



EVERY PROJECT NEEDS AN INSPIRING PRODUCT VISION

Find the true north for your project and follow it.

ABSTRACT

The product vision is THE true north. It is as the French say, the “raison d’etre” for a project. In other words, it is the reason why the entire project to create a product(s) exists. Without a product vision, there is no direction and little chance of creating a useful working product.

By U.S. Digital Service :: Executive Office of the President

Every Project NEEDS an Inspiring Product Vision

What It Is!

In order to have an inspiring product vision, project teams must be clear on the problem that they want to solve! This problem should be one about which they are passionate and one that inspires creativity in solving it. Once they are clear on the problem, then they can move forward to creating the vision for how to solve the problem.

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Product Vision Components

Each product vision should consider the following when it is being created:

- For (*target customer*)
- Who (*statement of the need or opportunity*)
- The (*product name*) is a (*product category*)
- That (*key benefit, compelling reason to buy*)
- Unlike (*primary competitive alternative*)
- Our product (*statement of primary differentiation*)

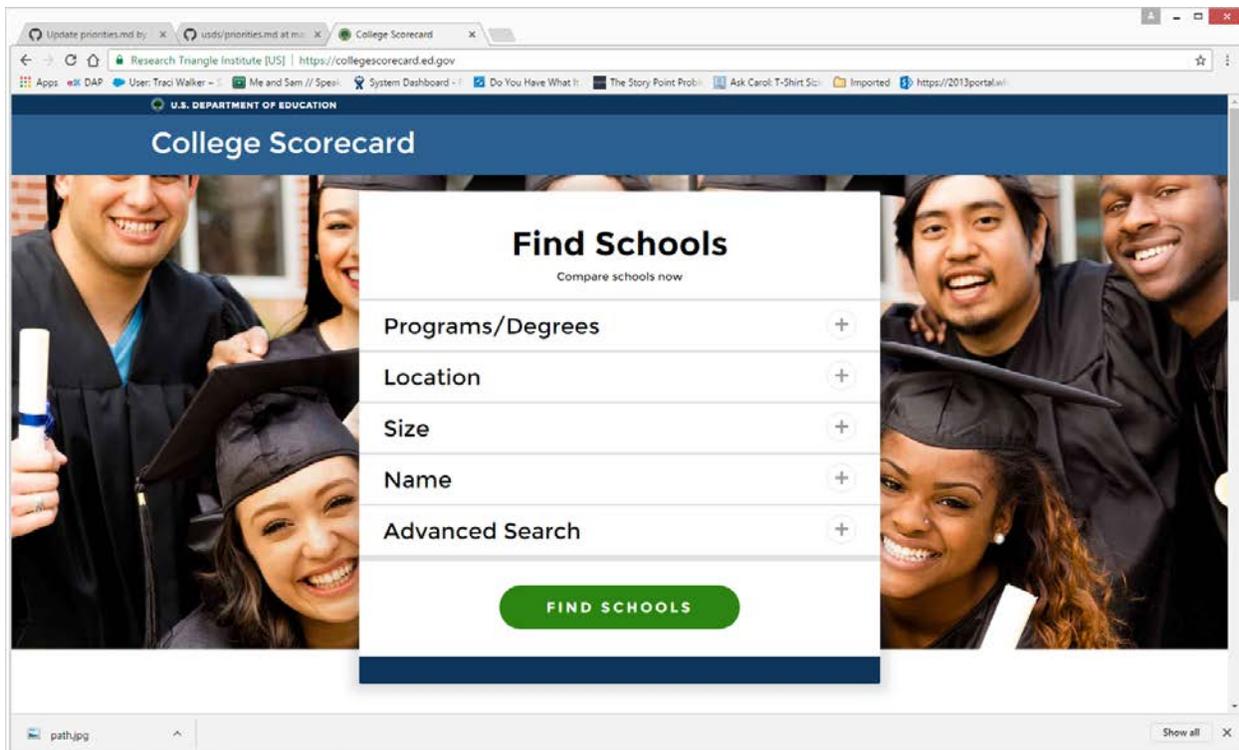
Product visions may not have all of the elements as outlined in the above, however, considering those elements will help create focus on what is the vision. For example, the following product vision for Toys R’US is “put joy in kids’ hearts and a smile on parents’ faces,” answers all of the elements above:

- For: children and parents
- Who: children need joy and parents need smiles
- The *games, trucks, dress-up clothes, ...* are toys
- That *brings happiness*

Steps to Creating a Product Vision

1. Describe the product motivation

To choose the right vision, teams should ask themselves why they are excited to work on the product, why they care about it, what positive change the product should bring about, and how it will shape the future. For example, the product vision for College Scorecard from the U.S. Department of Education is “Engage and educate potential college students of any age or background, and those that support and advise them, to find the schools best suited for them” The statement concisely captures the intention behind the site and describes the experience and results users and customers should experience.



