Crafting And Executing Strategy 19th Edition Thompson Solutions Manual

CASE 2
TEACHING NOTE

Costco Wholesale Corp. in 2012: Mission, Business Model, and Strategy

OVERVIEW

In 2012, Costco was the third largest retailer in the United States, the seventh largest retailer in the world, and the clear leader of the discount warehouse and wholesale club segment of the North American retailing industry. It had a total of 598 warehouses in 40 states and Puerto Rico (433 locations), nine Canadian provinces (82 locations), the United Kingdom (22 locations), Korea (7 locations), Taiwan (8 locations, through a 55 percent–owned subsidiary), Japan (11 locations), Australia (3 locations), and 32 warehouses in Mexico through a 50 percent–owned joint venture. Costco's fiscal 2011 total revenues were a record high of $88.9 billion and net income was a record high of $1.46 billion. About 25 million households and 6.4 million businesses had membership cards entitling them to shop at Costco, generating nearly $1.9 billion in membership fees for the company. Annual sales per store averaged about $146 million, about 85 percent higher than the $78 million figure for Sam's Club, Costco's chief competitor. In fiscal 2011, 93 of Costco's warehouses generated sales exceeding $200 million annually, up from 56 in 2010 and four stores had sales exceeding $300 million, including one that had more than $400 million in sales.

The membership warehouse concept was pioneering by discount merchandising sage Sol Price who opened the first Price Club in San Diego in 1976. Originally conceived as a place where small local business members could obtain needed merchandise at very economical prices, Sol Price soon concluded that his fledgling Price Club operation could achieve far greater sales volumes and gain buying clout with suppliers by also granting membership to individuals—Price's decision to add individual memberships was the trigger that launched the deep discount warehouse club industry on a steep growth curve. Within a few years, Sol Price's Price Club stores emerged as the unchallenged leader in member warehouse retailing, operating primarily on the West Coast.

The wholesale club and warehouse segment of retailing in North America was a $155 billion business in 2011, and it was growing 15–20 percent faster than retailing as a whole. There were three main competitors—Costco Wholesale, Sam's Club, and BJ's Wholesale Club. In early 2012, there were about 1,400 warehouse locations across the United States and Canada; most every major metropolitan area had one, if not several, warehouse clubs. Costco had just over a 57 percent share of warehouse club sales across the United States and Canada, with Sam's Club (a division of Walmart) having roughly a 35 percent share and BJ's Wholesale Club and several small warehouse club competitors about an 8 percent share.

Competition among the warehouse clubs was based on such factors as price, merchandise quality and selection, location, and member service. However, warehouse clubs also competed with a wide range of other types of retailers, including retail discounters like Walmart and Dollar General, supermarkets, general merchandise chains, specialty chains, gasoline stations, and Internet retailers. Not only did Walmart, the world's largest retailer, compete directly with Costco via its Sam's Club subsidiary, but its Walmart Supercenters sold many of the same types of merchandise at attractively low prices as well. Target, Kohl's, and Amazon.com had emerged as significant retail competitors in certain general merchandise categories. Low-cost operators selling a single category or narrow range of merchandise—such as Trader Joe's, Lowe's, Home Depot, Office Depot, Staples, Best Buy, Circuit City, PetSmart, and Barnes & Noble—had significant market share in their respective product categories. Notwithstanding the competition from other retailers and discounters, the low prices and merchandise

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selection found at Costco, Sam's Club, and BJ's Wholesale were attractive to small business owners, individual households (particularly bargain-hunters and those with large families), churches and non-profit organizations, caterers, and small restaurants.

Costco was founded in 1983 by Jim Sinegal and Seattle entrepreneur Jeff Brotman (now chairman of the board of directors). The first Costco store began operations in Seattle in 1983, the same year that Wal-Mart launched its warehouse membership format called Sam's Club. By the end of 1984 there were 9 Costco stores in five states serving over 200,000 members. In December 1985 Costco became a public company, selling shares to the public and raising additional capital for expansion. Costco became the first company to reach $1 billion in sales in less than 6 years. In October 1993, Costco merged with The Price Company. When the two companies merged in 1993, Jim Sinegal became CEO, presiding over 206 PriceCostco locations generating $16 billion in annual sales. When the company reincorporated from Delaware to Washington in August 1999, the name was changed to Costco Wholesale Corporation. The company's headquarters was in Issaquah, Washington, not far from Seattle.

Costco's mission in the membership warehouse business was "To continually provide our members with quality goods and services at the lowest possible prices." However, in their "Letter to Shareholders" in the company's 2011 Annual Report, Costco's three top executives—Jeff Brotman, Jim Sinegal, and Craig Jelinek—provided a more expansive view of Costco's mission, stating:

> The company will continue to pursue its mission of bringing the highest quality goods and services to market at the lowest possible prices while providing excellent customer service and adhering to a strict code of ethics that includes taking care of our employees and members, respecting our suppliers, rewarding our shareholders, and seeking to be responsible corporate citizens and environmental stewards in our operations around the world."

Costco's business model was to generate high sales volumes and rapid inventory turnover by offering members very low prices on a limited selection of nationally branded and selected private label products in a wide range of merchandise categories. Management believed that rapid inventory turnover, when combined with the operating efficiencies achieved by volume purchasing, efficient distribution and reduced handling of merchandise in no-frills, self-service warehouse facilities, enabled Costco to operate profitably at significantly lower gross margins than traditional wholesalers, mass merchandisers, supermarkets, and supercenters. Costco's high sales volume-rapid inventory turnover business model allowed it to sell and receive cash for inventory before it had to pay many of its merchandise vendors, even when vendor payments were made in time to take advantage of early payment discounts. Thus Costco was able to finance a big percentage of its merchandise inventory through the payment terms provided by vendors rather than by having to maintain sizable working capital (defined as current assets minus current liabilities) to facilitate timely payment of suppliers.

