for Mystery and Manday calculations for CB audit and certification will be brand/ format specific and fee for the same shall be charged accordingly.

In case of a franchisee getting certified for a retail brand for stores, the Trusted Mark will be used only for the stores operated by the franchisee. The parent brand does not get certified if franchisee gets certified.

A Retailer can apply for chosen stores/ formats under respective brands and then the sampling will be done within applied stores.

What is the ‘Trusted Mark’ Certification Audit Process?

An audit is the process by which a company shows evidence of working to the required system and this is a compulsory element of the ‘Trusted Mark’ Certification Process. It ensures that the system a retail brand has implemented is fit for purpose and continually improving. It is the regular check that a retail brand is managing the system/s consistently.

How a retail brand is going to be assessed and audited?

The assessment and auditing is done for a set of standards, which have been developed and ratified by technical experts and multi stakeholders. These standards encompass key functional areas of retail business such as customer service, care, safety, security, HR practices, Communication, Goods and services and so on.

Please refer [⇒Trust 150 – Standard Document](#) for more detail.

What kind of audit is there under the ‘Trusted Mark’ Certification Scheme?

There are two kinds of audits – Onsite audit which is done at outlet / office and mystery audit. The former is done by a Certification Body (CB) and the latter is done by mystery shoppers/ trained consumers engaged by the TM Secretariat. The findings of the mystery audit is reported to CB for final assessment and also shared with the applicant retailers to identify the gaps and take corrective measures.

What is a Certification Body (CB)?

A CB is a third party audit company. An approved CB by the TM Secretariat is a legal entity operating as CB for at least 5 years and conforms to ISO/IEC 17065. The CB is accredited by NABCB. [List of Approved CBs](#)

The certification body is responsible for and retains authority for assessing, auditing and certifying the retailer / retail organisation. This includes the granting, maintaining, renewing, extending, reducing, suspending and withdrawing of certification.

Who ensures that the CB auditors are qualified to audit a retail brand?

The qualification and competence level of involved auditors is well defined in >> [Trust 203 – CB Personnel Competence Guidelines](#) document. Approved CBs by the TM Secretariat have gone/ go through the required orientation program together with customer service, compliance, regulatory and legal experts of retail organisations.

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What is the process of Certification?

The applicant retail brand registers for 'Trusted Mark' Certification by submitting the Application Form with required details, declarations and application fee to the TM Secretariat. On receipt of Mystery Audit Fee, the TM Secretariat conducts the mystery audit and submits the Report to CB finalised by the applicant.

CB finalizes the exact audit date & methodology. CB carries out offsite review of data submitted by the applicant. CB auditor(s) complete the onsite audit and issues Non-Conformity (NC), if any. Applicant takes the corrective action and submits the evidences. Auditor closes the NC offsite or by onsite verification. Auditor submits report to CB Certification Committee with a positive recommendation. CB Certification Committee reviews the audit report and evidences collected and takes certification decision. CB issues the client e-certificate under intimation to the TM Secretariat. The minimum criteria for applicants would be that they should achieve 70 score out of 100 to qualify for certification. Please refer [⇒Trust 200 – Trusted Scheme Certification Process](#) document for more information.

What is the time duration for closure of NC?

30 days duration is allowed for closure of NC. If the NC is not closed within the stipulated time frame; a re-audit will be carried out. Additional fees have to be paid for the efforts for closure of the audit finding / re-audit.

Is the process conclusive or has some more stages involved?

The process also includes 2 surveillance audits one each after 12 months and 24 months along with one single store surprise audit anytime during the 3 year Certification Cycle.

How long it will take to get Certification?

It takes 12-14 weeks for complete certification process – subject to all required documents and systems in place.

What is the life span of initial certification and how to extend the period?

The Certification will be for a period of 3 years after which it can be renewed.

If a certified retail brand discontinues with IRF Trusted Mark after 3 years, what happens?

The retail brand will not be able to use the Trusted Mark advertise the Trusted Mark in any of its communications. The benefits of system implementation will continue provided the retail brand continues with the system in true spirit.

In case of certification withdrawal what would be the suspension period to re-apply for IRF Trust Mark Certification?

There is no such time interval. Company can rectify the system and re-apply.

If the scheme owner for some reason disqualifies the certified retail brand, what happens to the certification/ displayed 'Trusted Mark' in stores and other communication material?

The 'Trusted Mark' certification will be withdrawn and the retail brand would need to remove the 'Trusted Mark' from all its stores and communication.

How can a retailer brand apply for this Scheme?

The aspiring retail brand can apply for the Scheme by filling an application form and submit the same with the IRF Trusted Mark Secretariat at New Delhi. The application form is called [⇒Trust 201 – Application Process](#), which is a detailed document and has provision to record and declare all required information about the applicant.

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If the retail brand operates 5 outlets then is it required to go for certification of all the 5 outlets under the scope of ‘Trusted Mark’ Certification scheme?

Yes, all 5 outlets will be covered under the ‘Trusted Mark’ Certification Scheme, irrespective of their locations and size - provided all of them are operating under that single retail brand which applied for certification.

If the retail chain is managed by a franchisee/ distributor/ JV in India, can the franchisee/ distributor/ JV partner apply for the scheme?

Yes, but in such cases, the Trusted Mark will be displayed and or used for communication only for the stores managed by the certified franchisee/ distributor/ JV partner with specific brands/ stores.

If the retail brand has multiple formats within the same retail brand like express, super, hyper, premium, value etc., will all formats be audited or each one will be audited separately?

It is up to the retail brand to decide if it wants the retail brand to be certified irrespective of sub formats with in or it wants a specific format of the retail brand to go for certification. Accordingly the sq root sampling will include various formats in pro rata basis for Mystery audit purpose. CB audit at HO/ RO/ outlets will consider the retail brand as one but audit requirements of each specific format.

