

CREATE A COMPELLING MISSION STATEMENT

BY KATRINA LYKE

Most corporate mission statements contain industry buzzwords, are so complex that no one can remember them, and do nothing to inspire. You must be able to say in one clear sentence *exactly* what you do so that anyone hearing you will say to themselves, "Wow! Sounds like I could use some of that! I want to know more!" or else, "Interesting, but I don't need it right now." – and that response will be accurate. Having a clear and concise mission statement for your company becomes your guiding compass, your first impression, and your road to success.

Follow these ground rules for devising a winning mission statement:

Your mission is much more than your role.

Every time someone asks you, "So tell me – what do you do?" you encounter a "Marketing Moment of Truth". This oft asked question is your opportunity to help the listener discover that you have something they really need. Answering by handing them a label – banker, mechanic, accountant, whatever – and you are now at the mercy of their prejudices, ignorance and projections. You are in effect telling them: 'Go ahead. Drag out whatever image you have of accountants and slap it on me.' Do you really want them to do that? *Do not tell people what you are; tell them what you do.*

Your mission is not your To-Do list.

When writing your mission statement, contemplate the big picture and focus on your core values. Develop your mission first, then list your corresponding goals. Otherwise, you can be very busy following a To-Do list without creating anything worthwhile.

Your mission is not the same as your peers.

While crafting your mission statement, temporarily disassociate yourselves from your peers. We are often influenced by and take as our own the values and goals of those in our network, thus inhibiting self-discovery.

This distancing will allow you to concentrate on what is important and unique to your business.

Try this formula to get started:

I support: _____

In their desire to: _____

By means of: _____

The first blank identifies your market. If you start to get bogged down there, just write "my customers" and move on.

The second blank is the real heart and soul of the statement; it will contain the benefit or what your customers want that you can help them get.

The third blank is where you specify the actual services you perform which result in the benefit.



A few tips:

Eliminate jargon & technical terms.

If you insist on clinging to your own jargon, you will have a lot of trouble seeing what your customers see. An example: Cindy kept insisting that her customers all shared a "desire for good graphical design" until she finally acknowledged that most of her customers barely knew what "graphical design" was. Then she was able to see what her customers really had in common: They wanted professional-looking brochures that would help them get more business.

Look for a valued outcome, not a valuable feature.

Keep asking, "What do they get from that? Until your answer is an outcome that they value. An example: May owns a bookstore specializing in *escape* reading. She felt that her

mission was to provide "variety and wide selection" to her customers. That wording is almost right, but not quite. What do readers get from having variety and wide selection? They can be assured of finding exactly the kind of escape they are looking for. That is May's mission.

Do not assume your market values the things you do.

It probably doesn't. An example: Jenny does workshops on negotiation. Like most trainers, she saw "skills" as very important; giving people better negotiating skills seemed valuable in its own right. A hard-nosed salesman in her workshop pointed out that "good negotiating skills plus a buck will get you a cup of coffee in a cheap diner" – his way of saying that what was valued was not the skills but rather the results of successful exercise of those skills. In other words, we don't value the means, we value the results.

Some final examples:

- A trainer who did "workshops on humor, communication and futuring" realized that her mission was to "help create a positive work climate."
- One diversified consultant who was offering "employee involvement, participative management and problem solving" worked out his mission: "I help organizations construct a vision for their future that will enable them to thrive."
- A self-described "leadership coach" now tells people, "I help people lead their organizations out of chaos."

Now put your mission statement together and ask these questions: What is the beneficial outcome of your services? What problem do all of your customers have in common that you help them solve? What opportunity do all your customers face that you help them make the most of? The answer to these questions, because they really are the same question, defines what your customers have in common. It seems clear and obvious once you see it. It makes immediate sense to anyone hearing it and it will enable you to conquer marketing's moment of truth. That answer is your mission!

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Smith Barta & Company

CERTIFIED PUBLIC ACCOUNTANTS

RANDY YOUNG



The newest face at Smith, Barta & Company is Randy Young, Audit Senior. Randy joined the firm in November of 2003, just in time for tax season!

Randy comes to us with a wealth of accounting experience. Since graduating from Slippery Rock University in 1996, with a Bachelor of Science in

Business Administration and major in Accounting, he has developed a specialty in audit work, especially in the not-for-profit field, a perfect fit for Smith, Barta & Company. Randy also brings a depth of knowledge in tax and will be spending part of his time helping our clients with tax issues.