The cornerstones of Costco's strategy were low prices, a limited product line and limited selection, and a "treasure hunt" shopping environment.

The case spotlights Costco's mission, business model, and strategy, but it also contains good coverage of the company's warehouse operations, compensation practices, business philosophy, core values, and ethical standards. The company is interesting in several important respects:

- Costco's markups and prices were so low that Wall Street analysts had criticized Costco management for going all out to please customers at the expense of charging prices that would increase profits for shareholders—retailing and investment analysts believed that Costco could charge more for a lot of the items it sold.

- Whereas typical supermarkets stocked about 40,000 items and a Wal-Mart Supercenter or SuperTarget might have as many as 150,000 items for shoppers to choose from, Costco's merchandising strategy was to provide members with a selection of only about 3,600 items. About one-fourth of Costco's product offerings were constantly changing and consisted mainly of "treasure hunt" specials. Costco's merchandise buyers were constantly on the lookout to make one-time purchases of items that would appeal to the company's clientele and that would sell out quickly.

- Costco attracted the most affluent customers in discount retailing—the average income of individual members was about $75,000, with over 30 percent having incomes of $100,000 or more annually. Many members were affluent urbanites, living in nice neighborhoods not far from where Costco warehouses were located.

- Jim Sinegal, co-founder and long-time CEO of Costco Wholesale, was the driving force behind the company's 29-year march to become the 4th largest retailer in the United States, the 7th largest in the world, and the clear leader of the discount warehouse and wholesale club segment of the North American retailing industry. Sinegal was far from the stereotypical CEO. Grandfatherly and in his 70s, Sinegal dressed casually and unpretentiously, often going to the office or touring Costco stores wearing an open-collared cotton shirt that came from a Costco bargain rack and sporting a standard employee name tag that said "Jim." His informal dress, mustache, gray hair, and unimposing appearance made it easy for Costco shoppers to mistake him for a store clerk. Sinegal spent much of his time touring Costco stores, using the company plane to fly from location to location and sometimes visiting 8 to 10 stores daily (the record for a single day was 12). In touring a Costco store with the local store manager, Sinegal was very much the person-in-charge. He functioned as producer, director, and knowledgeable critic. He cut to the chase quickly, exhibiting intense attention to detail and pricing, wandering through store aisles firing a barrage of questions at store managers about sales volumes and stock levels of particular items, critiquing merchandising displays or the position of certain products in the stores, commenting on any aspect of store operations that caught his eye, and asking managers to do further research and get back to him with more information whenever he found their answers to his questions less than satisfying. Sinegal had tremendous merchandising savvy, demanded much of store managers and employees, and definitely set the tone for how the company operated its discounted retailing business.

- Employee compensation at Costco was higher than at Sam's Club. Jim Sinegal was convinced that having a well-compensated workforce was very important to executing Costco's strategy successfully. He said, "It has to be a significant advantage for you….. paying good wages and keeping your people working with you is very good business." Moreover, executives at Costco did not earn the outlandish salaries that had become customary over the past decade at most large corporations.

SUGGESTIONS FOR USING THE CASE

This case was written to (1) illustrate the CEO's role as chief strategist and organization leader, (2) demonstrate how a company's business principles and core values can link tightly to and drive a company's strategy and operating practices, and (3) give students practice in evaluating a company's direction and strategy in the highly competitive retail marketplace. The case requires that students draw upon most all of the concepts discussed in Chapters 1 and 2 in preparing the case for class discussion.

We think Costco Wholesale is an excellent leadoff case for the course (other good choices are Mystic Monk Coffee and Robin Hood—both of which require that students draw upon the material covered in Chapters 1 and 2). Student familiarity with "big box" discount retailing, the very interesting character of Costco Wholesale and its CEO Jim Sinegal, and the very close connection between the case and the material in Chapters 1 and 2 make this an especially good leadoff case. You may want to consider covering Chapter 1 in your first day's lecture, Chapter 2 on your second day's lecture, and then assigning Costco Wholesale for class discussion on Day 3.

However, if you opt for another lead-off case, we think you will find that the Costco Wholesale case works exceptionally well (1) as part of your business strategy module (where you want students to draw from Chapters 1-7 in doing their analysis and making action recommendations), (2) as a comprehensive written case or oral team presentation case, or (3) as an end-of-the-course or final exam case (because the case contains issues that cut across topics covered in many of the 12 chapters). If you want to cover Chapters 1-7 before assigning a case for class discussion, you'll find that the Costco case contains ample information on industry and competitive conditions and the and the businesses of Costco's two chief competitors in North America—Sam's Club and BJ's Wholesale. Thus, Costco Wholesale is one of those multi-faceted cases that will work nicely in any of several places in your lineup of case assignments—although our preference is to use it as a leadoff case.

You'll find ample opportunity here to explore Jim Sinegal's style of managing, his values and business principles, the company's clever and innovative business model, the chief elements of its business strategy, and the company's financial performance. If you wait to assign the case until students have read Chapters 3, 4, and 5, then you can expect students to probe a bit deeper in evaluating Costco's competitive strengths/weaknesses, its potential for continued growth, and how well it is positioned to compete against Sam's Club, BJ's Wholesale, and other big-box discounters like Walmart and Target. But students will really have no trouble wrestling with the competitive issues and generating opinions without the benefit of having first covered Chapters 3, 4, and 5—this is because they not only are likely to have shopped at one or more membership warehouses but also because the strategic issues and analysis turn out to be fairly clear-cut, which is why Costco Wholesale makes such a good leadoff case.

