



THE ELECTRONIC COTTAGE

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About the Cover

● Frank Serafine, whose new involvement with Paramount Pictures is detailed on page 13, is seen in his own studio complex. Soon, he tells us, it will be replaced by an all new complex, but that's a story for a future issue.

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Strategic Planning for the Small Studio

The creation of a strategic plan, business plan, or long-range plan is often perceived as something reserved for the "big" studio or business. It is true that the larger businesses are most likely to engage in such planning processes. While our business is small by any definition, we developed a strategic plan

and discovered that it was an extremely valuable exercise.

Of course, it is best for each organization to develop its own set of definitions...

A PROCESS OF ORGANIZATION

Through the development of the plan we learned what our "unique competencies" were, what goals we want to be moving toward in the future, and as a result, we were able to focus our energies in a much more organized fashion. Thus, we have been able to re-

alize some of our goals and re-define others. In fact, the process of developing the plan was as valuable as the resulting document itself.

What we have done is provide an explanation of the strategic planning process so that other small studio owners may utilize this technique. The plan that is developed is useful not just to the operation and organization of the studio, but is tremendously valuable when seeking bank financing for some piece of equipment. It shows the lender that the business is well-organized, has a direction and can show how the equipment sought will help to achieve the business objectives. It will even help to de-mystify the recording or sound profession just a bit.

Rick Shriver wrote "Atmosound: A Construction Story," in our September/October 1987 issue. He is co-owner of Atmosound, McConnelsville, Ohio, with Jeff Mercer and David King.



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In order for the strategic plan to become a usable document for the person not familiar with our profession, it is best to begin with the development of some operational definitions. For our planning, this meant defining "sound reinforcement," "public address," and "recording services" especially as they applied to our operations. With these definitions as a preface, the rest of the plan is readable and understandable, even for a banker.

Of course, it is best for each organization to develop its own set of definitions, but for us the distinctions were made:

"Sound reinforcement: systems typically composed of many input sources (mics, tape, etc.) with few output locations. (i.e. stage shows, musical acts, etc.)"

"Public address: systems which typically have few inputs (e.g. a single mic) but many output locations. (i.e. a paging system.)"

Finally we included a brief orientation to studio and remote recording as it applied to our situation.

With some understanding of the language of the business as a starting point, the second step is to outline the

planning process which will be utilized throughout the process. We have adopted a model of strategic planning (Figure 1).

The suggestion in this visualization is that environment (comprised of competition, economy, geographic markets, clients and technology) and the organization (affected by the mission statement, personnel, technical resources and financial resources) must both be considered in formulating the long and short-range objectives of the organization. From these objectives, the strategies are devised for the accomplishment of the organizational goals.

Ultimately, a niche in the marketplace must be identified.

STATEMENT OF MISSION

Step three in the preparation of the plan should be the articulation (or development) of the mission statement. Ideally this should begin with a

single sentence which states very simply what the business is about:

"It is the mission of *our studio* to provide professional audio services and consulting to the tri-state region at the lowest possible rates."

This basis for the mission statement should next be amplified through a series of supporting statements which develop more fully what the business is really about, what sets it apart from the rest and what special competencies allow that. This might include background and training of the personnel, the quality of equipment, the nature of the studio environment, or emphasis on turn-key packages in sound reinforcement.

With the above as prefatory material, step four of the plan should include more detailed information about the organization. Some historical background, current status and structure, projects under way and an autobiographical sketch of the personnel are all important components. Again, the focus of this section is the reinforcing of those aspects of the business that make it different from other similar businesses. Ultimately, a niche in the marketplace must be identified. In the



