

The Future of Purpose

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IF WE ASKED YOU WHAT THE NEXT GENERATION OF
WORLD-CLASS BUSINESSES WILL DO, YOU WOULD
LIKELY LIST SOME BUZZWORD TECHNOLOGIES.

You would probably say something about cryptocurrency, or AI, or virtual reality. But if we asked you why the next generation of businesses will exist, you might have a little more trouble.

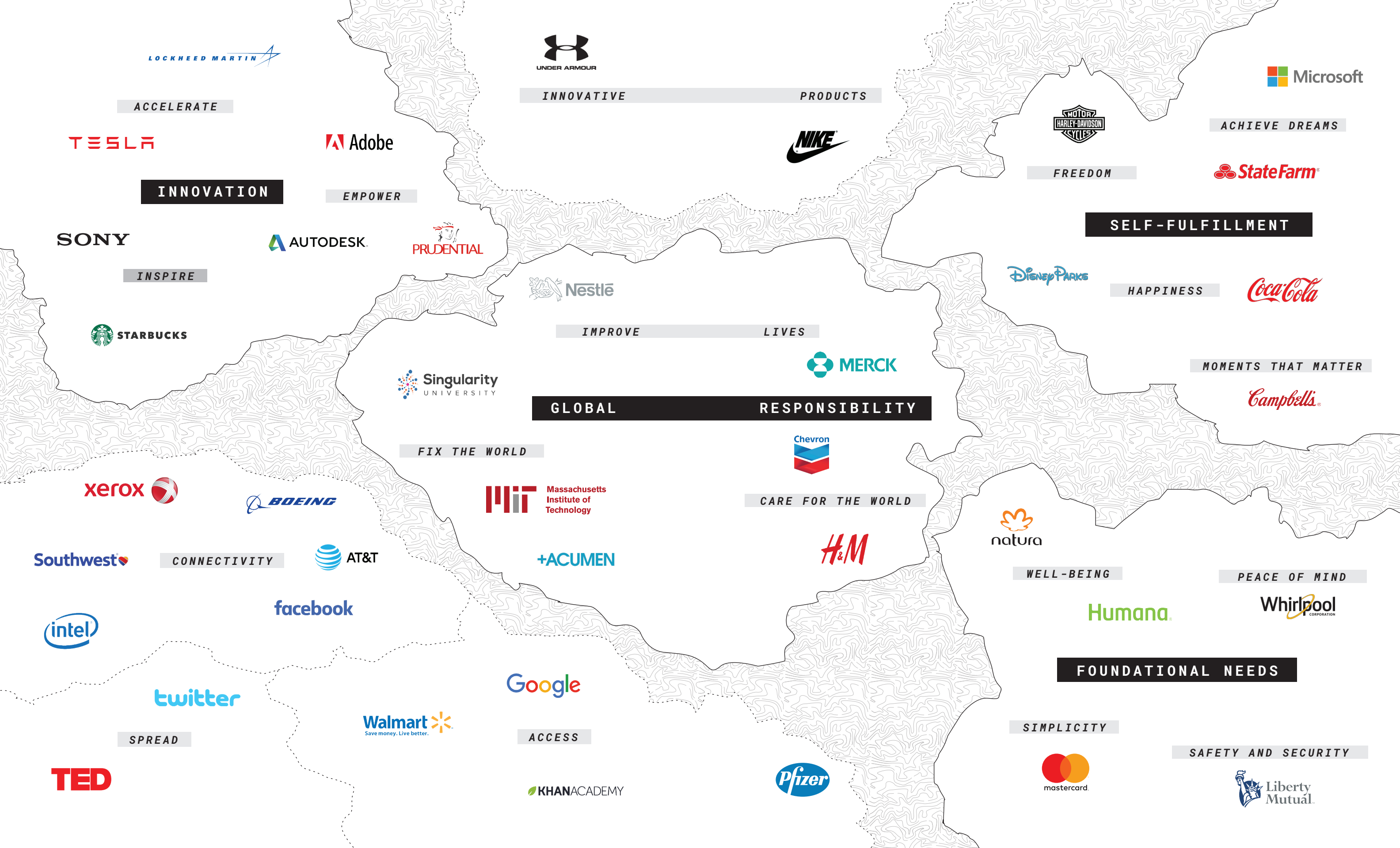
So, what purpose will the next generation of world-class businesses serve? Why will they exist?

“White space” can be defined as the place where unmet and unarticulated needs are uncovered to create opportunities for innovation. If an organization’s purpose is its reason to exist, then white-space mapping the future of purpose is a project of determining what kinds of companies could and should exist in near-, mid- and, long-term futures.

