What Are SMART Goals and How Can You Set and Achieve Them?

These five steps will help you determine the attainable goals that will have the biggest impact on your company.

November 25, 2019 5 min read

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Chances are, you've come across the phrase "SMART goals" before while reading entrepreneurial content on the web. Search Google for "smart goals business" and you'll get over 260 million results. The topic is of significant interest to a lot of people, judging from the sheer volume of relevant content on the subject.

But what exactly are SMART goals to begin with? What does that acronym stand for and should you be setting them for yourself and your business?

What makes a goal SMART?

The concept of SMART goals first turned up in an article by George T. Doran in the November 1981 issue of *Management Review*. Since that introduction, many business management experts have formulated the "SMART" acronym in various ways.

Here's how Doran framed it originally:

S stands for Specific: The goal is detailed. It identifies the precise aspect of performance improved by the goal.

M stands for Measurable: There is a metric or some kind of measurement unit for the goal. This way, you'll know exactly

when you've reached that specific goal.

A stands for Assignable: You can assign that goal to someone on your team (or a group of people) who will then be responsible for meeting it. (Note that sometimes people call A "Actionable." This means there are practical actions you can take to reach the goal. Some often call it "Attainable," which is basically a synonym for "Realistic.")

R stands for Realistic: While we all love wild success, SMART goals are those that can be realistically achieved, given time or financial constraints. (Note that in formulations where "A" stands for "Attainable," R is often attributed to "Relevant." That means that the goal will help your company fulfill its main purpose and mission.)

T stands for Time-Related (or Time-Bound): Your goal comes with a deadline that has a specific time-frame associated with it. By that target date, you expect to reach your goal.

Why are SMART goals so effective?

The power of goals in general lies in the way they create both an action plan for where we want to be, as well as an assessment tool for measuring progress towards those destinations. A good analogy is a road trip. If you're headed to a city you've never traveled to before, your journey will be more efficient and effective if you have a detailed road map to guide your travel.

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The same is true for achieving business objectives and goals. The more detailed, actionable, and measurable they are, the more easily you and your team will find it to achieve those goals.

For example, let's say you're building a mobile app. Consider what would happen if you set a vague goal, instead of a

specific one. You'd likely find it difficult to know whether your app development was on track or making solid progress towards launch. You also might not know necessarily whether you'd met certain goals at all, even after you'd spent significant time and effort trying to get there.

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If your goal isn't realistic, you'll likely experience a prolonged period of deep frustration, wondering why you're not "there" yet. Had you set your sights on a more realistic business goal, you'd likely have made measurable, noticeable progress on which you could build for future company projects.

SMART goals help you zero in on goals that will bring the most visible and concrete results for your company. It's often easy to get sidetracked by industry trends and buzzwords, without really considering the practical implications they hold for your business. SMART goal-setting cuts through the fog of confusion and drills down on the achievable results that will help you fulfill your vision for your company.

How do you set SMART objectives for your company?

SMART goals can be set for just about any area of your company's operations, including the finance department, your marketing and sales teams, and even company managers and C-suite executives.

Are you ready to set SMART goals? Start by considering your big-vision dream for your business, then work backward to reverse-engineer that overarching vision. What would help you lead your team to achieve that vision?

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Brainstorm several short-term goals that will help you reach your larger objective. Then, process each potential goal through the SMART paradigm. Make sure you can describe with specific details each of your goals and that each goal is relevant to your company’s overall mission. Determine how you’ll measure success and what metrics you’ll use.

Finally, set a deadline and assign the goal to the appropriate person or team. Monitor progress periodically and ask for regular briefings so you can help your team stay on track and reach the goal.

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