

GOOD STRATEGY IS BUILT
OUT OF THE HEART OF
YOUR BUSINESS—YOUR
MISSION AND VISION.

A Strategic Checklist for Organizational Health



If you lead a small business, your odds aren't great.

Not to be bleak, but the [U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics](#) says that, according to the data, a little more than half of small businesses make it five years, with only one of four reaching 15 years.

With that, however, we're not too concerned about the numbers. Why? Because most failed businesses have a few things in common. [One source boils it down](#) to six factors—not investigating the market, poor business planning, too little financing, bad location or marketing, an inflexible plan, and expanding too quickly.

What do these have in common? They all revolve around strategy.

Good strategy is built out of the heart of your business—your mission and vision. It takes a close look at the present to plan for the future, based on the foundation of your mission and vision.

This guide will walk you through building a strategic plan, step by step. A strategic plan has two main phases—where you are and where you want to go (with a little how we'll get there sprinkled in).

WHERE WE ARE.

Strategy starts with where your organization is today.

Imagine you're headed to Times Square in New York City. If you're in Central Park, you might jump on the train, bike, or walk (if you're trying to get your steps in). If you're across the pond—let's say, London—none of those options are going to cut it. They might seem like they're working until you realize your daily swim is a little longer than usual.

Sure, this analogy might seem unrealistic. But when it comes to building a strategy for your business, it's crucial to spend meaningful time examining your current context before jumping headfirst into your plans for the future. For example, you probably wouldn't want to start a coffee shop across the street from Starbucks. Where your organization is coming from doesn't determine how you get to where you want to go, but it definitely plays a part.

Let's get started. →



* The Inside—Your People & Mission.

Everything starts with your people—“stakeholders.”

At the most basic level, why does your business exist? Whether it’s to create social change, meet customer needs, or even meet your own needs, on some level, it’s about the people. It’s about your “target audience,” or customers, but also about your staff, board members, partners, affiliates, leads, donors, viewers, or any other group of people connected with your organization.

The first step in assessing where you are as a company is taking time to think about your people. Below is a sample template to get you thinking about your key stakeholders.

| Group name | Why does our business need them? | Why do they need our business? | What influence do they hold? | How invested are they (financially, socially, personally, etc.)? | Why do they choose our business rather than a competitor's? | What reservations do they have about our business? |
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Think of this template as an initial brainstorm. The truth is—your own assessment isn’t a complete picture of your stakeholders’ perspectives and insight. They are deeply connected with your organization, and their perspectives can bring valuable insight. You can dig a little deeper into their perspectives through:

- Direct Observation
- Written Surveys
- Phone or In-person Interviews
- Focus Groups

Once you have a clear picture of your business through the eyes of the people who know you best, it’s time to examine yourself through your own eyes. This starts with your mission and vision.

What's the difference between the two? While your mission explains what your company already does, your vision explains where you're going in the long run. Vision is bigger and broader than a short-term strategy, and isn't impacted as intensely as by the industry, competition, or trends. For example, here are our mission and vision statements:

- **Vision:** To be the best creative team for our clients so they can build a better world by engaging and impacting their communities.
- **Mission:** We empower mission-driven people to cultivate trust and communicate honestly through kind and creative brands.

In our case, our vision statement looks forward to who we want to be for our clients, and our mission statement puts action behind that, reminding us of what we're doing every day to get there.

For more on vision, feel free to bookmark these resources: [Casting Vision](#), [Writing a Foolproof Vision Statement](#), [Five Tips for Driving Vision in Ministry](#), [6 Questions to Diagnose An Organization's Vision Statement](#).

* The Outside—Your Surroundings.

Once you have a clear picture of your business, it's time to look outside, either at local businesses operating in your geographic area, or organizations serving similar people groups and meeting similar needs.

While you probably won't explore your competition to the same depth—please don't call up their customers or brand partners, we're begging you—thorough research can help you not only understand your competition, but also understand your local community on a deeper level.

Below are a few basic questions to ask about each of your competitors to get you started.

- Where are they located?
- Who do they serve?
- What makes their brand unique?
- What are their core products or services?

