

How to Come up with a Mission Statement

A mission statement is your vision for the company. It must capture the essence of your business in one or two sentences, and should contain the purpose of your business as well as to whom your product or service is targeted. Not only that, it should make your business plan exciting and entice the reader to want to learn more about you.

It's surprising how many entrepreneurs and small business owners have difficulty articulating what their companies do. You've probably run into this at least once. You meet a person at a party or conference, and you ask them what they do. You end up with one of two responses - either a one or two-word answer which doesn't tell you anything about the business, or a long-winded, jargon-filled speech that causes your eyes to glaze over and sends you straight to the punchbowl.

A well-thought out, well-articulated statement can help you become a success with customers or anyone else. It will elicit additional questions and comments and get the ball rolling with prospects. It will show that you understand your business, are clear with its purpose, and know who your customers are.

Creating an effective mission statement is not easy. You will most likely have to write and rework it many times before hitting on the right description. This worksheet should help you through the process.

What is your vision for your company?

When you sit down by yourself in a quiet room and think about your company, what do you see? What type of company is it? What is the ideal business transaction for your business? Who are you selling to? Who works for you? How large is your staff? Is your company service oriented or volume oriented? What makes customers come to you instead of your competitors? What do customers and others think when your company is mentioned?

What is the purpose of your business? Every product or service solves a problem or fills a need. The purpose of your business should begin with an active verb - to cook, to help, to deliver, to solve, etc.

What benefits do you provide? What benefits do your customers get from purchasing your product or service. Does it make their lives easier? Are they richer for the experience? Does it improve upon something they already do?

Who are your customers? Anyone who buys your product or service is not an acceptable answer. Write down a full portrait of your target customer. Think in specific terms. Instead of "people" use something like "parents," "Yuppies," "teenagers," "busy couples," or those "who want to entertain at home" or those "who decorate their own homes." The same holds true if your selling into the corporate marketplace.

Now write your mission statement. Use the space below to write your mission statement.

Is it longer than two sentences? Write it again. If you can't describe your business in two sentences, or if you need more than 25-30 words, then you haven't gotten down to the essence of your business. Try writing it again with these guidelines.

Go take a walk. You've been working hard on this statement, and you may be getting a little frustrated. Don't worry, it happens to everyone. Chances are you're getting too close to it and it's getting hard to focus. It helps to take a break and step back for a little bit. By the way, remember that this is how you're describing your business to someone who knows nothing about what you do.

Read it over again and rewrite it. Can you be more descriptive? Can you be more active? If you've used any jargon, get rid of it. If you put in any \$10 words, change them to terms anyone will understand.

Now that you're done, try it out on a friend or colleague. Once you think you've come up with a winning mission statement, it's time to audition it before a live audience.

Call up a friend, relative, colleague or anyone else who doesn't know exactly what your business does. Read them the statement you've created and ask them what they now think you do. Their answer will tell you whether your statement works or if you need to go back and hone it further. Write down their comments below.
