



How to write a Mission Statement

By

Tim Berry

Updated in 2021



What is it about certain brands that keep us coming back? What is it about them that makes us spend more time, money, or effort over other options? Is it the price? Maybe the convenience? Or is it something more?

The brands and businesses that we really connect with do more than just supply a product or service. They showcase a purpose, a mission that we can get behind. This can be displayed in how they [interact with customers](#), the [organizations and communities they support](#) and even the way they develop their products. And there's no better way for a business owner to showcase this purpose, then through a well-written mission statement.

What is a mission statement?

A mission statement is a simple action-oriented statement that explains your company's purpose. It summarizes what your company does for customers, employees, and owners, and typically includes general descriptions of your organization, its core function, and [its goals](#). In short, you're explaining what you do and why you do it within a mission statement.

Depending on the focus of your business, your mission statement may be even broader. Explaining not just how you serve your customers and employees, but your community and the world at large. Some businesses even opt to separate this larger aspiration into what's known as a vision statement.

What is a vision statement?

A vision statement is exactly what it sounds like. It's [a vision for the direction of your company](#) and what it aspires to be.

If we were looking at OKR's (objectives and key results) this would serve as your larger objective. Your mission statement would then be the key results, or steps, you need to take to get there. Again, this is typically an aspirational representation of the purpose of your business. That doesn't mean the end goal of the statement is impossible, but it is meant to be something that you're pushing yourself, and your business, to achieve.

Mission statement or vision statement?

These two statements aren't really interchangeable. They both reflect the purpose and goals of your business, but serve completely different purposes. Your mission statement should serve as the roadmap to achieve your vision statement. And your vision statement should serve as the guiding light for the aspirations of your business.

These can be completely separate written statements for your business, or they can be combined into a more comprehensive mission statement. Having all three does allow you to utilize them for different business purposes, so it may be worth developing variations over time.

Speaking of variations, it's important to note that your mission statement will likely evolve over time as your [business grows](#) and changes. So, don't be afraid to make adjustments when it seems necessary and avoid looking for the perfect version of your mission statement.

Why write a mission statement?

I've had a 30-year love-hate relationship with mission statements. I've read thousands. I love it when a mission statement defines a business so well that it feels like strategy—which does happen—and I hate it when a mission statement is generic, stale, and completely useless.

Just because a traditional [business plan](#) often includes a mission statement isn't a reason to do one. If it's not going to be useful for you and help guide your business, don't bother. The vast majority of the mission statements are just meaningless hype that could be used to describe any business.

Don't fall into the trap of writing a mission statement just because some checklist or expert said you had to. There are actually sites that poke fun at how most mission statements use vague, high-sounding phrases to say nothing. You *should* write a mission statement if you want to add clarity to your business goals and you want to get your employees, investors, and customers to understand what your organization is all about.

Define your mission statement to develop your business.

**Easily write a business plan
that reflects your mission.**

Get LivePlan

How to write a great mission statement

Developing your company's first mission statement, or writing a new or revised one, is your opportunity to define the company's goals, ethics, culture, and norms for decision-making. The daily routine of business gets in the way sometimes, and a quick refresh with the mission statement helps you take a step back and remember what's most important: the organization has a purpose.

So how do you make a useful mission statement? Over the decades I've spent reading, writing, and evaluating [business plans](#), I've come up with a process for developing a useful mission statement, and it boils down to these five steps.

1. Start with a market-defining story

A really good [market-defining story](#) explains the need, or the want, or—if you like jargon—the so-called “why to buy.” [It defines the target customer or “buyer persona.”](#) And it defines how your business is different from most others, or even unique. It simplifies thinking about what a business isn't, what it doesn't do.

Imagine a real person making the actual decision to buy what you sell. Why do they want it? How did they find your business? What does it do for them? The more concrete the story, the better. And keep that in mind for the actual mission statement wording: “The more concrete, the better.”

This isn't literally part of the mission statement. Rather, it's an important thing to have in your head while you write the mission statement. It's in the background, between the words. If you're having trouble getting started, make a quick list of what your company does and doesn't do.

2. Define what your business does for its customers

Start your mission statement with the good you do. Use your market-defining story to suss out whatever it is that makes your business special for your target customer.