Here, we have attempted to do just that by thematically mapping the current state of purpose in business. We looked to uncover the expressed purposes of some of today’s organizations. Then we asked, where are the gaps? What are the intentions of tomorrow that will motivate and organize the flow of people and capital? What needs doing? Purpose marries our strengths with our passions; we have to consider how people’s values are evolving and what kinds of new competencies are emerging in order to determine what our purposes might be in the future.

As in life, discovering new purpose in business involves venturing into the unknown. Like people, brands that lack genuine purpose are usually overly concerned with validation – rather than to working to shape the future, they seek approval.

The following maps and writings are designed to help business leaders and entrepreneurs think differently about purpose. Let’s acknowledge first the pathetic reality that, when it comes to purpose, most of the world’s large organizations have cluttered themselves into a few conventional thematic territories. Now, let us think about the white space. It’s time to forget about the present, and think about your organization’s future purpose – the idea or intention that will captivate markets, drive meaningful growth, and inspire your people to change the world.



LOCKHEED MARTIN



INNOVATIVE

PRODUCTS

Microsoft

ACHIEVE DREAMS

State Farm



FREEDOM

SELF-FULFILLMENT

HAPPINESS

Coca-Cola

MOMENTS THAT MATTER

Campbell's

Disney Parks



WELL-BEING

PEACE OF MIND

Whirlpool

Humana

FOUNDATIONAL NEEDS

SIMPLICITY

SAFETY AND SECURITY



H&M



MIT
Massachusetts
Institute of
Technology

+ACUMEN

Google

Walmart
Save money. Live better.

KHAN ACADEMY

PRUDENTIAL

Singularity
UNIVERSITY

Adobe

AUTODESK

BOEING

AT&T

facebook

twitter

xerox

Southwest



TESLA

SONY

STARBUCKS

ACCELERATE

INNOVATION

INSPIRE

EMPOWER

ACCESS

SPREAD

TED

Sustainability and Stewardship

We identified three categories of organizations that are focused on global responsibility. There were those focused on fixing the world by tackling big challenges through research and innovation, such as MIT and Singularity University, or through investment and entrepreneurship, like Acumen. Others were focused on “improving lives.” Here, we located pharmaceutical companies, including Merck. There is clearly adjacent white space here, especially if we get a little more specific about what we mean by “improving lives.” How about a brand devoted to helping the world sleep better? Or a brand whose expressed purpose is “cultivating mental wellness”? Finally, a number of brands utilize the rhetoric “care for the world,” which seems like code for “doing a little bit less damage to the world.” Chevron claims to improve lives and power the world forward, while H&M states its intent to make a circular economy a reality for its business model. In reality, however, Chevron is an operator of oil sands that are notoriously detrimental for the environment, and H&M continues to propagate the sins of fast fashion. Herein lies the first spectrum of opportunity: to be a company that actually walks the walk.

What would it mean for a company to actually stand for global stewardship?

A good example of a company practicing what they preach is Lockheed Martin. While most widely known as an aerospace and defense company, it is also heavily invested in environ-

mental sustainability. It was ahead of the curve when it came to regulation, setting “Go Green 2020 Goals” two years before the US federal government did. According to a post on the Harvard Business School website, Lockheed Martin CEO Marillyn Hewson leads the company with the mindset that “the only future that exists is one with meaningful climate change.” With this at the forefront, Lockheed Martin is heavily committed to projects such as capturing the energy of oceanic tides and, most recently, producing a vehicle-sized nuclear fusion reactor. Some describe these moves as reckless, but for a company still largely synonymous with “defense contractor,” could they one day reposition themselves as a company whose purpose is focused on climate response and global safety?

Tesla is another company that indeed walks the walk. Rather than spewing rhetoric about making the world a better place, their purpose is acutely specific: “Accelerating the world’s transition to sustainable energy.” So far, it seems to be working. One can imagine a number of equally strong purposes in adjacent spaces.

Purpose—

**TO MAKE THE CIRCULAR ECONOMY
VIAIBLE BY MANAGING THE FLOW OF
FINITE AND RENEWABLE RESOURCES**

Ideas and Information

In reviewing the current state of purpose, we found a few brands – like Facebook, TED, and Twitter – devoted to sharing and spreading ideas. These brands have played an important role in democratizing how information is accessed and disseminated, but they have all infamously contributed to misinformation and even been appropriated as weapons of information warfare. In a social moment characterized by phrases like “alternative facts,” “post-truth,” “fake news,” and “normalized fraud,” the white space reveals itself in the world’s cry for help parsing the troves of information, checking facts, and distinguishing what is true from what is false.

Google’s purpose is “to organize the world’s information.” *The New York Times* aims “to enhance society by creating, collecting, and distributing high-quality news and information.” But where is the company who explicitly expresses its purpose as devotion to “validating information and providing context to content”? While there are no major companies making inroads to this territory, there are some newcomers heading that way, signaling that there is real value in addressing the information crisis.

