

## white space

Through our experience we've learned that if you want to do something well, you have to know something about it. We would like to share some of what we have learned with you. Our newsletter is where you'll find marketing and visual communications topics related to retaining, communicating with and growing your organization's

### Designing an Effective Strategic Plan

You have decided to plan a trip to a place you've never been. You can imagine the sights, the smells, the life, the excitement. You can envision the attractions, the thrills, the relaxation, the differences. You may have an idea of how to get there, but in order to prevent any possible anxiety, you open your map, find the best route to take, and keep the final destination in mind. You start to consider all the possibilities, different directions, and alternative paths. In the end, your itinerary becomes a bit broader, but you've made it versatile enough to prepare yourself for anything. You are ready to begin your travel because you know where you're headed.

**A Strategic Plan** should derive from that same perspective. It drives you to your best potential as an organization, and establishes an essential focus on your endeavors. It allows your expertise and professional strengths to be communicated effectively to your associates and employees. It's a provoking piece that confirms to your organization the common goals and aspirations that began with the fundamentals of your purpose. It's a concise measure aimed toward prosperity, and an efficient way of advocating that message to your associates and supporters.

Creating a Strategic Plan, although not an intricate process, has recently received some criticism. A Strategic Plan is a valuable tool for your organization's potential success, but it must be approached properly. This past month, *Associations Now* released a commentary on strategic plans by James F. Hollan, CAE, that denounced strategic planning, as it **"discourages change"** and **"narrows a company's vision."** He continues to assert, **"High-speed technology has radically reduced timelines and profoundly changed the way we need to operate..."** The article emphasized the ways in which a Strategic Plan impedes flexibility and modification -two major components in today's business world. However, the article supported its criticism on shortsighted goals and the destructive over-emphasis on strategic planning to demonstrate how they can inevitably crumble organizations. Hollan focused on the specific failures like poor organization planning for an annual jazz dinner cruise because of layers of committees needed for approval requirements—most likely due to a lot of inefficient internal agencies created by their strategic planning. However, the fault should have been allocated to a flaw in creating a lot of unnecessary red tape, not a strategic plan itself. Attention was distributed too generously to the obstruction of change, whereas a strategic plan should provide the means to embrace it.





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It's true—the world has become so versatile that, in order to remain ahead, an organization must remain adaptable to its effects and dispose of mechanisms that slow it down. This doesn't mean abandoning strategic planning. It means targeting your ambitions with a broader intuition. For example, the **Intelligent Transportation Society of America (ITS America)** completed its successful Summer 2008 Strategic Plan that prioritized effective goals like optimizing member value, serving as the Chief Advocate for intelligent transportation systems and thought leader in transportation policy, and improving efficiency and effectiveness of ITS America governance and operations. Each goal strived to create more optimism, form stronger alliances, increase financial independence, and introduce regular organizational assessment. Their planning mechanisms neither prevented future ideas from being implemented, nor imposed unrealistic or overly specific goals that could not be modified or attained.

Something to remember is that your organization still retains its expertise, whether you can thoroughly achieve your strategic goals or not. However, this doesn't mean that a strategic plan should be disregarded. In a new modern society, adapting doesn't always mean obliterating. It's imagined that you still want to connect with your associates and improve communication within the organization. It's assumed you're still consistently analyzing your efficiency and discovering ways to improve it. Strategic Planning still provides that hard copy of high standards for proficiency. With the right goals and mindset, a strategic plan can be easily redefined and adaptable to a competitive business world. You might even want to consider making versatility and flexibility an organizational goal itself.

Once you've analyzed what transformations are needed and whether those changes can respond effectively to a revolutionizing society, consider how to design and implement them. In a strategic plan, it's important to include your mission, vision, and principles that





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have continued to guide your organization. It serves as a great opportunity to connect your ideals with future ambitions—something that your associates and employees will respect and want to accomplish. After you've collected the information you wish to include, it's time to concentrate on its presentation. Our previous newsletter highlights a 3D principle that can also be applied to a strategic plan—Design, Development, Delivery. With these strategies, you can determine how to target your audience successfully, include a captivating format (try bold color schemes, inspiring quotes, and confident graphics to enhance your objectives), decide how to display it, and provide efficient ways of implementation. With these dynamics, you can approach a strategic plan that motivates your organization and strengthens the capacity for achievement.

Strategic planning, as stated, is like a reliable map to a great destination. You might make some alterations to your route, find faster ways to dodge traffic, or add a few more landmarks you wish to see on the way. Nevertheless, you find yourself moving forward, overcoming challenge, and taking less time deciding where to go and how to get there. With a Strategic Plan, you'll always be prepared.

