

David Newns explores the benefits of mission statements

Are mission statements a North Star for your business or just 'woo-woo'? Can they point you in the right direction for growth or merely distract you from getting on with the job at hand? I have to admit, I'm a fan of the mission-driven business.

Temps de lecture : minute

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As Mark Twain said, "The two most important days in your life are the day you are born and the day you find out why." A company's mission is its indelible purpose and reason for being. So how do you make a case for one in your company and then actually put it on paper?

The benefits of writing a mission statement

It articulates exactly what mission you're on as an organisation to everyone involved with it. And that clarity in itself is massive for yourself and your team.

Every morning, when you have a list of 50 things to do, you can check which ones will get you further on your mission. If 10 are but 40 aren't, do more on those 10! It's a great way to keep your focus in check.

The same is true of your leadership team and wider team. They really need to know exactly what the company is trying to do—simply and succinctly—so they can make sure that they use their time best. Also, it helps to inspire and motivate them because everyone will know what you're trying to achieve as a company.

What you should include in a mission statement

Aim for something short and succinct. It's very easy to make one that's complex and long, but it's hard to make it short. So sum up everything you want to do in one or two lines. It's almost the two lines that if you're in a pub, and someone says, what do you do, you can just roll them off your tongue. And your team can do that as well. You have to work hard to convey the essence of your mission in a clear yet memorable and exciting statement, but the shorter the better. When you get it right, everyone remembers it and gets energised by it.



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Using a mission statement to attract investment

A mission statement shows investors that you clearly know what you're setting out to achieve and have a strong idea of how to do it. Equally, it can show them the high value you place on articulating your mission well in order to get people behind it. It also shows them that you care about your team enough to make sure they are focused on delivering the vision.

On an even more practical level, the investment manager at a fund has to communicate your mission internally to her or his decision makers, including their chief investment officer and the investment committee, in order to approve your investment. So they have to communicate your mission with pinpoint accuracy, and it's critically important that they do so using your language and not their own. So a succinct, unambiguous and motivating mission statement really can help you secure investment.

Key mistakes to avoid

Most mistakes come from rushing and not being thoughtful enough. People take shortcuts such as trying to copy other mission statements. This means it's a version of someone else's business, not yours, and doesn't show your company's DNA.

So for example you get companies copying Huel's 'Don't be a dick' (internal) motto, which might be inspiring and motivating for some, but not for others. Either way, don't just copy it because you like it, instead take the care and effort to understand what type of language is the best expression of your company's individual DNA.

Shortcuts can also lead to sloppier statements which should be succinct, vague ones that should be clear, and gaps that should be closed to create a short, super powerful and super easy to remember mission.

Can you change a mission statement?

You absolutely should change your mission statement. Being a startup is about being able to pivot. The plan you create at the beginning won't be the plan you execute.

When you change, you have to be clear and guide people through your reasons for why you're changing the mission, and make sure people are still aligned with it and excited about it. At the same time, it's important not to be held back by a mission either. So yes, change it, with good reason, and get buy-in!

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