



In a recent blog post, we addressed the topic of short, succinct mission statements and their importance to your business. We thought it would be good to expand on that topic in this issue of Designing Strategies. Your mission statement is the most important part of your business and strategic planning process. It defines the reason that you are in business. Without it, you have no core, no center, no defining direction. In short, you will not have a clear grasp on what your business is all about, who your customers are, or what to do in order to achieve success, without this important filter.

It seems that the larger the corporation, the longer and more detailed the mission statement becomes. They are often filled with industry and business jargon that most readers would not understand. Totally confused after the first paragraph, they stop reading, or just respond with a 'Huh?'. Did they understand the mission of the company? Probably not. For that matter, how many people in the company have ever seen it or understand what it means in the execution of their jobs? A mission statement needs to clearly explain what your company does and for whom. That's it. It doesn't need to say how you will accomplish your mission, what guidelines you will use or anything else. Nothing grandiose, just what you do and for whom.

If you can't define your mission in a few words, you clearly don't have a clue what your business is about.

A great example of a company that didn't know what they were about is that old buggy whip manufacturer. Remember him? He made the finest buggy whips on the market, using the highest quality materials. They were a well constructed, high quality product, lasted a long time and were a great value for customers. Then, seemingly overnight, horseless carriages came on the scene and buggy whip sales dropped to zero. It didn't take long to realize that whipping a horseless carriage was a waste of time. Had he a better idea of the business that he was in, and his eye on the future, he might have survived this major change. Instead of seeing himself as being in the buggy whip industry, he should have understood that he was really in the transportation industry and made changes in his business as the transportation industry evolved around him. We make high quality buggy whips, as a mission statement certainly limited his outlook and decisions made about the company and product line.



Everyone in the world knows of the Disney corporate empire. It is huge. Their vast holdings span the globe. The Disney corporation has one of the shortest, most clear mission statements on record: To make people happy. That's it, nothing more, nothing less. Their mission is to make their customers happy whether it is at one of their theme parks, at one of their movies, shopping in a Disney retail store, playing with one of many character toys, or humming along to one of their songs. All decisions made in this enormous corporate entity are based on the happiness of their customers.

mission n. 1 a particular task or goal of a person or group. 2 a journey made of this. 3 a person's vocation (similar to persons sent, esp. to a field of product negotiations etc. 3 a brief missionary post or

If yours is one of those companies that has a mission statement (and of course you do have one) that is longer than 10-12 words, it's time to start editing. Pare it down to a bare minimum. Trim the fat out of it. Cut out all that jargon that only you understand. Use words the average person will understand. I've heard that marketing guru and author, Seth Godin, believes a mission statement should be no more than 8 words in length. I'm willing to go the extra few words. The idea is to have something short and concise enough to be easily remembered and communicated. Communicated to whom, you might ask. To all of your company's stakeholders. To your executive team, your staff, vendors, suppliers, customers, investors. In short, everyone involved with your business. The more these stakeholders understand the mission statement, the easier it will be for them to understand their particular place in your organization and how they can help you achieve your mission.

Visualize - Analyze - Strategize