We suggest use of a teaching plan that focuses on Jim Sinegal's business principles and management philosophy, the various aspects of Costco's business model, the company's strategy and growth initiatives, its compensation and benefits practices, why shopping at Costco appeals to upscale consumers, and whether the strategy is delivering good financial performance. If class members have read Chapter 3, then you can also make a point of press class members for their five-forces analysis of competitive conditions in the North American wholesale club industry.

The assignment questions and teaching outline presented below reflect our thinking about how to conduct the class discussion.

Videos for Use with the Costco Case As a way to set the stage for class discussion, we suggest showing a 2:00-minute YouTube video shot in April 2012 entitled "Why Are People Addicted to Costco?" It can be accessed at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q64DTbQyHiM. A second option is to show a 5:01-minute video produced by NBC entitled "Today's Consumer: Where to Shop"; a link to this video is posted in the Instructor section of the Online Learning Center at www.mhhe.com/Thompson and a DVD containing this video can also be obtained through your McGraw-Hill representative. Either or both of the videos will be particularly helpful to students who have never been in a Costco or other wholesale club store, and they also embellish some of the themes in the case.

The Connect-based Exercise for the Costco Case. We developed an exercise for the Costco Wholesale case for inclusion in the publisher's ***Connect™ Management*** web-based assignment and assessment platform because

- The case is very appropriate for use early in the course (following coverage of Chapters 1, 2, and 3).
- One of the purposes of the Connect-based **case exercises** is to drill students in applying the concepts and analytical tools discussed in the chapters to the circumstances posed in the cases.

The Connect-based case preparation exercise for Costco Wholesale is framed around the following questions:

1. What are the chief components of Costco's business model?
2. What are the chief elements of Costco's strategy?
3. Draw a representative five-forces diagram for the North American wholesale club industry.
4. What is your assessment of the strength of competitive pressures stemming from rivalry among Costco, Sam's Club, and BJ's Wholesale?
5. What is your assessment of the strength of competitive pressures stemming from the threat of entry of new competitors into the North American wholesale club market?
6. What is your assessment of the strength of competitive pressures stemming from substitutes for shopping at wholesale clubs?

7. What is your assessment of the strength of competitive pressures stemming from suppliers to the three North America-based wholesale club competitors?

8. What is your assessment of the strength of competitive pressures stemming from the customers/members of the three North America-based wholesale club competitors?

9. What is the collective strength of the five competitive forces facing the three North America-based wholesale clubs?

Note that this exercise entails conducting a full-fledged five-forces analysis of competition in the wholesale club industry (five-forces analysis is introduced in Chapter 3 and should be covered before asking the class to complete the Connect-based exercise). It should take class members roughly 30-40 minutes to complete the Costco Connect-based exercise, assuming they have read Chapters 1-3 and done a conscientious job of reading and absorbing the information the Costco case contains. All aspects of the 9 questions in this exercise are automatically graded and entered in your electronic grade book that is part of the Connect platform, which makes it easy for you to evaluate each class member's understanding of what five-forces analysis is all about and the extent to which they can accurately gauge the strength of the various competitive forces that prevail in the wholesale club industry.

Unless you want to use a particular case exercise for testing purposes, ***the best approach to using the Connect case exercises is to require all class members to complete this exercise for the Costco case before coming to class on the day the case has been assigned.*** Students definitely need practice in doing a five-forces analysis—it is not as simple as it might look to do an insightful analysis of competitive pressures. Certainly, students that do a conscientious job of completing the exercise will be better prepared to make meaningful contributions to the discussion of what competition is like in the wholesale club industry, as opposed to merely giving off-the-cuff opinions.

What to Tell Students in Preparing the Costco Case for Class. To give students guidance in what to do and think about in preparing the Costco case for class discussion, we strongly recommend two things:

1. ***Have class members complete the Connect-based exercise for the Costco case (in the event you have opted to make the Connect supplement for the 19th Edition a part of the materials required for your course)***.

2. ***Provide class members with assignment questions (in addition to what is covered in the Connect exercise) and insist that they prepare good notes/answers to these questions before coming to class***. Our recommended assignment questions for the Costco case are presented in the next section of this TN. Since there are 12 assignment questions, you may want to have students focus on a subset of the questions (depending on how you want to conduct the class discussion).

   To facilitate your use of assignment questions and making them available to students, we have posted a file of the Assignment Questions contained in this teaching note on the student section of the publisher's Online Learning Center for the 19th edition (**www.mhhe.com/thompson**). (You should be aware that there is a set of assignment questions posted in the student OLC for each of the 30 cases included in the 19th edition.)

   In our experience, it is quite difficult to have an insightful and constructive class discussion of an assigned case unless students have conscientiously have made use of pertinent core concepts and analytical tools in preparing substantive answers to a set of well-conceived study questions before they come to class. In our classes, we expect students to bring their notes to the study questions to use/refer to in responding to the questions that we pose. Moreover, students often find that a set of study questions is useful in helping them prepare oral team presentations and written case assignments—in addition to whatever directive question(s) you supply for these assignments. Hence, we urge that you provide students with assignment questions—either those we have provided or a set of your own questions—for all those aspects of an assigned case that you believe are worthy of student analysis or that you plan to cover during your class discussion of the case.

