



ask the expert

What is a positioning statement and how is that different from our mission and vision?

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Question. What is a positioning statement and how is that different from our mission and vision?

Answer. Successful organizations, whether nonprofit or for-profit, anchor their operational behavior to an agreed mission statement. The mission statement describes, in simple terms, the fundamental reason that the enterprise exists. It provides a foundation for the daily decision making and actions that must be undertaken. It also provides focus to prevent the organization from unknowingly entering into areas where lack of knowledge or market presence can cause difficulties.

Vision statements, on the other hand, define the expected state of the organization at some future date. They articulate goals related to factors such as enhanced scope or improved performance that would indicate success over time.

For nonprofits, the mission statement defines why we exist, and the vision statement highlights what we hope to achieve over time.

The problem with these two documents is that they are necessarily brief, and are therefore subject to misinterpretation. Mission and vision statements are used by many constituents of a nonprofit. The board usually formulates and approves these statements as part of its strategic planning process. Staff uses these statements to support day to day decisions. Volunteers use these statements to support their decision to work for a particular cause. Funders use these statements to fund organizations which are compatible with their funding goals. Community and political leaders use these statements to decide which organizations they will support.

Influencing customer perception is a critical element of successful marketing. Mission statements and vision statements tend to be

somewhat dull. The single mission statement and vision statement do not recognize the differing needs and perceptions of the above mentioned constituents. If you consider each of these constituents as a customer, then it is important to package the messages in a unique manner for each customer. This is where a positioning statement is used. Its purpose is to position information such as mission and vision statements in a way that significantly improves the chances of the reader making the correct decision. It specifically links the interests or "hot buttons" of the reader to the organization, to ensure that the reader takes the time to read the request and makes a favorable decision.

“Don’t assume that the mission and vision statements are all you need to explain your nonprofit’s existence to everyone.”

For example, the positioning statement to a potential donor would specifically link the donor’s known experiences and philanthropic preferences to the mission and vision of the organization. The positioning statement to a potential volunteer would link volunteer opportunities, activities and potential personal gratification to the mission and vision. For staff, positioning statements may focus on providing additional clarity and understanding by relating the mission and vision to specific day to day activities or to defining operational priorities.

So improve your marketing communications! Don’t assume that the mission and vision statements are all you need to explain your nonprofit’s existence to everyone. Communicate effectively! Take the time required to focus on the differing perceptions of each of your main constituent groups and put custom paint jobs (the positioning statement) on your communications. Effective positioning, whether verbal or in writing, will greatly improve your chances of success.

To learn more about how the Nonprofit Resource Center consulting services can help your nonprofit, call (941) 556-7102.

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