Since accepting his position at Smith, Barta & Company, Randy has relocated from Medina to the Stark County area with his family: wife, Vanessa and two young daughters, Cassidy and Clarissa. Most of his spare time is spent with his family, playing, chasing his toddler, changing the baby's diapers, and house hunting! He does find time, however, to serve as a Member of the Board for the International Soap Box Derby.

Randy is anxious to meet our clients and to do everything possible to help them achieve financial success. Welcome, Randy!

FIREWALLS : WHAT ARE THEY, DO YOU NEED ONE AND HOW ARE THEY USED?

BY MICHELLE SAMAHA

The Internet, one of the 20th century's greatest developments, allows people to access information globally and send e-mail in a matter of seconds. But, as we all know with every good thing, there is always a downside - you've probably heard the term "Firewall".

What is a firewall? A firewall is a structure intended to keep a fire from spreading. Buildings have firewalls made of brick to completely separate sections of the building and secure the people and property inside. In computer lingo, a firewall is simply a software program or hardware device that filters the information coming through the Internet connection into your private network or computer system. Internet firewalls are intended to extinguish the flames of Internet hell and to stop anyone on the outside from logging on to a computer in your private network.

A software firewall can easily be installed on the computers in your network that have an Internet connection. You've probably heard of

"Zone Alarm", "Black Ice", "Norton Personal Firewall", these are just a few of the many programs available. A hardware firewall can be a Cable/DSL router or Proxy Server such as the ones offered by Linksys.

Do you need a firewall? The Internet today is as close to the wild, wild west as most of us will ever experience. The only way to completely secure your computer is to turn it off or disconnect it from the Internet. A firewall is a major step to make your computer secure. For the best protection, a firewall should be used in conjunction with your Anti-Virus Software, Anti-spam and Privacy software.

How is a firewall used? A firewall, whether software or hardware, can be customized by using various filters to control the traffic in and out of your system. Once configured you can begin protecting your system from such things as a "Remote Login" where someone outside of your network is able to take control of your system or "Backdoors", a

special feature allowed by certain software applications that creates hidden access allowing control of some programs. Also you may be able to customize your protection by controlling email, macros, viruses, Spam, etc.

Putting a firewall in place is the best way to give you peace of mind and the knowledge that your system is as secure as possible.



FIVE REASONS YOU NEED A WILL

BY JEFFREY PELOT, CPA



Many people fail to appreciate the importance of a will, especially if they feel their estate is too small to justify the time and expense of preparing one. Even people who recognize the need for a will often don't have one, perhaps due to procrastination or disinclination to mention the subject of mortality with loved ones. Here are five basic reasons you should have a will:

To Choose Beneficiaries

The in testate succession laws of the state in which you live determine how your property will be distributed if you die without a valid will. For example, in most states the property of a married person with children who dies in testate (without a will) generally is distributed one-third to the spouse and two-thirds to the children.



1099 WARNING!

Due to the Jobs and Growth Tax Relief Reconciliation Act of 2003, changes to capital gains and qualified dividends tax rates are causing brokerage houses to reevaluate their portfolios and holding periods well after year end. This is expected to lead many issuers to reclassify dividend income and later provide corrected information causing the issuance of amended 1099 forms and amended tax returns.

Brokers sought a filing reprieve from the IRS to get additional time to calculate which dividends qualify for the special 5% or 15% tax rates. They wanted a one month extension of the January 31 deadline to mail the 1099's. But the IRS turned down a blanket extension for the industry.

The property of an unmarried, childless person who dies in testate generally will be distributed to his parents. These distributions may be contrary to what you want. In effect, by not having a will, you are allowing the state to choose your beneficiaries. Further, a will allows you to specify not only who will receive the property, but also how much each beneficiary will receive. In addition, if you wish to leave property to a charity, a will may be needed to accomplish this goal.

To Minimize Taxes

Some people feel they don't need a will because their taxable estate does not exceed the amount allowed to pass free of federal estate tax. However, your taxable estate may be larger than you think. For example, life insurance, qualified retirement plan benefits and IRAs typically pass outside of a will or of estate administration. But these assets are still part of your federal estate and can cause your estate to go over the threshold amount. Also, in some states (including Ohio), an estate becomes subject to estate taxes at a point well below the federal amount. A properly prepared will, along with other estate planning documents, is necessary to implement estate tax reduction strategies.