Don't undervalue your business: You don't have to cure cancer or stop global climate change to be doing good. Offering trustworthy auto repair, for example, narrowed down to your specialty in your neighborhood with your unique policies, is doing something good. So is offering excellent slow food in your neighborhood, with emphasis on organic and local, at a price premium.

This *is* a part of your mission statement, and [a pretty crucial part](#) at that—write it down.

If your business is good for the world, incorporate that here too. But claims about being good for the world need to be meaningful, and distinguishable from all the other businesses. Add the words “clean” or “green” if that’s really true and you keep to it rigorously. Don’t just say it, especially if it isn’t important or always true.

For example, Apple Computer’s 2020 mission statement is:

“Apple revolutionized personal technology with the introduction of the Macintosh in 1984. Today, Apple leads the world in innovation with iPhone, iPad, Mac, Apple Watch, and Apple TV. Apple’s four software platforms—iOS, macOS, watchOS, and tvOS—provide seamless experiences across all Apple devices and empower people with breakthrough services including the App Store, Apple Music, Apple Pay, and iCloud. Apple’s more than 100,000 employees are dedicated to making the best products on earth, and to leaving the world better than we found it..”

That one obviously passes the test of defining the company with flying colors. Nobody could mistake that mission for generic hype. And it’s an interesting change from the early mission as defined by founder Steve Jobs:

“To make a contribution to the world by making tools for the mind that advance humankind.”

Ikea, on the other hand, starts its mission statement with something that could be any company anywhere. “Our vision is to create a better everyday life for the [sic] many people.” To its credit, it goes on to define a “rest of the mission” that could only be IKEA:

“We make this possible by offering a wide range of well-designed, functional home furnishing products at prices so low that as many people as possible will be able to afford them.”

And note, in this mission statement, how Sweetgreen incorporates a world vision into a product-oriented mission statement:

“Founded in 2007, Sweetgreen is a destination for delicious food that’s both healthy for you and aligned with your values. We source local and organic ingredients from farmers we know and partners we trust, supporting our communities, and creating meaningful relationships with those around us. We exist to create experiences where passion and purpose come together.”

3. Define what your business does for its employees

Good businesses are good for their employees too or they don’t last. Keeping employees is better for the bottom line than turnover. Company culture matters. Rewarding and motivating people matters. A mission statement can define what your business offers its employees.

My recommendation is that you don’t simply *assert* how the business is good for employees—you define it here and then forever after make it true.

Qualities like fairness, diversity, respect for ideas and creativity, training, tools, empowerment, and the like, actually really matter. However, since every business in existence at least *says* that it prioritizes those things, strive for a differentiator and a way to make the general goals feel more concrete and specific.

Don’t worry about being fully unique

With this part of the mission statement, there's a built-in dilemma. On the one hand, it's good for everybody involved to use the mission statement to establish what you want for employees in your business. On the other hand, it's hard to do that without falling into the trap of saying what every other business says.

Stating that you value fair compensation, room to grow, training, a healthy, creative work environment, and respect for diversity is probably a good idea, even if that part of your mission statement isn't unique. That's because the mission statement can serve as a reminder—for owners, supervisors, and workers—and as a lever for self-enforcement.

If you have a special view on your relationship with employees, write it into the mission statement. If your business is friendly to families, or to remote virtual workplaces, put that into your mission.

You may not need to focus on employees

And this is rare in mission statements. The vast majority are focused on messaging for customers. My recommendation here is not the norm. I include it because it's good practice, even though not common.

While I consulted for Apple Computer, for example, that business differentiated its goals of training and empowering employees by making a point of bringing in very high-quality educators and presenters to help employees' business expertise grow. That was part of the culture and, to my mind, part of the mission; but it wasn't part of the mission statement. It could have been.

American Express, however, includes the team in its mission:

"We have a mission to be the world's most respected service brand. To do this, we have established a culture that supports our team members, so they can provide exceptional service to our customers."

4. Add what the business does for its owners

In business school, they taught us that the mission of management is to enhance the value of the stock. And shares of stock are ownership. Some would say that it goes without saying that a business exists to enhance the financial position of its owners, and maybe it does. However, only a small subset of all businesses are about the business buzzwords of "share value" and "return on investment."