Utilizing the Guide to Case Analysis. If this is your first assigned case, you may find it beneficial to have class members read the Guide to Case Analysis that is at the end of Case 30 in the 19th edition. The content of this Guide is particularly helpful to students if your course is their first experience with cases and they are unsure about the mechanics of how to prepare a case for class discussion, oral presentation, or written analysis.

Suggested Assignment Questions for an Oral Team Presentation or Written Case Analysis. The Costco case is quite suitable for both oral team presentations and a written case assignment. Our suggested assignments for either an oral presentation or a written case assignment are as follows:

1. What is your assessment of Costco's business model and strategy? How well is Costco's strategy working? What recommendations would you make to Costco management to sustain the company's growth and improve the company's financial performance?

2. What is competition like in the North American wholesale club industry? Which of the five competitive forces is strongest and why? Which of the three rivals—Costco, Sam's, or BJ's Wholesale—has the best strategy? Why? Which of the three rivals has been the best performer? Five years from now, is Costco's standing as the industry leader likely to be stronger or weaker? Are the other two rivals likely to gain or lose ground on Costco? Why? What recommendations would you make to Costco management to sustain Costco's growth and improve the company's financial performance?

   (Should time permit, you could ask for action recommendations pertaining to Sam's Club and/or BJ's Wholesale. If you are using the case for oral presentations by two or more teams, then different teams could be assigned different companies when it comes to proposing action recommendations.)

ASSIGNMENT QUESTIONS

1. What is Costco's business model? Is the company's business model appealing? Why or why not?

2. What are the chief elements of Costco's strategy? How good is the strategy?

3. Do you think Jim Sinegal has been an effective CEO? What grades would you give him in leading the process of crafting and executing Costco's strategy? What support can you offer for these grades? Refer to Figure 2.1 in Chapter 2 in developing your answers.

4. What core values or business principles has Jim Sinegal stressed at Costco?

5. (In the event you have covered Chapter 3) What is competition like in the North American wholesale club industry? Which of the five competitive forces is strongest and why? Use the information in Figures 3.4, 3.5, 3.6, 3.7, and 3.8 (and the related discussions in Chapter 3) to do a complete five-forces analysis of competition in the North American wholesale club industry.

6. How well is Costco performing from a financial perspective? Do some number-crunching using the data in case Exhibit 1 to support your answer. Use the financial ratios presented in Table 4.1 of Chapter 4 (pages 104-105) to help you diagnose Costco's financial performance.

7. Based on the data in case Exhibits 1 and 4, is Costco's financial performance superior to that at Sam's Club and BJ's Wholesale?

8. Does the data in case Exhibit 2 indicate that Costco's expansion outside the U.S. is financially successful? Why or why not?

9. How well is Costco performing from a strategic perspective? Does Costco enjoy a competitive advantage over Sam's Club? Over BJ's Wholesale? If so, what is the nature of its competitive advantage? Does Costco have a winning strategy? Why or why not?

10. Are Costco's prices too low? Why or why not?

11. What do you think of Costco's compensation practices? Does it surprise you that Costco employees apparently are rather well-compensated?

12. What recommendations would you make to Costco top management regarding how best to sustain the company's growth and improve its financial performance?

TEACHING OUTLINE AND ANALYSIS

1. What is Costco's business model? Is the company's business model appealing? Why or why not?

As discussed in Chapter 1, a company's business model explains the rationale for why its business approach and strategy will be a moneymaker. This rationale sets forth the key components of the company's business approach, indicates how revenues will be generated, and makes a case for why the strategy can deliver value to customers and at the same time be profitable.

The information in the case lays out the chief components of Costco's business model in a straightforward manner:

- Require the payment of membership fees to shop at Costco (Costco employs a " subscription" membership business model)
- Generate high sales volumes and rapid inventory turnover by offering members very low prices on a limited selection of nationally branded and selected private label products in a wide range of merchandise categories.
- The broad appeal of the company's low prices created high levels of store traffic and produced big sales volumes on many items.
- Management believed that rapid inventory turnover, when combined with the operating efficiencies achieved by volume purchasing, efficient distribution and reduced handling of merchandise in no-frills, self-service warehouse facilities, enabled Costco to operate profitably at significantly lower gross margins than traditional wholesalers, mass merchandisers, supermarkets, and supercenters.
- Furthermore, Costco's high sales volume and rapid inventory turnover generally allowed it to sell and receive cash for inventory before it had to pay many of its merchandise vendors, even when vendor payments were made in time to take advantage of early payment discounts. Thus Costco was able to finance a big percentage of its merchandise inventory through the payment terms provided by vendors rather than by having to maintain sizable working capital (defined as current assets minus current liabilities) to facilitate timely payment of suppliers.

2. What are the chief elements of Costco's strategy? How good is the strategy?

The cornerstones of Costco's strategy were low prices, a limited product line and limited selection, and a "treasure hunt" shopping environment. The company was, moreover, a low-cost operator.

- Costco is pursuing a low-cost leader strategy (as students should quickly recognize from the discussions in both Chapter 1 and Chapter 5). Costco's CEO Jim Sinegal left no doubt about the company's efforts to be a low-cost operator when he stated:

  Costco is able to offer lower prices and better values by eliminating virtually all the frills and costs historically associated with conventional wholesalers and retailers, including salespeople, fancy buildings, delivery, billing, and accounts receivable. We run a tight operation with extremely low overhead which enables us to pass on dramatic savings to our members.

