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Turnaround

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Case Studies

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directorship

European Market

Finance

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Leadership

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Project

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Mission Possible: Six Questions Your Mission Statement Should Answer

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A Proper Mission Statement Provides an Understanding of Future Growth Directions

Does your company have a mission statement? If so, feel confident in knowing that the company is in a select group of companies that have engaged in this forward-thinking activity.

But what good is a mission statement if it's not put into practice? When was the last time you read your company's mission statement? What did it say to you? What do you think it conveys to others?

A mission statement must spell out what your company does and where it is going. The answers to these questions are supposed to inspire and guide you and your employees every working day and hour, whether your business is coming up ahead, lagging behind, or just sitting in the middle.

Mission statements often come up short, like this nebulous one: "The mission of our company is to provide excellence and quality for all of our customers."

While these ideals are fine, they are basically expected. Most managers acknowledge that the company for which they work is going to strive for excellence and quality for all of its customers. However, these words do not give constructive guidance to management and professionals in their daily work lives.

What Needs to be Stated

Where is your company going? A good management team needs to set a course with goals that can be realistically attained, that can be accomplished within allotted time frames, and that can motivate people to keep pushing forward.

Setting such a course is an arduous task. It means work; a lot of work. It means risk; the company leadership needs to state the company's direction. It means leadership; someone has to make a decision about the company's direction, have the conviction to follow it, and convince others as well.

How to State It

The role of the mission statement is to provide the planning team, management, employees, and customers—all stakeholders—with an understanding of future growth directions. Somewhere in its body, it should include the following six components:

Product/Service Definition. What does your company do or provide?

Example: We will offer (specific products/services) that are positioned to (special benefit to be gained) and will be focused at (definition by line, scope, or positioning).

Products and services should be defined in terms of how they are positioned to serve and benefit the customer. Breadth of product line, attributes, price, quality level, and any product classification should be included.

How will you contribute to fulfilling the customer's mission? Limit the extent of the offering to focus on what you do very well.

Technology. How will your company deliver its services?

Example: We will use (define technologies to be used) to provide our services.

Here is where you begin to set the company's product apart from the competition, and from areas of business where you don't belong. Actually providing an array of multiple technologies can involve increased investment and a risk of diluting effectiveness, commitment, and impact because dollars and resources are going elsewhere. Conversely, complimentary technologies theoretically can improve skill sharing amongst a large group of employees and improve customer service because employees are better equipped to tackle a variety of situations.

Levels of Vertical Integration. How much will we do?

Example: We will provide (stages in the life cycle offering) designed to support (degree of penetration to satisfy the customer's entire need).

You can't be all things to all people. Resources will not allow it. Also, it's not good business sense.

Define which elements of the customer's requirements will and will not be satisfied. This effort will indicate where you need to develop new products, seek partners, or avoid competing. Plan how products and services will support changing customer dynamics, and how you will stay abreast.

Generic Customer Need. Why will they buy?

Example: Our products and services will satisfy (what important customer demand or necessity).

What is the customer trying to accomplish? By defining generic needs you can identify future growth directions which have a higher-than-normal probability of being funded and carried out.

If the need is greater than you can currently offer, you clearly define areas where you may want to augment capabilities or where strategic alliances may be necessary.

Statement of Direction or Market Definition. Who will we sell to? Where are they located?

Example: Our main thrust will be dedicated to the (market definition or segmentation).

The key here is to focus on where you are and where you are going to aim marketing efforts. Which specific customer groups or segments and geographic territory will be served or not served?

This section of the mission statement enables the development of different strategies necessary to address multiple directions, yet accommodate common goals.

Distinct Competencies. Why will they buy from us?

Example: We will develop and maintain unequivocal qualifications in (which areas), which will yield (specific capabilities). We commit to (level of expertise to set us apart) to remain recognized as an expert in (what we do better than anyone else).

Define and focus on those special abilities that set you apart from the masses. Competencies will command the higher profit and cash flow margins.

What do you accomplish that the competition cannot? What areas do you need to invest in to maintain your advantage? This is the most important thinking of all.

Only after developing a comprehensive matrix describing the relationship of these six elements for each product or service that you offer will you have properly completed a good mission statement. When that's accomplished, you will have a statement of direction that has substance. It's a statement that, if executed, can produce added value for the company.

[Read more](#) about examples of good, and not-so-good, mission statements.

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