2. Be clear on the difference between the product and the vision for it

Don't confuse the two. The former is the motivation for developing the product; the latter is a means to achieve the overarching goal. For example, "Engage and educate potential college students of any age or background, and those that support and advise them, to find the schools best suited for them," is the product vision. The product(s) is the thing(s) that make that possible:

1. Streamlined website that is compatible with all browsers and mobile devices
2. Connected databases that quickly process inputs and deliver relevant results
3. Easy to use online forms...

The vision is the true north for the project team. It is the reason why the team exists and the reason why the project team is doing all the hard work needed to make the product(s)!

3. Strategy to get to the goal is separate

The product strategy is the sequence of products or milestones that are planned to realize the vision. These can be different or related products OR can be different versions of the same product. A strategy that is separate from the product vision allows for any needed changes in how to fulfill the vision (pivot).

A good tool for describing both the product vision and the product strategy is the Roman Pichler Product Vision Board. The top section holds the vision, and the ones below state the strategy to realize the vision. Below, see the VETS.gov example how this board could be used to develop a strategy based on a product vision:

THE PRODUCT VISION BOARD

 pichler consulting

 VISION What is your motivation for creating the product? Which positive change should it bring about? Build a single unified digital experience for all veterans.			
 TARGET GROUP Which market or market segment does the product address? Who are the target customers and users? Veterans and their beneficiaries	 NEEDS What problem does the product solve? Which benefit does it provide? Veterans cannot easily find information about the services and benefits available to them in one place online. They also cannot easily apply for key benefits online. Creating a single unified digital experience will create one online presence where all veterans can go to get the information that they need about what services and benefits are available to them. This improves user experience and access to services and benefits that veterans have earned with their service to our country.	 PRODUCT What product is it? What makes it stand out? Is it feasible to develop the product? Website Databases The website is aesthetically pleasing and has an information architecture that is customer centric so that users can quickly find the information they need and quickly submit inquiries or applications for benefits.	 BUSINESS GOALS How is the product going to benefit the company? What are the business goals? VA will be able to quickly provide useful information to veterans online and enable them to apply to services/benefits through a simple online process.

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Download the tool for free from romanpichler.com/tools/vision-board.

4. Get buy-in from stakeholders

What is needed is a vision that guides everyone involved in making the product a success (also known as stakeholders): product owner, development, marketing/communications, sales, and support.

Without that support, the most inspiring and beautiful vision will likely fail. It cannot be the true north for the team if everyone has not agreed to move towards it. Without a shared vision, people follow their own goals making it much harder to achieve product success. The best way to have agreement on a vision is to create it together with the stakeholders. Together they should all agree on what is the problem and what will happen when it is solved. This is most likely one of the toughest parts of the project development. Stakeholders may have different visions initially, however, consensus will come as

they search for common ground and combine their goals until there is a single vision on which everyone agrees.



Image source: <http://www.romanpichler.com/blog/tips-for-writing-compelling-product-vision/>

5. Inspire, think big, be concise

The vision should motivate people, connect them to the product, and inspire them. Visions that focus on adding value to the lives of others are often the best at inspiring stakeholders to hold fast to the true north that it establishes! Try to include a beneficial change the vision would cause without identifying the product that would facilitate that change. If that happens, then pivots (changes in product of strategy), will still keep the team moving towards the true north and fulfill the vision.

The vision should be easy to communicate and understand. Ideally, it should be something that can be easily memorized and recited, especially in moments of turmoil. Consider the following as examples that can be shared with a team who needs a product vision:

- “Provide a single unified digital experience for veterans”-Vets.gov
- “To provide access to the world’s information in one click.” –Google
- “Engage and educate potential college students of any age or background, and those that support and advise them, to find the schools best suited for them” –College Scorecard
- “Our vision is to create a better everyday life for the many people. Our business idea supports this vision by offering a wide range of well-designed, functional home furnishing products at prices so low that as many people as possible will be able to afford them.” –IKEA
- “We believe that we are on the face of the earth to make great products and that’s not changing. We are constantly focusing on innovating. We believe in the simple not the complex.

We believe that we need to own and control the primary technologies behind the products that we make, and participate only in markets where we can make a significant contribution. We believe in saying no to thousands of projects, so that we can really focus on the few that are truly important and meaningful to us. We believe in deep collaboration and cross-pollination of our groups, which allow us to innovate in a way that others cannot. And frankly, we don't settle for anything less than excellence in every group in the company, and we have the self-honesty to admit when we're wrong and the courage to change. And I think regardless of who is in what job those values are so embedded in this company that Apple will do extremely well." –Apple
(NOTE: While the Apple vision statement is not short, it is in many ways simple and could easily be referenced in part as a way to get to the whole! For example, "we don't settle for anything less than excellence in every group in the company," "We believe in deep collaboration and cross-pollination of our groups, which allow us to innovate in a way that others cannot)