- Costco's strategic approach to pricing was to keep customers coming in to shop by wowing them with

low prices. Costco was known for selling top quality national and regional brands at prices consistently below traditional wholesale or retail outlets. The company only stocked items which could be priced at bargain levels and provide members with significant cost savings; this was true even if an item was oft-requested by customers.

- A key element of Costco's strategy to keep prices low to members was to cap the margins on brand name merchandise at 14 percent (compared to 20 to 50 percent margins at other discounters and many supermarkets).
- The margins on Costco's private-label Kirkland Signature items were a maximum of 15 percent, but the fractionally higher markups on Costco's private label items still resulted in its private-label prices being about 20 percent below comparable name brand items. The company's private label Kirkland Signature products—which included juice, cookies, coffee, tires, housewares, luggage, appliances, clothing and detergent—were designed to be of equal or better quality than national brands.

■ Whereas typical supermarkets stocked about 40,000 items and a Wal-Mart Supercenter or SuperTarget might have as many as 150,000 items for shoppers to choose from, Costco's merchandising strategy was to provide members with a selection of only about 3,600 items.

- However, Costco's product range covered a broad spectrum—rotisserie chicken, prime steaks, caviar, flat-screen TVs, digital cameras, fresh flowers, fine wines, caskets, baby strollers, toys and games, musical instruments, ceiling fans, vacuum cleaners, books, DVDs, chandeliers, stainless steel cookware, seat cover kits for autos, prescription drugs, gasoline, and one-hour photo finishing. But the company deliberately limited the selection in each product category to fast-selling models, sizes, and colors. Many consumable products like detergents, canned goods, office supplies, and soft drinks were sold only in big container, case, carton, or multiple-pack quantities.
- The selections of appliances, equipment and tools often included commercial and professional models because of many of Costco's members were small businesses.
- The approximate percentage of net sales accounted for by each major category of items stocked by Costco is in TN Exhibit 1 below.

TN EXHIBIT 1 Costco's Sales by Major Product Category, 2003–2011

	2011	2010	2009	2007	2005	2003
Food (fresh produce, meats and fish, bakery and deli products, and dry and institutionally packaged foods)	33%	33%	33%	31%	30%	30%
Sundries (candy, snack foods, tobacco, alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages, and cleaning and institutional supplies)	22%	23%	23%	23%	25%	26%
Hardlines (major appliances, electronics, health and beauty aids, hardware, office supplies, garden and patio, sporting goods, furniture, cameras, and automotive supplies)	17%	18%	19%	21%	20%	20%
Softlines (including apparel, domestics, jewelry, housewares, books, movie DVDs, video games and music, home furnishings, and small appliances)	10%	10%	10%	11%	12%	14%
Ancillary and Other (gasoline, pharmacy, food court, optical, one-hour photo, hearing aids, and travel)	18%	16%	15%	14%	13%	10%

- To encourage members to shop at Costco more frequently, the company operated ancillary businesses within or next to most Costco warehouses; the number of ancillary businesses at Costco warehouses is shown below:

	2011	2010	2009	2008	2007
Total number of warehouses	592	540	527	512	488
Warehouses having stores with					
Food Court	586	534	521	506	482
One-Hour Photo Centers	581	530	518	504	480
Optical Dispensing Centers	574	523	509	496	472
Pharmacies	529	480	464	451	429
Gas Stations	368	343	323	307	279
Hearing Aid Centers	427	357	303	274	237
Print Shops and Copy Centers	10	10	10	8	8
Car washes	7	7	2	–	–

Note: The numbers for 2009 and 2011 exclude the 32 warehouses operated in Mexico.

- While Costco's product line consisted of approximately 3,600 active items, some 20 to 25 percent of its product offerings were constantly changing. Costco's merchandise buyers were continuously making one-time purchases of items that would appeal to the company's clientele and that would sell out quickly. A sizable number of these items were high-end or name-brand products that carried big price tags—like $1,000–$2,500 big-screen HDTVs, $800 espresso machines, expensive jewelry and diamond rings (priced from $50,000 to as high as $250,000), Movado watches, exotic cheeses, Coach bags, $5,000 necklaces, cashmere sports coats, $1,500 digital pianos, and Dom Perignon champagne. Dozens of featured specials came and went quickly, sometimes in several days or a week—like Italian-made Hathaway shirts priced at $29.99 and $800 leather sectional sofas. The strategy was to entice shoppers to spend more than they might by offering irresistible deals on big-ticket items or name-brand specials and, further, to keep the mix of featured and treasure-hunt items constantly changing so that bargain-hunting shoppers would go to Costco more frequently than for periodic "stock up" trips.

- Costco's low prices and its reputation for making shopping at Costco something of a treasure hunt made it unnecessary to engage in extensive advertising or sales campaigns. Marketing and promotional activities were generally limited to special campaigns for new warehouse openings occasional direct mail marketing to prospective new members, and regular direct mail programs promoting selected merchandise to existing members. The company's primary direct mail program for members was The Costco Connection, a multipage mail-out that contained a host of savings coupons for featured specials. For new warehouse openings, marketing teams personally contacted businesses in the area that were potential wholesale members; these contacts were supplemented with direct mailings during the period immediately prior to opening.

  - Potential Gold Star (individual) members were contacted by direct mail or by promoting membership offerings at local employee associations and businesses with large numbers of employees. After a membership base was established in an area, most new memberships came from word-of-mouth (existing members telling friends and acquaintances about their shopping experiences at Costco), follow-up messages distributed through regular payroll or other organizational communications to employee groups, and ongoing direct solicitations to prospective Business and Gold Star members.

