

Vision Statement Form and Function



Jonathan Babcock | PracticalAnalyst.com | Oct 20, 2008

When launching a new product (including projects to update existing ones) it is important that all stakeholders share a simple, focused vision of whose needs it will meet, what those needs are, the benefits it will provide, and how it will be different (read: better) than the competitor's product, or the current-state product.

Form

[Geoffrey A. Moore](#) introduced a template that has gained broad acceptance ([Craig Larman](#), [Karl Wiegers](#), [Jim Highsmith](#) and many others have referenced it), and that I've used successfully on a number of occasions. It's as follows:

- For [target customer]
- Who [statement of the need or opportunity]
- The [product (or project) name]
- Is [a product category]
- That [key benefit, compelling reason to buy or use]
- Unlike [primary competitive alternative, current system, or current business process],
- Our product [statement of primary differentiation and advantages of new product].

[Jim Highsmith posting on Joel on Software](#) provides an example mission statement using the Moore formula, and a Google search will provide others. Below is one example from [Beaupre & Co.](#):

For movie producers and others
Who depend heavily on post-production special effects,
Silicon Graphics provides computer workstations
That integrate digital fantasies with actual film footage.
Unlike any other vendor of computer workstations,
SGI has made a no-compromise commitment to meeting film-makers' post-production needs.

This format ensures that we address each of the key areas mentioned in my introductory paragraph.

Function

So, what are the benefits of having such a vision statement? If I thought long enough about it, I am sure I could name several, but because I'm writing a blog post and not a book, I'll just share a few for now.

“The Elevator Test”

One benefit is that the vision statement makes it easy to describe and socialize what the project is all about. [Per Highsmith](#), the vision statement “helps team members pass the elevator test — the ability to explain the project to someone within two minutes.”

Focus on the Customer

True customer need can be obscured by layers of management and bureaucracy. Everybody seems to know best, right? When the customer is named in the vision statement, that tells me, the business analyst, who I want to talk to first. In situation where it isn't possible to talk directly to the customer, a good product manager is invaluable. But, as a rule, I always like some time with the customer. Customer-driven solutions just seem to be the ones with the happiest endings.

While the vision statement itself can't prevent the customer's voice from getting lost in the shuffle, it provides something for the BA or PM to point back to and say, “hey, that sounds great, but does it align with the customer's needs?”

Scope Containment

Beyond the benefit of being able to concisely share what the project “*is*”, the vision statement may be as valuable in discerning what it “*is not*”. One of the key challenges is maintaining focus on the defined scope and objectives and not meandering off until what began as a simple sales reporting system becomes the decision support engine that will finally solve world hunger.

In a previous post, I mentioned the [importance of having a concise strategy](#) that everyone in the company knows, so products and initiatives that don't pass the “smell test”, or that don't align cleanly with the company strategy are scrutinized, and usually dropped from consideration.

The same is true, at the product level, with the vision statement. If features or functionality are proposed that don't align with the clearly defined vision and objectives of the project, then they probably ought to be considered separately or dropped altogether.

Read more: <http://practicalanalyst.com/2008/10/20/vision-statement-form-and-function/#ixzz0Fv2Z8mUP&B>

About the Author: Jonathan Babcock is a business analyst who thoroughly enjoys what he does. Practical Analyst is his outlet for sharing what he's learned, and for interacting with like-minded folks. To keep up with the latest on Practical Analyst, you can [subscribe](#) to the RSS feed, [follow Jonathan](#) on Twitter, or [view his profile](#) on Linked In.