Take, for instance, Vox, which was launched, in its current form, by Ezra Klein in 2014. Vox is known for providing context to trending news stories. They exist to “explain the news... and everything else that matters.” In the social media space, Snap, Inc. (Snapchat) is employing an in-house team of journalists to evaluate the relevance and accuracy of user-submitted footage from big events before republishing them. Within the public domain, Wikipedia cofounder Jimmy Wales’s WikiTribune aims to fix fake news with volunteer fact-checking.

Purpose—

**TO VALIDATE THE WORLD’S INFORMATION
AND PROVIDE CONTEXT TO CONTENT**

Untapped Innovation Missions

Amidst the organizations we identified whose purposes were explicitly about innovating, a number of organizations distinguished their particular variety of innovation. There were those focused explicitly on making iterative advances, those focused on creating innovations to accelerate the velocity of progress in specific fields, and even companies whose innovations are intended to help people innovate (such as Adobe and Autodesk). None of the organizations we looked at focused explicitly on scientific discovery, disruptive innovation, or venturing into novel and non-competitive spaces.

The exercise of searching for white space within the current cacophony of expressed purposes prompted a simple idea that seems almost too obvious: be a white-space company. By this, we mean constantly taking inventory of what is possible, looking toward the past and the future, and finding new applications of existing technologies in underexplored and non-trending spaces.

Purpose—

**TO RESOURCEFULLY MATCH UNDERUTILIZED
TECHNOLOGIES WITH UNMET NEEDS**

A Collaboration Company

In today's world, there is a seemingly dichotomous emphasis on the individual – characterized by companies that capitalize on the need for self-fulfillment – as well as on the collective, which is highlighted by companies that are honing in on global responsibility. There is also no shortage of organizations that attempt to bridge this divide, focusing on the idea of bringing individuals together (i.e. connectivity). Facebook aims to “make the world more open and connected,” while Southwest Airlines hopes to “connect people to what’s important in their lives.” The feeling of connectedness is an inherent driver for many of us; but in our future, where more brains are nearly always better than one in the process of innovation, which companies will focus on collaboration?

Collaboration is the process of working together to realize something successfully through the creation of new tools, software, or services. Major companies in this space that have permeated the way people share and collaborate include Google (most notably through Google Docs, Sheets, and Slides; more recently through Google Keep, a note-taking application that can be added to by collaborators) as well as Adobe (via its Creative Cloud). With the advent of collaborative tools popularized by applications such as Slack, and the possibilities created by emerging technologies, such as telerobotics and VR telepresence, as well as the intersections between these

developments, our question is: What will the collaborative tools of the future look like?

Purpose—

**TO BRING PEOPLE CLOSER AND HELP
TEAMS WORK TOGETHER ACROSS SPACE
AND TIME**

Owning “Cool”

Can a company be deliberately cool? If being cool is being relaxed and apathetic, then perhaps “cool” can’t be part of a company’s purpose. But some fashion brands, like Levi’s, Adidas, and Converse, have stayed consistently cool for decades. They certainly do not articulate it as an explicit goal, but they do spend heavily to stay on trend, especially through cultural investments like event sponsorships and influencer endorsements. Brands as diverse as Supreme, GoPro, Doritos, and PlayStation have cracked the cool code, building equity through associations with contemporary youth culture, while Google and Facebook are considered cool places to work. Cool translates into cash. And since every company in the world wants to be desirable and attract the best talent, coolness is an unspoken priority; every company wants to be cool. The need is there, but no big business will ever fill this gap. So who will own cool? The people. Cool always starts with revolutionary people. And cool is anti-establishment. Imagine the world’s first massively multi-influencer online clubhouse; a scene-owned social network; an incorruptible underground subculture that sells out to brands and shares the profits; or a “Co-op of Cool” that disrupts the current state of exploitative agencies and social media platforms, capitalizing on the eternally in-style.

Purpose—

TO KEEP COOL AND CARRY ON

Sex and Intimacy

Despite all the brands out there that profess that their purpose is to improve lives, not one of them is talking about sex. How is it that, as of yet, no world-class company is devoted purely to sex and sexual health?

Pfizer’s Viagra brand is too narrowly focused to claim the realm of great sex; Playboy may be universally recognized, but only as an old and out-of-touch dinosaur brand. The pornography industry, while popular for private consumption, is notorious for tastelessness and is publicly taboo. The stated purposes of its biggest companies are as generic as their names. Larry Flynt’s “New Frontier Media,” for example, “produces and distributes transactional television.” Tinder is similarly bland – it apparently exists to “facilitate communication between mutually interested users.”

Carex and Cupid, the world’s first and second largest condom manufacturers, are shifting their innovation mandates to focus more on pleasure and satisfaction. Each would be an interesting, if unlikely, candidate to become the company whose stated purpose is “helping people express themselves sexually – safely, freely, and pleasurably.”