To Appoint a Guardian

If for no other reason, you should prepare a will to name a guardian for minor children in the event of your death without a surviving spouse. While naming a guardian does not bind either the named guardian or the court, it does indicate your wishes, which courts generally try to accommodate.

To Name an Executor

Without a will, you cannot appoint someone you trust to carry out the administration of your estate. If you do not specifically name an executor in the will, a court will appoint someone to handle your estate, perhaps someone you might not have chosen. Obviously, there is an advantage and peace of mind, in selecting an executor you trust.

To Establish Domicile

You may wish to establish domicile (permanent legal residence) in a particular state, for tax or other reasons. If you move frequently or own homes in more than one state, problems can arise. Each state could try to impose death or inheritance taxes at the time of your death, possibly subjecting your estate to multiple probate proceedings. To lessen the risk of this happening, you should execute a will that clearly indicates your intended state of domicile.

STANDARD BUSINESS MILEAGE RATE UP FOR 2004

For 2004, the standard mileage rate for deducting business driving will be 37.5 cents per mile, up from 36 cents in 2003. The mileage allowance deduction replaces separate deductions for lease payments (or depreciation if the car is purchased), maintenance, repairs, gas, insurance and license and registration fees. The taxpayer may, however, claim separate deductions for parking fees and tolls connected to business driving.

Taxpayers using up to four vehicles at a time for business will now be able to use the standard rate. Prior to 2004, those using more than one vehicle at a time couldn't use the standard rate but had to track actual expenses for each vehicle.

However, the majority of taxpayers who are eligible to use the mileage allowance in 2004 probably will be

better off forgoing it and deducting actual expenses plus depreciation if they buy new autos and use them more than 50% for business use. Under the bonus first-year depreciation allowance rules applicable to business autos, first-year depreciation on a new auto bought and placed in service in 2004 can be as high as \$10,710.



CORNER

BY KATRINA LYKE

CLIENT

Vickie Fehler, owner of M.E.C.A., a medical management organization, says, "In order to manage health care costs, you must manage health care." - and in her opinion that's through personal contact with her clients and healthcare patients.

Vickie founded M.E.C.A. (Medical Evaluations and Cost Containment Assistance, Inc.) in 1989 after working as a nurse in the managed care industry and finding it a very impersonal experience, especially for the patients involved. She vowed to try and improve the industry by offering personal assistance and on-site case management to those most affected while containing costs for her clients.

M.E.C.A. offers two main areas of help for its Insurance Company, Self-Insured Employer and Third Party Administrator clients, Medical Case Management and Utilization Management. Both of these services are handled by experienced and trained nurses and staff doctor to assist in controlling health benefit costs and assure each patient that they are receiving the appropriate level of care in a timely manner.

Medical Case Management Services include:

- Management, not monitoring, of catastrophic or chronic cases
- Coordination of care from diagnosis through rehabilitation
- Collaborative planning with physician, patient, family to establish patient centered goals
- Facilitation of positive communication between all parties
- Assurance of quality and appropriate care
- Determination of level of care
- Discharge planning to ensure continuity of care
- Selection of appropriate vendors of ancillary services
- Management of short and long term disability claims

Utilization Management Services offered are:

- Pre-certification to determine medical necessity
- Concurrent review to monitor appropriate level of care/services
- Pre-determination of services to ensure medical necessity
- Retrospective reviews
- Claim Reviews
- Negotiation of services during the pre-certification, retrospective and claim review process
- "Patient Centered" to keep the patient involved in their own health care
- Identification of Case management patients



**MEDICAL EVALUATIONS AND COST
CONTAINMENT ASSISTANCE, INC.**

Vickie and her staff consider themselves to be pioneers in Case Management with their innovative approach to managing health care and health care costs. She offers a bit of advice for anyone who finds himself or a family member staring at a health care crisis, "Call your insurance company to see if there is a case manager assigned and let that person

help manage the situation. You'll find the daunting process that much easier." Although a difficult and emotionally charged field, Vickie says the reward is worth the effort.

Don Keith, CPA and Partner of Smith, Barta & Company has been helping M.E.C.A. since the company's inception. Remembering back to 1989 when she started the business, Vickie says, "Someone once told me, 'Get a good attorney and a good accountant', I did a really good job choosing the accountant!" She's been very happy with her high quality service and notes that, "Whenever we have a problem, I call Don and he always has the right answer."

We wish continued success and a prosperous 2004 to Vickie Fehler and M.E.C.A.

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