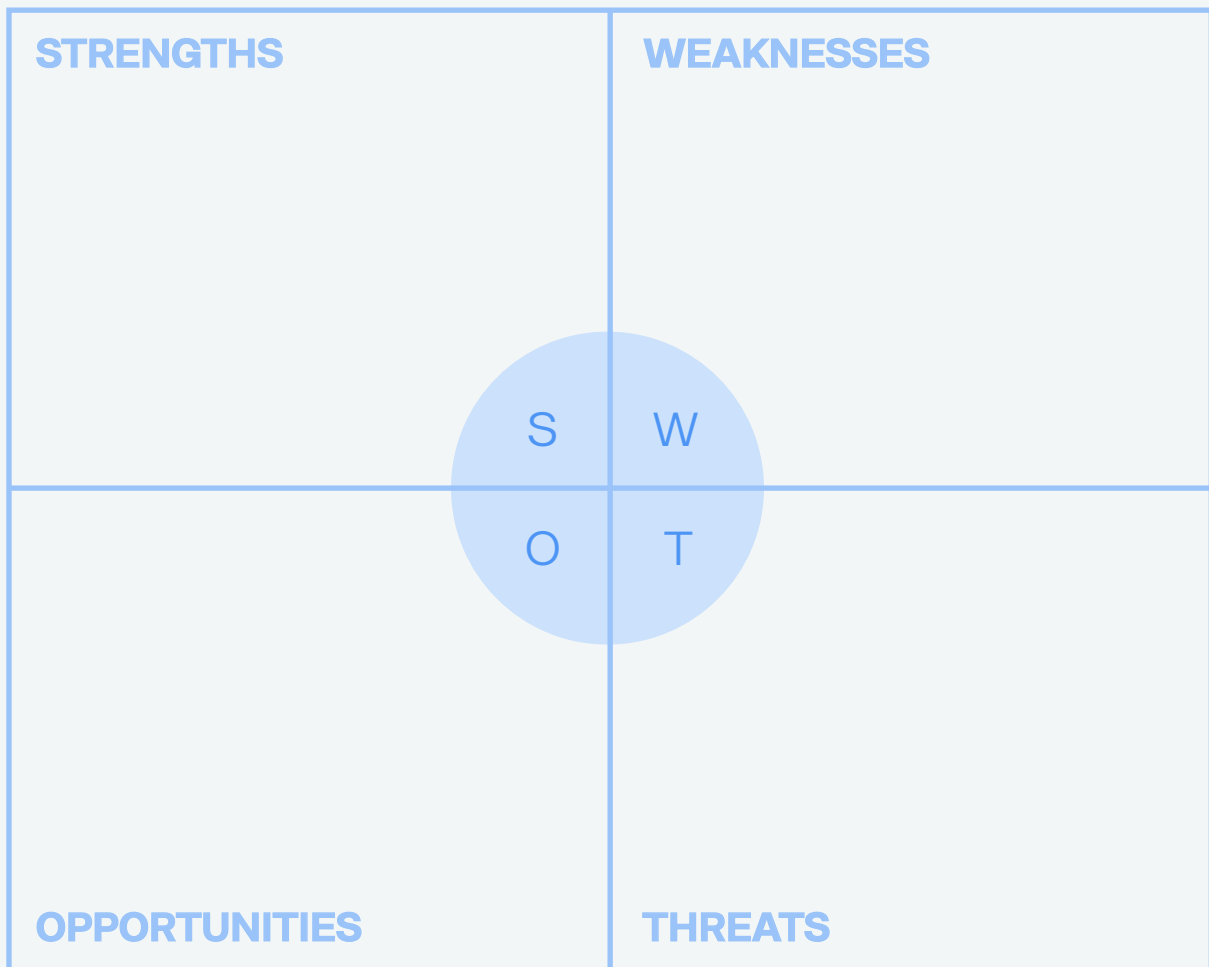
Being able to answer these questions about your competitors will help you gauge where your business is and what possible opportunities (or threats) are ahead—which brings us to our next stop.

* Bringing it all together—SWOT.

With all of your research, you should be able to create a comprehensive picture of where your business stands. A SWOT Analysis brings together your strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats as a foundation upon which to build a strategy.

It helps you understand your business's internal factors—strengths and weaknesses—and respond to the external factors—opportunities and threats. For example, you might be a local flower shop. A strength? You're in a high-traffic area. Your weakness? You don't have an online presence. You might have an opportunity for online sales and delivery but might be "threatened" by online competition or fluctuating flower prices.

