Excerpted From:
Entrepreneurial Small Business

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the highest quality products and service available in the seasoning industry.” Typically, a mission statement talks in terms of what will make a difference for the customer or the industry. It rarely discusses profits, but it often mentions the entry wedge that follows from the firm’s strategy discussed in Chapter 7. A few more examples of mission statements from small firms are:

- BabyGenie.com (Fort Lauderdale, Florida): The mission of BabyGenie.com is to become one of the best online resources for young mothers and repeat parents.
- Bob Victor’s (Topeka, Kansas): Our GOAL is to serve YOU, the custom picture framing and professional portrait photography industries, with molding manufactured from carefully selected American solid hardwood.
- Fantastic Gift Baskets (Raleigh, North Carolina): The family at Fantastic Gift Baskets puts the same care and love into designing our gourmet gift baskets as you would... if you had the time.

Mission statements can get long. Since they are usually oriented toward those inside the firm or to formal investors, mission statements tend to cover everything that is truly important. This might include the major competitive advantages of the firm, its position in the industry, and its attitudes toward customers, competitors, and the environment. Remember, however, that the best mission statements are simple, short, and direct. A mission statement that sounds like it was produced by the Dilbert Mission Statement Generator (<http://www.dilbert.com/comics/dilbert/games/career/bin/ms.cgi>) may initially sound impressive, but will ultimately fall short of describing your business’s purpose.

The Elevator Pitch

An elevator pitch is an action-oriented description of your business that is somewhat longer than a vision statement or tagline. It is designed to open the door to a more in-depth dialogue. Even when it doesn’t lead to any specific business, this information about your business should be memorable enough so that the listener can tell others about your business. The idea of the elevator pitch is that you are alone with a prospective customer or investor for the length of an elevator ride, say, around 30 seconds. That comes out to 100 words or less. This description is used in one-on-one business

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**Going up?** Each year, Wake Forest University’s Babcock Graduate School of Management holds its annual elevator pitch contest. Teams must progress through a rigorous weeding-out process to advance to the semi-finalist stage, where they get the chance to present their pitch to real venture capitalists and experts on a two-minute elevator ride. To read more about this year’s contest, visit [www.mba.wfu.edu/elevator/index.html](http://www.mba.wfu.edu/elevator/index.html).
settings and when someone asks for more detail after hearing your concept. In a time when politicians develop sound bites and a good phrase can make a product (Altoids, for example, are “curiously strong”), having a high-quality concept or elevator pitch for your business is more important than ever.20

CellTunes: You hear it, you got it! Ever wanted to buy a tune you heard on the radio but missed the name? Well, CellTunes is the instant gratification music ordering service. CellTunes lets you buy the songs you hear on your favorite FM radio, AM radio, or Internet radio station with a single cell phone call. CellTunes tracks the songs playing on your favorite stations and can download the song to you or to your account at services like iTunes or PressPlay. CellTunes is demonstrating its technology and seeking seed investors. CellTunes makes song ordering faster and easier than ever before—you hear it, you got it!

The above elevator pitch leads with the hook—the frustration people have felt at not being able to recall a song or find it to buy. It follows up with the purpose of the service—helping people obtain the song. Because this pitch is for a new type of service, it gives the listener more details about how it works than may otherwise appear in an elevator pitch. For a familiar type of business, you might talk instead about what makes your firm unique or superior to the competition. The pitch ends with where the business is now—seeking money from seed investors. This is about 100 words and would take about a minute to say. Note that a lot of it sounds like a sales pitch, and that is intentional. Listeners might be customers or investors, but either way, the goal is to sell them on the idea and their need for it. With this background, Skill Module 8.1 explains how to craft an elevator pitch.

**How to Write Your Elevator Pitch**

Elevator pitches have four success factors: the hook, the purpose, the what and where, and the delivery.

First, find a hook—something about your product or service that people would remember and take to heart. “We tutor kids others call too difficult.” “When government or industry wants to find the newest businesses, they come to us.” “We are one of the nation’s biggest suppliers of parts for old Corvettes.”

Stan Mandel supervises Wake Forest University’s Elevator Pitch Competition, so he knows pitches. He suggests using analogies. If you’re planning a large, discount pen store, you might say “We will be a Wal-Mart for pens.” For CellTunes, it might be “We’ll be the Home Shopping Network for music.” It helps people quickly understand your firm. Great pitches or concepts aim to get the listener to ask questions or take some other form of “next step.” Stan suggests different pitches for different sorts of audiences—investors, customers, suppliers, and so forth.

Second, focus on the purpose your product or service serves for the customer. Do not talk skills (“I am a graphic designer.”); talk about how you make customers happy (“I produce designs that sell books!”).

Third, tell the listener the business’s situation: where the business “is at”—if it’s a start-up, state what the business is seeking (funding, partners, distributors, etc.). If it is operating, tell the listener where he or she can buy the product or service.

Once your elevator pitch is written, you need to become conversationally perfect in your delivery. You want to be able to give the pitch or concept dozens, even hundreds, of times. Yet it is important that the pitch does not sound memorized. It needs to sound like regular conversation, preferably a conversation whose topic excites you. To achieve this, you must master the material, and then keep working on it so that it becomes a natural part of what you say to others. Have family and friends listen to it. Consider using a video camera to see how natural you seem when making the pitch. Remember, the elevator pitch is often the first real insight people have about your business, so it is essential to have a pitch that flows and sells for you.