



Forget Mission Statements—Develop Your Company's Positioning Statement Instead

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Maybe it's time to shelve your company's marathon mission statement development sessions and focus on establishing a strong positioning statement instead...

I'm not a big fan of mission statements. Why? Because over the years, I have watched businesses waste an inordinate amount of time on this task—especially technology companies.

And to what end? To hang on a plaque in the lobby? To declare (on paper, mind you) that your firm focuses on “delighting customers” and “increasing shareholder value?” These types of empty platitudes are the marketing equivalent of nails on a chalk board.

I will concede that there was a time when the concept of developing a strong mission statement seemed to have a purpose—mainly to answer the question “*why do we exist*,” thereby providing a sense of direction for the company and its staff. Instead, many mission statements today fall flat. They are bland, uninspiring and full of meaningless cliches like “*paradigm*” and “*synergistically*.”

Could it be that they stumbled across the automatic “Mission Statement Generator, compliments of the Dilbert? This little online gadget generates a paragraph of nonsensical corporate babble each time you click “regenerate.” Obviously, this is a humorous spoof of the process, but the sad fact is, we've all seen mission statements that actually sound like they came from a Dilbert cartoon strip.

Even Lou Gerstner, upon joining IBM in 1993, didn't go down the mission statement path. When he came on board, IBM was stagnant from a lack of leadership and too much bureaucracy. Despite the prevailing view that a new mission statement was in order, Gerstner rejected this course of action. Why? Because he knew instinctively that the same bureaucrats that had the company tied up in knots would be the same people debating a new mission statement for months, even years. Instead, he initiated a bold, sales driven culture that focused on filling a market void (i.e. lucrative IT consulting contracts).

He focused *outwardly* and then set a course to implement programs that would achieve the goals set forth in the strategy. In its simplest form, he established a *positioning* statement, built a marketing strategy around it, then implemented it.

The positioning statement, therefore, can be a far more useful management exercise than the creation of a mission statement. In addition to addressing the “why do we exist” question of a mission statement, a positioning statement adds more depth by raising important external, *market-focused* questions:

- Who are we?
- What business are we in?
- For whom? (whom do you serve)
- What are the needs of that audience?
- Again whom? (who are your competitors?)
- What's different/why should someone care?

Perhaps it's time to shelve your company's marathon mission statement development sessions. Instead, devote your valuable time toward establishing a strong positioning statement to give your company the direction, clarity and purpose it needs to grow in today's competitive environment.

Next Issue: Positioning Unplugged...

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