In the early years of my business, I wanted peace of mind about cash flow more than I wanted growth, and I wanted growth more than I wanted profits. So I wrote that into my mission statement. And at one point I realized I was also building a business that was a place where I was happy to be working, with people I wanted to work with; so I wrote that into my mission statement, too.

However, this element too, as with the suggestion about including employees, is unusual. Few mission statements do it. That's understandable, since most mission statements are outward-facing only, aimed at customers and nobody else.

Still, some of the best mission statements incorporate a much broader sense of mission that includes, or at least implies, the mission of ownership.

Warby Parker, an eyewear company, does a great job at voicing a higher mission that includes customers, employees, and owners.

“Warby Parker was founded with a rebellious spirit and a lofty objective: to offer designer eyewear at a revolutionary price while leading the way for socially-conscious business.”

5. Discuss, digest, cut, polish, review, revise

Good mission statements serve multiple functions, define objectives, and live for a long time. So, edit. This step is worth it.

Start by considering developing a full mission statement for internal use and using a customer-facing subset for general publication. That’s common. Many companies have segmented mission statements, with sections set aside and categorized by type or goal. Use bullet points or sections if that works for you. Part of the reason people confuse mission with mantra and vision is that many businesses use them together, and many others also redefine them to fit their context. So what a company does for customers is often called vision, despite the formal definition.

Remember, form follows function, in mission statements, as in all business writing. Make it work for your business. Or don’t do it at all. If you want to call it a vision, and that works for employees and customers, then do that.

Cut out general terms

As you edit, keep a sharp eye out for the buzzwords and hype that everybody claims. Cut as much as you can that doesn’t apply specifically to your business, except for the occasional special elements that—unique or not—can serve as long-term rules and reminders. Unique itself, the word, means literally, the only one in the world. Use it sparingly. Phrases such as “being the best possible,” “world-class,” and “great customer service” mean little because everybody uses them. Having great customer service is way harder than writing that into a mission statement.

Read other companies’ mission statements, but write a statement that is about you and not some other company. Make sure you actually believe in what you’re writing—your customers and your employees will soon spot a lie.

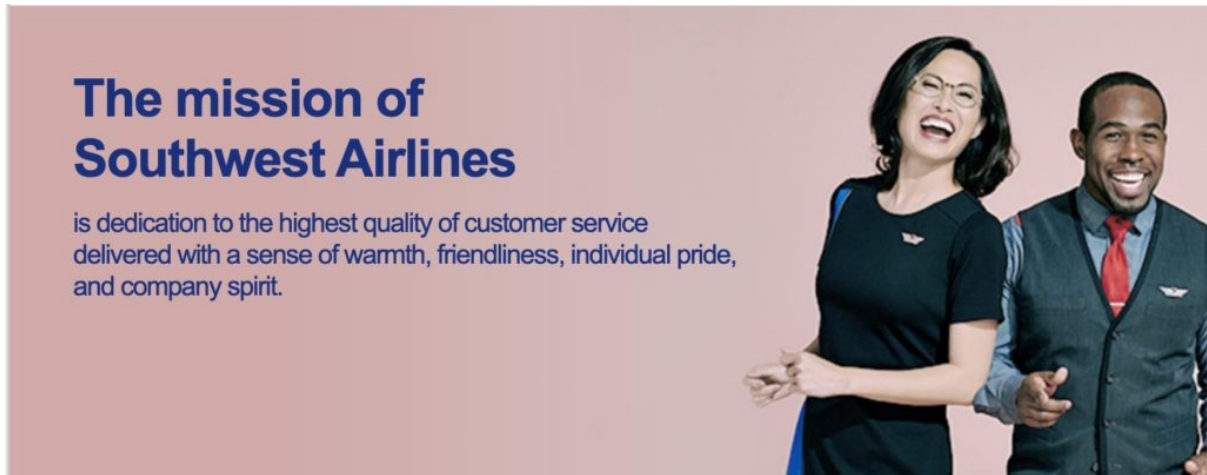
Then, listen. Show drafts to others, ask their opinions and really listen. Don’t argue, don’t convince them, just listen. And then edit again.

And, for the rest of your business’s life, review and revise it as needed. As with everything in a business plan, your mission statement should never get written in stone, and, much less, stashed in a drawer. Use it or lose it. Review and revise as necessary, because change is constant.

