

From Vision to Strategy: Turning Change into Choice

A board-level guide to translating foresight into competitive action

Part of the Strategic Growth in the Mid-Market series by Outdoor Connect

By Reinout Schotman



Clarity begins when leaders dare to look through a different lens.

Vision is not inspiration — it's interpretation.

Once a company has defined its market clearly and precisely, the next strategic challenge is to understand where that market is heading. Most firms treat *vision* as marketing poetry — something to inspire employees or decorate slides. In reality, vision is the CEO's most powerful diagnostic tool: a disciplined interpretation of how the external world is changing. Without that clarity, strategy becomes a sequence of reactions rather than a deliberate path.

A sharp vision does not predict the future; it frames the forces shaping it. It turns the noise of change into a coherent signal.

When a German mid-market business communications company reframed its vision around three major technology shifts, it moved from being a tactical supplier to becoming the preferred strategic partner of the incumbent telecommunications provider. Vision, when grounded in reality, changes not what you say — but how you act.

Vision as a Diagnosis of Change

Vision is not a slogan or a dream — it is a reasoned view of how tomorrow's landscape will differ from today's. It asks: *What is changing around us, and which of these changes truly matter?*

A credible vision is built from observation, not imagination. It draws on evidence: shifts in customer behaviour, emerging technologies, evolving regulation, or new patterns of competition. For mid-sized firms, this discipline is not academic — it is survival. They sit close enough to the market to feel change first but often lack the buffers larger firms enjoy. The earlier they diagnose change, the more they can shape its direction.

"Vision is not internal hope — it's external foresight."

The best visions do not attempt to describe a utopia. They define a likely trajectory — a story of how the world will work — against which strategic choices can be tested.

Mission: Identity in a Moving World

If vision explains the world's direction, mission defines the company's role within it. It answers a fundamental question: *Who do we want to be in that changing world?*

Defining a mission is not a branding exercise — it is an act of strategic self-definition. A good mission balances continuity with relevance. It should reflect the organisation's enduring purpose, but also clarify what it uniquely contributes to the evolving market. A mission that is too broad lacks focus; one that is too narrow becomes obsolete as the environment shifts.

A useful way to test a mission statement is through three filters:

- **Customer relevance:** What real value do we bring to the people who pay us?

- **Distinctiveness:** What do we do or believe that others in our market cannot credibly claim?
- **Longevity:** Will this remain true even as the market evolves?

Boards and CEOs should craft mission statements from lived behaviour, not aspiration. Ask: *What do our best customers trust us for? What are we unwilling to compromise on?* The answers often reveal a company's true identity better than any internal brainstorming session.

A clear mission gives direction to every decision — from capital allocation to recruitment. It connects foresight to culture. Without it, even the sharpest view of change remains detached from action, and the organisation risks drifting between short-term opportunities.

Once purpose is defined, ambition can take form — this is where strategy begins.

Strategy: The Bridge Between Vision and Mission

Strategy transforms perspective into position. It translates vision and mission into a set of deliberate choices:

- Given how we believe the world is changing,
- And given what we aspire to be,
- ***How will we win?***

Strategy is the bridge between understanding and ambition. It converts foresight into focus — determining where to play, how to allocate capital, and what capabilities to build. It also defines what not to pursue. In doing so, it turns prediction into preparation.

A strong strategy aligns today's investments with tomorrow's relevance. It is where belief meets execution.

Why Mid-Sized Companies Struggle Most

Many mid-sized firms operate with impressive energy but limited strategic depth. Growth targets are often mistaken for strategy. Yet without a clear vision of change or a defined mission, these goals become arbitrary. They point forward without explaining *why* that direction matters.

This structural gap is understandable. Leaders in the €50–500 million range are close to operations, facing constant demands for results. Reflection feels like a luxury. But in the absence of structured foresight, decisions become reactive, and resources scatter across competing priorities.

Embedding a rhythm of strategic reflection — quarterly, data-based, and board-owned — creates the mental space to think before acting.

Vision as a Strategic Tool — Not a Poster

A useful vision is both directional and testable. It should meet three standards:

- **Specific** – grounded in observable trends, not vague ambition.
- **Credible** – supported by data and logic executives can defend.
- **Dynamic** – flexible enough to evolve as the environment shifts.

A vision that meets these criteria guides decision-making without constraining creativity. It informs investment choices, product focus, and customer engagement. Vision should live in conversations about capital, people, and markets — not in framed statements.

Consider a Benelux SaaS company that reframed its vision from *managing customer data* to *automating administrative work*. This subtle shift realigned R&D priorities toward workflow orchestration and AI automation. Within two years, customer retention doubled, and its positioning strengthened. The power was not in the words but in how they refocused action.

A Practical Process: From Vision to Strategy

Outdoor Connect applies a structured discipline to link vision and strategy:

- **Environmental Scanning** – Identify macro, industry, and adjacent trends that will reshape your market.
- **Vision Framing** – Distil 3–5 assumptions about how your market will likely evolve.
- **Mission Revalidation** – Test whether your current identity and purpose still fit that future.
- **Strategic Choice-Making** – Determine where to focus, where to invest, and what to stop doing.

This process ensures that strategy is anchored in foresight rather than history. It aligns strategic intention with market reality — a vital link for companies competing with limited resources and fast-moving peers.

Implications for Boards and CEOs

Vision is not a communications exercise; it is a leadership responsibility. Boards and CEOs must jointly own the dialogue between foresight and strategy. Consultants can structure and challenge thinking, but only leadership can decide what to believe about the future.

Boards can institutionalise this discipline by:

- Reviewing vision assumptions alongside financial performance.
- Testing each major investment against the vision it serves.
- Ensuring external data and weak signals regularly inform board discussions.

When vision becomes part of governance, foresight turns into an operating capability — not a quarterly inspiration.

Closure: In a world of acceleration, foresight is the only form of control

Where Chapter 2 defined the playing field, this chapter defines how leadership chooses to move within it. Vision perceives change. Mission gives it meaning. Strategy makes it actionable.

Foresight is not about control — it's about courage: the courage to decide before certainty arrives.

For mid-sized companies navigating turbulent markets, connecting these three is not philosophy — it is discipline. Those who treat vision as a living strategic process will shape their markets. Those who do not will spend their future adapting to someone else's.

About Outdoor Connect

Outdoor Connect is an independent strategy advisory platform focused on board-level value creation for mid-sized, growth-driven companies (€50–€1B). We bring direct senior engagement—without the traditional consulting pyramid—to help founders, CEOs and boards set direction, make sharper capital allocation choices, and embed an execution rhythm. Core areas include growth strategy in technology and the energy transition, strategic repositioning in fragmented markets, and board-level sparring on value creation and M&A preparation.

© Outdoor Connect 2025. All rights reserved. 10/25