There are things you can control and things you can't; a SWOT analysis helps you hone in on what those are and how to strengthen who you are while preparing for what you don't know.



WHERE WE'RE GOING.

Once you've clearly situated your company or organization in the road map of strategy, it's time to choose a direction, guided ultimately by your overarching vision. Since the heavy lifting of reflection and research is done, the rest is straightforward. Based on a framework proposed by [Harvard Business Review](#), we've broken the process into a few simple questions.

*** Ask.**

When it comes to growth, setting specific strategies can be overwhelming. When setting strategy, many companies often jump directly from research to objective setting. Even with lots of research under your belt, the opportunities to capitalize on and threats to address can feel overwhelming. However, Graham Kenny from Harvard Business Review proposes a single question to bridge the gap—

“What do we want from our stakeholders?”

At first glance, it can seem self-serving. However, in some sense, any organization—even those that are mission-driven—is seeking some sort of behavior from people, whether that is revenue from their customers, participation from the local community, support from donors, awareness from readers, innovation from staff members, or something else entirely.

Just like in the research phase, framing your goals around the people who matter most to your business brings relevance and clarity to the process. It bridges the gap between where you're at and where you're going, grounding your objectives.

| GROUP | ACTION |
|-------|--------|
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* Set.

When you have a clear idea of which actions your organization is looking for, it's easier to set objectives.

Ask your team. For each group, ask each department within your business to brainstorm ways that they can specifically work toward each desired action, inspired by your mission and vision statements.

Use hierarchy. Priorities —> Goals —> Objectives

Even with unlimited resources, it'd be impossible to accomplish everything in a year or two. Since your resources likely are limited, it becomes even more challenging. However, there is a sense of freedom in restriction—it helps you focus on what's most important. Your strategy should look ahead to the next few years, while being flexible enough to pivot when needed.

One way to accomplish this is to set three-year priorities, one-year goals, and quarterly objectives. [This resource from CFO Perspective](#) outlines the differences between each and gives some examples and inspiration to get you started.

* Measure.

Setting objectives is a great start, but measuring them ensures their success. Setting up KPIs—Key Performance Indicators—gives you a picture of your strategy in action. You'll quickly know what is and what is not working so that you can adapt and refine your objectives over time.

How do you choose which KPIs to measure? Work through each of your objectives, one-by-one. For each one, ask yourself, "What are a few things we can achieve that would make this objective true?"

To offer a few examples and get you started, [Asana has put together a guide to understanding and choosing KPIs](#) as a resource.

* Wrap it up.

A strategic plan is only as good as its implementation.

At this point, you're done with the plan, but it's time to share your strategy. One way is through a written strategic plan.

The goal is to get your employees not only informed about the direction you're headed but also excited about it. An [executive summary](#) serves to communicate in writing a high-level overview of your new strategic plan. It should also include your founding documents, such as mission, vision, and values, ultimately showing how where your organization is going aligns with what you set out to do.

In addition to road mapping your plan for your staff or other stakeholders, crafting an elevator pitch is a helpful way to boil everything down to the most essential elements. It can also give your team clear language to talk about where you're headed as a business over the next few years.

After putting words to your new direction, it's time to put it into action. All that's left is to create clear tasks for specific departments or individuals, align job descriptions to what you hope to accomplish, and support your team as you move forward.



STRATEGIC PLANNING IS A JOURNEY.



But with an accurate roadmap, you can better navigate your business from its current position toward a promising future, shaped by your mission and toward your vision. In theory, a successful plan is simple—it hinges on where you stand today and where you aspire to be tomorrow. But we understand that simple things aren't always easy.

Whether you're just starting out or have been around for decades, we hope this guide gives you a place to start when it comes to strategic planning for your business. If you still have questions or want to explore a partnership with Amenable, let's talk!

→ hello@weareamenable.com

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- thrivehive.com/questions-to-ask-about-your-competitors
- asana.com/resources/strategic-planning
- cfoperspective.com/4-simple-steps-with-template-for-an-effective-small-business-strategic-plan
- prosper-strategies.com/101-guide-strategic-planning-for-nonprofit-organizations