  - Management believed that its emphasis on direct mail advertising kept its marketing expenses low relative to those at typical retailers, discounter, and supermarkets.

- Most Costco stores were located in the upscale areas/suburbs of major metropolitan areas.

- Costco's growth strategy was to increase sales at existing stores by 5 percent or more annually and to open additional warehouses, both domestically and internationally. In fiscal 2011, sales at Costco's existing warehouses grew by an average of 10 percent, chiefly because members shopped Costco warehouses an average of four percent more often and spent about five percent more per visit than they did in fiscal 2010 (see Exhibit 1 for recent average annual sales increases at existing stores). In recent years, Costco had opened between 14 and 34 new locations annually (Exhibit 1); most were in the United States, but expansion was under way internationally as well. In fiscal 2011, Costco spent nearly $1.3 billion to open 20 new locations, two newly relocated warehouses, and several distribution depots. Average annualized sales for these newly opened warehouses was $103 million per warehouse, the highest-ever number in the company's history.

  Costco's strategy to attract more members and entice members to do a bigger percentage of their shopping at Costco had three components:

  - Give members a place to buy supplies of practical, frequently-used business and household items at money-saving prices. A recent initiative that management believed would spur sales was to expand the offerings of Kirkland Signature private-label items from some 400 items in 2005 to as many as 600 items by 2009.
  - Make shopping at Costco interesting and rewarding because of opportunities to purchase an ever-changing array of big ticket items and indulgences at rock bottom prices—in this regard, it was important that members be able to spot appealing new items on the sales floor each time they shopped at Costco. Costco buyers constantly scanned the manufacturing landscape, looking for one-time opportunities to buy items that would appeal to bargain-hunting members. And warehouse personnel strived to do an effective job of displaying and merchandising the special buys on the sales floor.
  - Acclimate members to the merits of visiting Costco on a weekly or bi-monthly basis so as to not miss out on the special one-time-only merchandise selections that typically sold out in a matter of days.

Once the chief elements of Costco's strategy have been brought out, you may want to poll the class on what they think of the strategy. How good is it? Based on Costco's rapid growth, its status as market leader, and its financial performance, we see no basis for a grade of less than B+. A grade of A would seem appropriate.

3. Do you think Jim Sinegal is an effective CEO? What grades would you give him in leading the process of crafting and executing Costco's strategy? What support can you offer for these grades? Refer to Figure 2.1 in Chapter 2 in developing your answers.

Class members are likely to approve of the way Jim Sinegal manages Costco and the overall job he is doing. We suggest that you push the class to evaluate Sinegal in terms of how well he has performed the five tasks of strategic management portrayed in Figure 2.1 in Chapter 2. You might want to ask the following questions:

- Is it a good idea for Sinegal to spend time visiting Costco stores? Why or why not?
- Should Sinegal "cross-examine" store managers pretty aggressively as he tours the stores he visits?
- Should he expect solid, reasoned answers to the questions he poses? Should he offer suggestions?
- What should Sinegal strive to accomplish on his store visits?

We would give Jim Sinegal an "A" for the job he has done in leading the strategy-making process at Costco. But there is always merit in pushing class members to justify their reasons for approving of Jim Sinegal's performance. Very likely, students will find little to criticize. Most will concur that the strategy is fundamentally sound and that there is every indication it is working well. Some points that class members ought to make:

- Jim Sinegal has set forth a clear and well-defined strategic path for the company to follow.
- He is the architect of Costco's business model and has presided over the development of the company's strategy.
- Sinegal has savvy merchandising skills and has orchestrated the company's effective strategy to create a "treasure hunt" atmosphere in the stores, to keep prices ultra-low, and to build a high volume of store traffic that promotes rapid inventory turnover. He is the driving force behind the company's ability to achieve annual sales volume of close to $130 million annually per store.

Moreover, Sinegal has done a commendable job in leading the strategy execution process at Costco. He spends a lot of time in the stores, checking out store layouts and merchandising, speaking with employees, and in general staying in close touch with how well things are going. He is apparently very quick to take action when he spots ways a store can improve. In touring a Costco store with the local store manager, Sinegal is very much the person in-charge. He functions as producer, director, and knowledgeable critic. He cuts to the chase quickly, exhibiting intense attention to detail and pricing, wandering through store aisles firing a barrage of questions at store managers about sales volumes and stock levels of particular items, critiquing merchandising displays or the position of certain products in the stores, commenting on any aspect of store operations that catch his eye, and asking managers to do further research and get back to him with more information whenever he found their answers to his questions less than satisfying. Information in the case indicates that Sinegal has tremendous merchandising savvy, that he demands much of store managers and employees, and that his views about discount retailing set the tone for how the company operates. Knowledgeable observers claim that Jim Sinegal's merchandising expertise was on a par with that of the legendary Sam Walton.

In short, ***there is very little about Jim Sinegal's performance that merits criticism***. Students ought to concur that he has effectively performed the 5 tasks shown in Figure 2.1 of Chapter 2.

