

Goals vs. Objectives

Many well-intentioned professionals set out to clarify a project's objectives but soon find themselves using descriptions that are open to interpretation and can't be measured. Quite often, they are really stating goals. The following guidelines should help you get started on differentiating between the two.

Goals provide guidelines. They describe a general purpose to which you direct your business practices. Their descriptions are more subjective and based on a long-term vision but their sweeping statements don't offer specific benchmarks for progress and cannot be accurately measured for success.

Objectives state a specific effort or action necessary to accomplish a targeted outcome. An objective should use a verb that is open for very little interpretation and describes an observable action. They must state the level of acceptable performance (your objective is to receive how many click-throughs, save how much time, accept what number of errors, and so on).

Summary: Goals describe what you want your business to achieve and objectives provide the action plan or steps on how to do it.

Examples of open verbs: hope, appreciate, believe, value, understand, know, grasp
Examples of specific action verbs: build, identify, sort, establish, construct, write, hire

Turn these goals...

- "It's important to us to have strong client communications."
- "We want to strengthen client and prospect relationships."
- "We hope clients will explore our entire website."
"We plan to have systems that work efficiently."

...into objectives.

- We will write a series of ten sell sheets designed to increase weekly call volume by helping clients understand which products/services meet their needs.
- We will prepare a case study or customer success story that will provide relevant, helpful information and then send a copy to all of our contacts.
- We will construct a web page to direct 50 percent more traffic to our online store.
We will outsource this project's data entry component to save our IT staff 15 hours/week which they can use to develop our new product.

Sources:

Diamond, Robert M. 1989. Clarifying Instruction Objectives and Assessing Outcomes. In *Designing and Improving Courses and Curricula in Higher Education*, 129-132. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

SDSU Online Tutorial. "Understanding Objectives: The Difference Between Goals and Objectives," <http://edweb.sdsu.edu/courses/edtec540/objectives/Difference.html>