10 Examples of Great Mission Statements

If you're looking for some inspiration to get you started on your own mission statement, here are a few of my favorites.

1. Southwest Airlines



“The mission of Southwest Airlines is dedication to the highest quality of customer service delivered with a sense of warmth, friendliness, individual pride, and company spirit.”

What's most interesting about [Southwest's mission statement](#) is that they don't mention anything about getting from point A to point B. Their mission is all about how they differentiate what, these days, can be seen as a commodity experience. They also focus on their own employees and the “spirit of the company”, not just the customer experience.

2. Urban Outfitters



“A lifestyle retailer dedicated to inspiring customers through a unique combination of product, creativity and cultural understanding. Founded in 1970 in a small space across the street from the University of Pennsylvania, Urban Outfitters now operates over 200 stores in

the United States, Canada, and Europe, offering experiential retail environments and a well-curated mix of women's, men's, accessories and home product assortments."

[Urban Outfitters focuses](#) on the experience that they deliver and the focus on what they do. Their mission drives what their stores look like and what their goal is: to inspire. They also nod to their heritage of starting small and growing.

3. REI



"At Recreational Equipment, Inc. (REI) we believe a life outdoors is a life well-lived. We believe that it's in the wild, untamed and natural places that we find our best selves, so our purpose is to awaken a lifelong love of the outdoors, for all."

[REI's mission](#) focuses mostly on what it wants to do for its customers, but hidden in the mission statement is a mission to preserve the environment as well. Their focus on "getting outside" is what creates a connection between them and their customers.

4. Starbucks



“To inspire and nurture the human spirit – one person, one cup, and one neighborhood at a time.”

Starbucks expands on its mission statement by stating its core values. This is really an extension of the mission statement and explains how they focus on their customers, how they grow their company, and how they work with employees. You can read their values [here](#).

5. Walgreens

Feel more like you
We can help with side effects of cancer treatment.
[Get support](#)

“Walgreens’ mission is to be America’s most-loved pharmacy-led health, well-being, and beauty retailer. Its purpose is to champion everyone’s right to be happy and healthy.”

[Walgreen’s mission](#) really defines their goals: what they want to achieve and in what product categories they want to achieve it in. They also bring in their broader purpose when they talk about “everyone’s right to be happy and healthy.”

6. Slack



Make work life simpler, more pleasant and more productive.

Slack is the collaboration hub that brings the right people, information, and tools together to get work done. From Fortune 100 companies to corner markets, millions of people around the world use Slack to connect their teams, unify their systems, and drive their business forward.

“Make work-life simpler, more pleasant, and more productive.”

While [Slack’s mission statement](#) is short, it implies a lot. “Work” doesn’t just mean their customer’s work, it means their own work at their company. Their mission statement serves them both internally and externally.

7. The Coca Cola Company

PURPOSE AND VISION

“Refresh the world. Make a difference.”

Coca Cola takes a slightly different approach [with a statement of purpose](#) and then a vision statement. Their purpose is essentially their mission statement and says a lot for being so short. They want to refresh people in both body and spirit while making a positive impact on the world. Their vision also implies their goal of serving the entire world’s population which hits on their corporate and shareholder goals.

8. Patagonia



“We’re in business to save our home planet.”

Another [short mission statement](#) that says so much more than you would think at first glance. First and foremost, Patagonia doesn’t say that they are a non-profit – they state that they’re a business. And, this implies that they need to be a strong, healthy business to meet their goal of saving the planet. Their mission applies to their employees, their customers, their products, and their activism.

9. charity: water



“charity: water is a nonprofit organization bringing clean and safe drinking water to people in developing countries.”

[charity: water’s mission statement](#) is clear and to the point – it simply describes what it does and who it does it for. For most non-profit mission statements, this is enough.

10. Asana

Our Company

We're empowering teams to do great things together.

“Asana’s mission is to help humanity thrive by enabling the world’s teams to work together effortlessly.”

Similar to other mission statements, Asana blends a message about what they do with a higher goal of enhancing the world outside of their company. Yet, they still hint at their target market and goals of being a world-wide company, thus improving the lives of their employees and shareholders.

**Editor’s note: This article was originally published in 2018 and updated for 2021.*