How Mystery audit will be different from the CB audit?

While the Mystery Audit will be conducted by IRF Trusted Mark Secretariat for a sample size, which is square root of total number of outlets – in operation for at least six months and applied for certification, The CB audit will be at applicant’s HO/RO/ Outlet/s – wherever the complete documents are available for audit. While the Mystery Audit will be conducted by real customers with training to audit every aspect of retail operation, CB Audit is done at HO/ RO/ outlets of retailer applicant by Auditors qualified by CB for QMS audits in specific business sector as detailed in Trust 203 – CB Personnel Competence Requirements.

How will audit take place for ecommerce in the absence of outlets?

The scheme has been rolled out in the first phase for retail brands with brick and mortar stores only.

Who will help the applicant to implement the ‘Trusted Mark’ standard / Pre-requisite?

The retail brand can approach independent consultants with knowledge of ISO certification of their own choice at their location in this regard. The TM Secretariat runs an ongoing programme to train professionals in retail, consulting and Certification. This is a Certificate Course with advanced study material, interview, group discussions, master class and exam by qualified experts and trainers on ISO standards and certification process. Interested applicants can approach already trained professionals or can apply for the Certificate Course.

Please visit <http://www.irftrustedmark.org/certificate-programme/> for details.

What if the retail brand has stores outside India?

At present, the scheme is only for stores in India so stores outside India will not be covered.

Is it necessary to recruit additional staff for managing the ‘Trusted Mark’ certification implementation?

No. If the retail brand already has competent staff to manage compliance, regulatory, legal, customer care related issues there is no need to recruit additional staff. The applicant retail brand can approach the TM Secretariat for directions or can engage a consultant to guide/ train the existing employees.

Will the CB Auditors Guide Retail Brands for Improvement?

CB interaction during the process of audit and CB Gap Report helps identifying areas for improvement. The CB shall not offer any consultancy to any client. It may offer training on ‘Trusted’ Scheme provided the training is generic and not client specific (which may be considered as consultancy). The auditor will typically compose a report, analysing the system and the use of, against the clauses of the standard. CB will also provide clients with recommendations for improvement that will have been agreed with you to assist you to drive the system forward to enable continuous improvement, thus getting the most out of the standard/s.

Whom to approach for any clarification during the process of the ‘Trusted Mark’ certification?

Applicant can approach the chosen CB, Consultant or the TM Secretariat for clarifications.

What is the control with the TM Secretariat if Trust Mark logo is misused?

Logo rules drafted by the TM Secretariat are available on its website and would be issued along with certification. In case of any violation disciplinary action will be based on the logo rules. Please refer [⇒Trust 250 – Rules for use of IRF Certification Mark](#) for more information on rules for use of IRF Certification Mark.

How will the TM Secretariat deal with any major issue raised against the retail brand?

IRF will provide time for resolution of the problem. Proper due diligence will be done prior to any action/suspension.

How will the TM Secretariat deal with any dispute arising among involved parties?

[⇒Trust 210 – Scheme Procedure for Appeals and Complaints](#) document has procedure for appeals and complaints. The reported dispute will be brought under the preview of the Mediation committee, which will come into existence as and when required. The committee has well defined role and responsibilities.

What is the mechanism for recording disputes?

[⇒Trust 211 – Incident Report](#) document addresses this requirement where all such incidents are recorded appropriately for future reference and process updation.

What is the monetary gain from the ‘Trusted Mark’ Certification scheme implementation?

It helps as a marketing tool. It is a differentiator and helps in confidence building / increasing credibility in the market especially with Customers, bankers, government etc. The TM Secretariat is helping to build credibility for the industry by putting efforts, identifying quality standards, models and creating a ‘CUSTOMER CENRIC’ group which otherwise cannot be built individually.

Will retailer’s sales increase if the ‘Trusted Mark’ is adopted? If yes, HOW?

The ‘Trusted Mark’ promotes adoption of process approach when developing, implementing and improving the effectiveness of the business processes (including sales and operation processes) to enhance customer shopping experience and satisfaction. Moreover, the ‘Trusted Mark’ guides the organization TRANSFORM INPUT INTO OUTPUT.

What impact this certification is going to bring about to the organization?

The certification provides a framework for growth. An organization will develop and implement systems for all aspects of business with a focus to systematically prosper and develop trust and transparency with all stakeholders.

The Trust Mark is not popular yet among consumers. How will people accept?

It's a journey. Certified organization will definitely reap the benefit and will be the Trusted Mark's brand ambassador. The brand building will happen over a period of time.

THE TM Secretariat aims to undertake a nationwide campaign to establish the "Trusted" certification mark as the seal for consumer trust - generating consumer awareness as well as encouraging consumers to confidently shop, eat and enjoy services of outlets with "Trusted" certification mark.

Will opting for the 'Trusted Mark' help the company to obtain or raise funds from Govt./ banks?

With required systems and processes in place, the credibility of the retail brand surely will go up. Banks and lending institutions always give due weightage to such standards.

What is the cost involved in getting the 'Trusted Mark' Certification?

The cost includes fee for registration, management & mystery audit, Trust Mark usage and CB audit fee. Please refer [⇒Trust 201 – Application Process](#) document for detailed information on the same.

Will the fee reduce for multisite operation?

Audit man-day rate for all CBs is fixed but operational expenses for auditor such as travel, boarding and lodging can vary from case to case and location to location. In fact such charges can be better controlled and economically optimised if the organisation bears them itself.

Should you need any more clarification on the IRF Trusted Mark or the Certification Scheme please call or write to:

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