Key Conclusion and Teaching Point: Jim Sinegal is an effective CEO and is doing a very creditable job of strategic leadership. Students should see that ***Costco is a good illustration of a point much emphasized at the end of Chapter 1: good strategy + good strategy execution = good management.***

4. What core values or business principles has Jim Sinegal stressed at Costco?

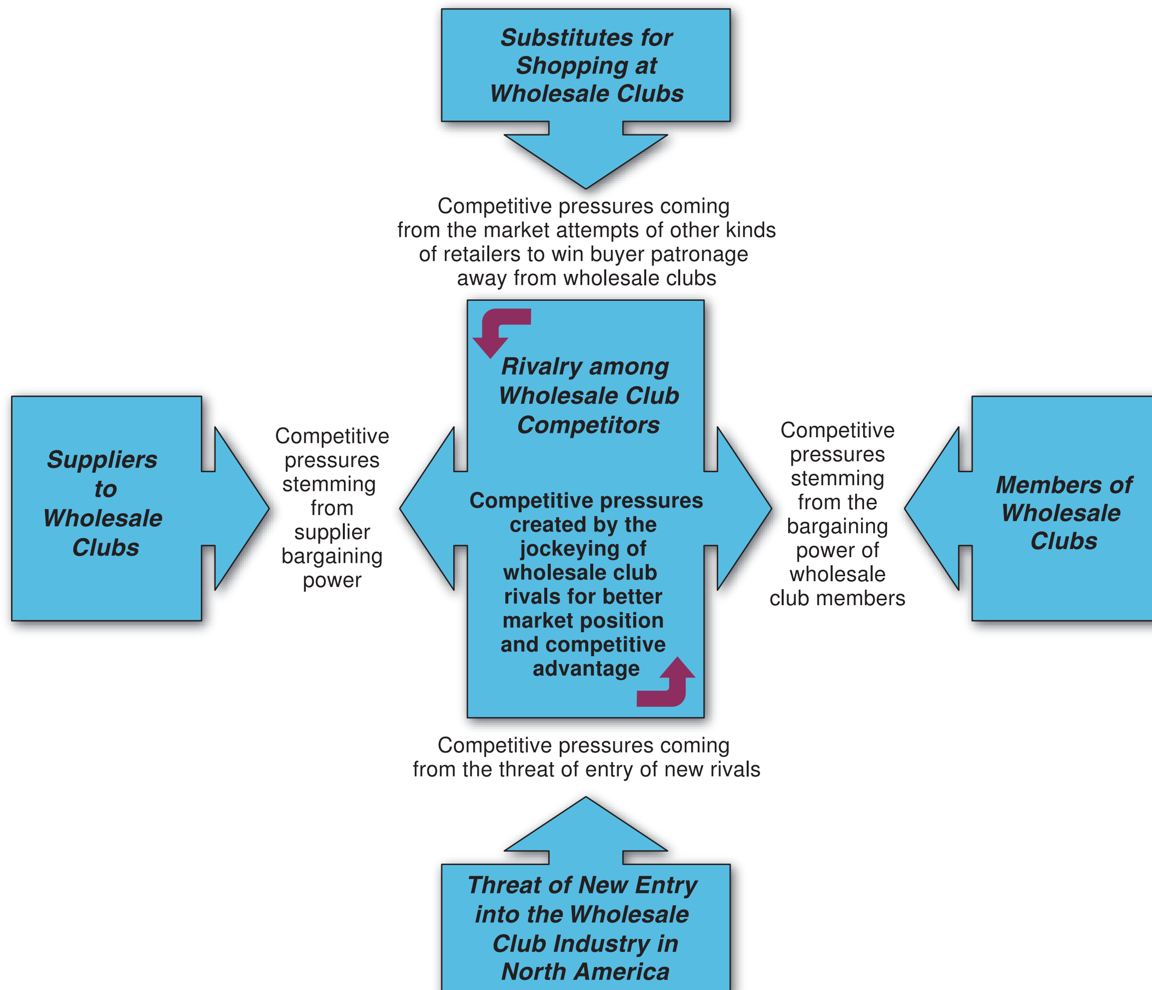
Two core values or business principles seem to stand out at Costco:

- Delivering value to customers in the form of low prices.
- Treating employees well.

Jim Sinegal's comments in the case make it clear that he is dedicated to instilling these values as part of Costco's culture. He seems to have drawn a line in the sand in insisting that these two values/business principles be reflected in the way Costco operates.

5. (In the event you have covered Chapter 3) What is competition like in the North American wholesale club industry? Which of the five competitive forces is strongest and why? Use the information in Figures 3.4, 3.5, 3.6, 3.7, and 3.8 (and the related discussions in Chapter 3) to do a complete five-forces analysis of competition in the North American wholesale club industry.

Below is a representative five-forces model of competition for the North American wholesale club industry:



■ ***Rivalry among wholesale club competitors***—a strong to fierce competitive force

In assessing this competitive force, students should draw upon the information in Figure 3.4 on p. 51 of Chapter 3 (and the related text discussion on pp. 50-53).

The rivalry among Costco, Sam's Club, and BJ's Wholesale is vigorous and likely to remain so. All 3 competitors are striving to attract more members and to offer merchandise selections and a shopping experience that will cause members to make more store visits and/or spend larger sums per visit. Rivalry is centered on two main factors:

- Low prices (consistently below retail price levels and the prices charged by retail discounters)—prices had to be at "bargain levels" in order to attract members and provide them with considerable cost savings (enough to more than cover membership fees)

- Product quality and selection
    - Merchandise was generally of good to excellent quality and often included name brand products supplemented with an assortment of private-label products
    - Warehouse clubs stocked 3,500 to 4,500 items, a portion of which were ever-changing as company purchasing personnel ran upon one-time buying opportunities. Typical supermarkets stocked about 40,000 items and a Wal-Mart Supercenter or SuperTarget might have as many as 150,000 items for shoppers to choose from..
    - The product lineup included such items as appliances, electronics, office and restaurant supplies, auto supplies, toys and games, light bulbs, batteries, cookware, tools, apparel, DVDs, books, canned and frozen foods, fresh meats and seafood, fresh fruits and vegetables, bakery items, beverages, wines, vitamins and personal care products, cleaning supplies, and paper products.
    - Selection within each category was limited (usually to fast-selling models, colors, and large-quantity sizes).