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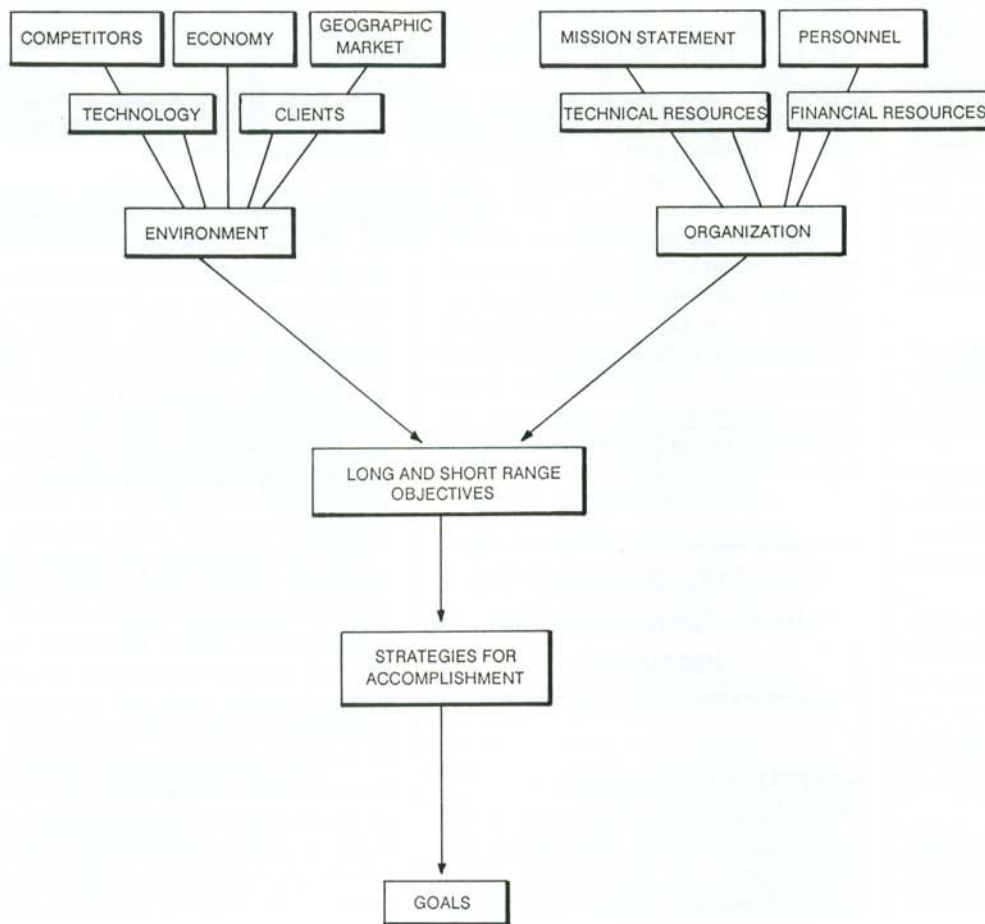


Figure 1. A flow chart of strategic planning.

section on personnel it is wise to include current resumes, along with a paragraph addressing the unique capabilities these people bring to the organization.

MARKET DEFINITION

The fifth task, and last before articulating the "plan" itself, is to define the market. This must include a geographical analysis of the area from which clients will be drawn, as well as an analysis of who those clients are. Any examination of the market must also include the competition. That should be an honest appraisal of their strengths and weaknesses. In our profession, one must also recognize industry trends such as new technologies, economic climate and increasing specialization. Trade periodicals are obviously an invaluable source for this information and should be consulted regularly and cited in the planning document.

If all of the above has been honestly and thoroughly executed, the business of planning a strategy may begin.

Many authors writing on strategic planning have suggested that in light of all the factors we have discussed above (the organization, personnel, re-

sources, environment, etc.), we should attempt to identify the "key factors to success" (Kenichi Ohmae, "The Secret of Strategic Vision," *Management Review*, April 1982, pp. 9-13). Step six, then, is identifying those factors which, when under our control, will assure the successful attainment of the organizational goals. Further, those factors which cannot be controlled (called "limiting factors" or constraints) and ways to overcome them must be identified. This will further increase the probability of success. Ultimately, the organizational goals and objectives must be defined relative to these factors.

**Each strategy statement
must include the cost
associated with it.**

In our business it seems that the key factors to success are having the equipment the client requires, at a price the client will find attractive, having the expertise to operate this equipment to the satisfaction of the client, and the ability to do all of this in an aestheti-

cally pleasing environment. Obviously this is something of an over-simplification, but may serve as a point of departure for individual planning projects.

SETTING THE OBJECTIVE

Now we come to the seventh step—setting of objectives. (This will lead to the establishment of strategies for their accomplishment.) Short-range objectives come first and address those things which can be achieved in the next two years. For our business, the short range included some financial objectives, physical plant improvements and market share objectives.

