

Reflection essay on strategic plan, part i: conceptualizing a business

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A bowl of ice cream is not just a bowl of ice cream anymore. It is an experience. Ben & Jerry's has elevated the 'ice cream experience' to a whole new level with their company philosophy, the product they offer and the service they provide to their customers. It is important to understand how the vision, mission and values of a company can affect the business. Lip service is not something any consumer deserves, and Ben & Jerry's has taken this to heart. Their three-part mission statement, progressive value statement and their stand on current social issues show they believe in their product and the business they have built.

In the following paragraphs, this author will define and present the mission statement, vision, values, strategic direction, and how the needs of the customers are met, as well as the competitive advantage of Ben & Jerry's.

Mission Statement On May 5, 1978, after splitting a \$5 fee for an ice cream making class and scraping together \$12,000, Ben Cohen and Jerry Greenfield opened the doors to the first Ben & Jerry's storefront in Burlington, Vermont (Ben & Jerry's, n. d.).

In 1980, the company expanded the single storefront to include a packaging factory in order to distribute their original ice cream flavors to grocery stores and small locally owned stores (Ben & Jerry's, n. d.). By 1981, the brand was so popular, the team decided to branch out and open their first franchise in another Vermont town. Over the next ten years, the customer base for Ben & Jerry's spreads across the nation and finds itself an international product in 1994 when it gets distributed to the United Kingdom (Ben & Jerry's, n. d.).

According to Pearce and Robinson (2009), a mission statement is, “ the unique purpose that sets a company apart from others of its type and identifies the scope of its operations in product, market, and technology terms,” (pg. 25). Ben & Jerry’s has taken a very strong environmental stand since inception and can be seen in their mission statement. Benjerry.com (n. d.), states: Ben & Jerry’s is founded on and dedicated to a sustainable corporate concept of linked prosperity.

Our mission consists of 3 interrelated parts: Social Mission: To operate the Company in a way that actively recognizes the central role that business plays in society by initiating innovative ways to improve the quality of life locally, nationally and internationally Product Mission: To make, distribute and sell the finest quality all natural ice cream and euphoric concoctions with a continued commitment to incorporating wholesome, natural ingredients and promoting business practices that respect the Earth and the Environment Economic Mission: To operate the Company on a sustainable financial basis of profitable growth, increasing value for our stakeholders and expanding opportunities for development and career growth for our employees (Activism, Mission Statement).

Vision As stated by Pearce and Robinson (2009), the vision statement is, “ a statement that presents a firm’s strategic intent designed to focus the energies and resources of the company on achieving a desirable future,” (pg. 37). At Ben & Jerry’s (n. d.), the Social Mission for the company most reflects the corporate vision: “ Within both our domestic and international trade, we continue to seek out progressive, values-driven strategies and corporate practices that can be integrated throughout the company’s internal business

operations as well as play a central role in our external relationships,” (SEAR Report). Values Pearce and Robinson (2009), state the company philosophy, or value statement, “ reflects or specifies the basic beliefs, values, aspirations, and philosophical priorities to which strategic decision makers are committed in managing the company,” (pg. 30). Ben and Jerry’s values can be clearly sorted into sections to represent culture, social responsibility and ethics.

At benjerry.com (n. d.), culture can be seen in the following portion of their progressive value statement: We have a progressive, nonpartisan Social Mission that seeks to meet human needs and eliminate injustices in our local, national and international communities by integrating these concerns into our day-to-day business activities. Our focus is on children and families, the environment and sustainable agriculture on family farms (Activism, Mission Statement). Further, a consumer can see that social responsibility can be seen in the next part of their value statement: Underlying the mission of Ben & Jerry’s is the determination to seek new and creative ways of addressing all three parts, while holding a deep respect for individuals inside and outside the company and for the communities of which they are a part (Activism, Mission Statement).

Finally, the ethical value that Ben and Jerry’s portrays is evident in the last section: Capitalism and the wealth it produces do not create opportunity for everyone equally. We recognize that the gap between the rich and the poor is wider than at any time since the 1920s. We strive to create economic opportunities for those who have been denied them and to advance new models of economic justice that are sustainable and replicable (Activism,

Mission Statement). By following these guiding principles, Ben & Jerry's has continued with an environmentally friendly, consumer responsive business that has grown to be a leader in these areas throughout the food industry. Strategic Direction The vision, mission, and values for Ben & Jerry's tie closely together.

There is a strong desire to maintain an environmentally friendly atmosphere, reduce their footprint, and help not only their own employees, but also the employees of their competitors. In 2011, the company focused on three goals: 1. Use the company to further the cause of Peace and Justice, 2. Make ice cream that is aligned with their values, and 3. Take the lead promoting global sustainable dairy practices (Ben & Jerry's, n. d.). Each of these goals had numerous parts to them, such as moving to sustainable packaging, reducing emissions, promoting rBGH free cows for dairy use, and helping the growth of the Ben & Jerry's Foundation with an additional \$2. 2M contribution based on the 2010 sales (Ben & Jerry's, n. d.).

Customer Needs and Competitive Advantage

Ben & Jerry's bases their interpretation of the customer's needs from their own preferences and the current trend towards all natural, environmentally friendly products. By offering products that use hormone free dairy, cage-free and free-range eggs, and limiting their global footprint, the consumer feels they are also contributing to a 'greener' America. It is in this area Ben & Jerry's also has a competitive advantage. The trend for the last decade has been to reduce pollution, recycle more and be sustainable. For Ben & Jerry's, this is not a new concept, but one they have always touted since inception. This is one trend that has helped the company succeed and push forward

with their goals even further because of the support of their customer base.

Conclusion

This author has discussed the mission statement, vision, values, strategic direction, and how the needs of the customers are met, as well as the competitive advantage of Ben & Jerry's. Ben & Jerry's does not offer Lip service, and their product ingredients show their intent to maintain a high quality, GMO-free product. Their mission statement, values, and outlook on current social issues show they believe in their product. Chunky Monkey, Cherry Garcia, or Phish Food - It is an experience. Ben & Jerry's has maintained their company philosophy in the way they do business, the product they offer and the service they provide to their customers and community.