If not the established brands, there are a few purpose-driven startups staking claim to the vast territory that is sex. Cambyo

is a research and content initiative devoted to helping “accelerate the liberation of sex” and “helping people improve their intimate lives.” It is doubtful that whoever said “sex sells” was thinking of anything as meaningful and mindful as Cambyo, but the old aphorism will prove itself again when Cambyo becomes the world’s trusted source of information about sex. Cindy Gallop’s MakeLoveNotPorn, whose goal is to “make #realworld-sex socially acceptable,” is another exceptional example. There is plenty of room to play here. Who are the progressive, responsible, and imaginative new brands ready to make sex their *raison d’être*?

Purpose—

TO PROMOTE SEXUAL FREEDOM,
HEALTH, AND PLEASURE

INNOVATION

ACCELERATE



To accelerate the world's transition to sustainable energy



Be the global leader in supporting our customers' missions, strengthening security, and advancing scientific discovery

INSPIRE



To be a company that inspires and fulfills your curiosity



To inspire and nurture the human spirit – one person, one cup, and one neighborhood at a time

EMPOWER



Gives everyone – from emerging artists to global brands – everything they need to design and deliver exceptional digital experiences



Builds software that helps people imagine, design, and create a better world



To help our customers achieve financial prosperity and peace of mind

INNOVATIVE PRODUCTS



Bring inspiration and innovation to every athlete in the world



Make all athletes better through passion, design, and the relentless pursuit of innovation

GLOBAL RESPONSIBILITY

IMPROVE LIVES



Enhancing quality of life and contributing to a healthier future; to help shape a better and healthier world; and to inspire people to live healthier lives



To discover, develop, and provide innovative products and services that save and improve lives around the world

FIX THE WORLD



To educate, inspire, and empower leaders to apply exponential technologies to address humanity's grand challenges



To advance knowledge and educate students in science, technology, and other areas of scholarship that will best serve the nation and the world in the 21st century



To change the way the world tackles poverty by investing in companies, leaders, and ideas

CARE FOR THE WORLD



Develop the energy that improves lives and powers the world forward



To make sustainable fashion choices available, attractive, and affordable to as many people as possible

SELF-FULFILLMENT

FREEDOM



Fulfilling dreams of personal freedom is more than a phrase. It's our purpose and our passion. We bring a commitment of exceptional customer experiences to everything we do – from the innovation of our products to the precision of our manufacturing – culminating with our strong supplier and dealer networks

ACHIEVE DREAMS



To empower every person and every organization on the planet to achieve more



To help people manage the risks of everyday life, recover from the unexpected, and realize their dreams

HAPPINESS



To refresh the world, to inspire moments of optimism and happiness, and to create value and make a difference



To be one of the world's leading producers and providers of entertainment and information. Using our portfolio of brands to differentiate our content, services, and consumer products, we seek to develop the most creative, innovative, and profitable entertainment experiences and related products in the world

MOMENTS THAT MATTER



Real food that matters for life's moments

FOUNDATIONAL NEEDS

WELL-BEING



We believe our role in the insurance industry is to shift perceptions and move beyond being simply a provider. To that end, we work to empower our members and help them live healthy, active, and rewarding lives



Our Reason for Being is creating and commercializing products and services that promote wellness/being well

PEACE OF MIND



Every home is our domain, every customer and customer activity our opportunity. This vision fuels the passion that we have for our customers, pushing us to provide innovative solutions to uniquely meet their needs

SIMPLICITY



Every day, everywhere, we use our technology and expertise to make payments safe, simple, and smart

SAFETY AND SECURITY



With our policyholders we are engaged in a great mutual enterprise. It is great because it seeks to prevent crippling injuries and death by removing the causes of home, highway, and work accidents. It is great because it deals in the relief of pain and sorrow and fear and loss. It is great because it works to preserve and protect the things people earn and build and own and cherish. Its true greatness will be measured by our power to help people live safer, more secure lives

CONNECTIVITY



To connect people to what's important in their lives through friendly, reliable, and low-cost air travel



Xerox innovates the way the world communicates, connects, and works, helping companies deliver breakthrough experiences to improve and grow their business



Utilize the power of Moore's Law to bring smart, connected devices to every person on earth



Connect, protect, explore, and inspire the world through aerospace innovation



To connect people with their world everywhere they live, work, and play – and do it better than anyone else



Give people the power to build community and bring the world closer together

SPREAD



To spread ideas



Give everyone the power to create and share ideas and information instantly, without barriers

ACCESS



To organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful



Saving people money so they can live better



To provide a free, world-class education to anyone, anywhere



Innovate to bring therapies to patients that significantly improve their lives