Long-range objectives, which address the three-to-five year period, will include some logical extensions of the short-range objectives, but may also include some new areas. Again, for us, the long-range objectives involved increases in receipts, studio development and improvements, and exploring of some "new markets."

As with any objective-setting exercise, the caveat must be kept in mind that objectives should be realistically attainable, but ambitious enough to challenge the organization. It is equally important to keep in mind that quantity is

not important; four or five well-written objectives for each of the above categories (long and short range) are quite sufficient.

Each strategy statement must include the cost associated with it.

STRATEGIC PLANNING

Finally, the strategy may be developed. This is simply a series of statements which articulate how the objectives may be reached. These will be action-oriented statements that include the person(s) responsible for accomplishment. For example, we divided our strategy into three broad areas (marketing, equipment acquisition and physical plant) and then came up with a series of steps under each area which would facilitate the realization of our objectives. Each strategy statement must include the cost associated with it.

So, if an objective of the business is to increase gross receipts by 25 percent for the year, the strategy for accomplishing that might include a marketing function. One part of that marketing may be actively soliciting more demo work from bands by preparing sample tapes to distribute, or developing brochures to place at musical instrument retailers, or mailing newsletters to musicians identified through the American Federation of Musicians. Naturally, raising receipts may involve other kinds of strategies than marketing.

We came away from this process with a clearer picture of what we were doing and how to do it best.

With all of this completed, we placed the entire document into a three-ring binder. To it we added photographs, examples of brochures, business cards, newspaper clippings, press releases, and any other relevant materials. As mentioned at the outset, this package makes an excellent marketing tool for seeking financing. It will explain the nature of the industry in general as well as thoroughly explaining the structure and operation of the particular organization. It demonstrates that the busi-

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— Ian Eales, Recording Engineer, Los Angeles

"I insist on Monster for all my recordings. It lets me capture all the sound that's missing with other cables."
— Jeff Balding, Recording Engineer, Nashville

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— Ed Bannon, TAJ Soundworks, Los Angeles

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— Bob Hodas, Recording/Concert Engineer, Sausalito, CA

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— Randy Kling, Mastering Engineer, Disc Mastering, Nashville

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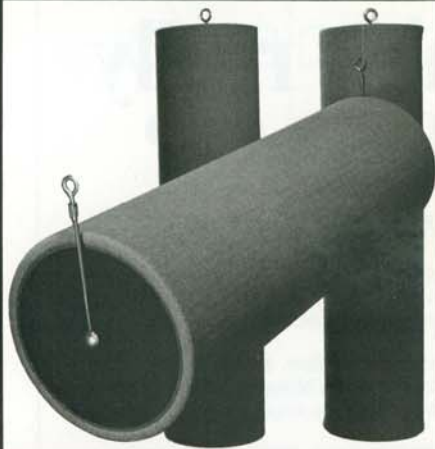
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ness is well thought out and has a definite direction. It clearly shows how certain items and projects will help the business move toward the realization of its goals.

We came away from this process with a clearer picture of what we were doing and how to do it best. We have a prioritized equipment acquisition plan, and a plan for continuing improvements to our studio. Surprisingly, five years after writing our first plan, we are very close to where we wanted to be in 1988. Of course, for the strategic plan to be useful, it must be periodically adjusted and updated. It is worth the effort.

EQUIPMENT ROSTER

Consoles:

Carvin 1688

Biamp 1221

Teac IIA

Amplifiers:

Phase Linear Laboratory Standard

Monitors:

JBL L110

JBL 4408

Yamaha NS 10M

Fostex

Microphones:

AKG

Electro-Voice

Sennheiser

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Superscope

Headphones:

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Sony

Koss

Sennheiser

Yamaha

Outboard processors:

Lexicon

dbx

Yamaha

CBS Laboratories

ADC

Tape machines:

Tascam 38

Tascam 32

Cassettes: AKAI, Sharp, Electro-Sync

Instruments:

(Guitars)

Gibson Les Paul Custom (2)

Fender Telecaster

Yamaha FG 360 (2)

Cort bass w/Steinberger tuner

Gibson ES-335

Gibson ES-175

(Amplifiers)

Marshall 100 watt

Fender Showman

Fender Bandmaster

Sunn Coliseum Lead

Spectra JMF

Ampeg B-15

Fender Vibrolux


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