  To encourage members to shop more frequently and create a bit more of a one-stop shopping appeal, both Costco and Sam's Club operated ancillary businesses within or next to most warehouses—gas stations, optical centers, photo centers, print and copy centers, pharmacies, food courts, and the like.

To a much lesser extent, rivalry also revolved around attracting members/shoppers by means of convenient store locations, a comparatively pleasant big-box shopping environment, and maybe even satisfactory checkout speeds.

Class members should cite several factors (displayed in Figure 4.3) as working to intensify rivalry among the three warehouse club competitors in North America:

- All 3 club rivals are aggressively pursuing top-line revenue growth (chiefly by opening new stores, attracting more members at both new and existing stores, and endeavoring to grow sales revenues and shopper traffic at existing stores). The industry is becoming somewhat mature (which strengthens rivalry); achieving fast revenue growth is heavily dependent on the speed with which rivals open new stores and grow sales at existing stores.
- *Low switching costs on the part of consumers* (membership fees were very similar from club to club). In large metropolitan areas with stores of two or more of the 3 competitors, it is easy for households and businesses to switch their memberships from one club to another (or to belong to both and then shop at whichever club had the best deals).
- *Weak to modest degrees of product line differentiation from club to club*. There is considerable similarity in the merchandise offerings of all three clubs (which enhances rivalry).

Factors that might be cited as making rivalry weaker include:

- The differentiation that exists from club to club (as concerns product selection, shopping ambience, and convenient access to store locations)—this differentiation poses a barrier to switching to the extent that some bargain-hunting shoppers prefer shopping at one club versus another when there are multiple clubs to choose from in their shopping area, thus acting to weaken rivalry.

But this one factor is not powerful enough to overcome the combination of factors acting to strengthen rivalry.

■ ***Threat of entry into the warehouse club industry in North America***—a weak competitive force

In assessing this competitive force, students should draw upon the information in Figure 3.5 on p. 56 of Chapter 3 (and the related text discussion on pp. 54-55).

From our perspective, the window for entering the North American warehouse club industry is pretty much closed—except in the case of the two outside private-equity firms that opted to acquire BJ's Wholesale Club, presumably with the intention of rapidly expanding into areas and states where there are currently no BJ's locations.

The barriers to a new entrant are quite high:

- Costco and Sam's have to be considered formidable competitors and enjoy sizable scale economies not easily accessed by a newcomer.
- Capital requirements are sizable—if an entrant wishes to compete on a scale comparable to the industry incumbents.
- The marketing and advertising costs to attract members and build a significant volume of sales (and otherwise overcome the loyalty of existing warehouse club members) would seem to be significant. Why, for example, would a Costco member want to switch to an industry newcomer? Overcoming member switching costs would be an uphill struggle of considerable proportions.

Moreover, ***the three industry incumbents are in a strong position to vigorously contest a newcomer's entry***.

Conclusions concerning the threat of entry. All things considered, a newcomer's prospects for attractive profitability appear slim indeed. This is a low-margin business to begin with (with profits coming chiefly from membership fees). What outside company (besides perhaps Target---and that is a big and risky perhaps) really would want to come in to this industry and do battle head-to-head with Costco, Sam's, and BJ's in such a low-margin industry? It makes little or no business sense.

In short, the pool of candidates for fresh entry into warehouse club industry is small and ***the likelihood of fresh entry in 2012 and beyond is equally small, making the competitive pressures from the threat of new entry virtually non-existent***.

■ ***Competition from substitutes***—a strong to fierce competitive force

In assessing this competitive force, students should draw upon in Figure 3.6 on p. 57 of Chapter 3 and the related discussion on pp. 56-58.

Students should quickly recognize that small business and individuals/households have hordes of substitutes for shopping at warehouse clubs. While the prices of substitute retailers may not be quite as low, the range of merchandise selection is far greater and the number of convenient store locations of these substitute retailers is overwhelming greater. Even the members of warehouse clubs buy a considerable fraction of what they need from other types of retail/discount outlets.

Students should conclude that the substitutes for being a member of and shopping at wholesale clubs are a *relatively* strong competitive force, given that

- Acceptable substitutes are readily available.
- Buyer costs to switch to substitutes are minimal (except for the higher prices that may have to be paid).
- Many consumers are familiar with and comfortable with shopping at substitute retailers/discounters.
- The merchandise that can be purchased at substitute retailers/discounters is quite comparable to the merchandise sold by wholesale clubs.

- ***The bargaining power and leverage of suppliers to the warehouse club industry—***a moderate to weak competitive force.

In assessing this competitive force, students should refer to Figure 3.7 on p. 59 and the related discussion on pp. 58-60 of Chapter 3.

The suppliers consist mainly of the manufacturers of the products that warehouse clubs elect to stock. While a big fraction of these manufacturers are undoubtedly large enterprises with well-recognized brand names and good reputations among consumers, they are not necessarily in a strong bargaining position that allows them to dictate the terms and conditions on which they will sell their wares to the warehouse clubs.

Costco and Sam's, in particular, have considerable buying power and bargaining leverage in obtaining the merchandise they desire to stock. If a particular manufacturer chooses not to sell to the wholesale clubs at an attractively low price (such that the clubs can, in turn, charge what are perceived by members as "bargain prices" and save their members money), they can purchase goods for their stores from other more willing and price competitive sources. In Costco's case, no single manufacturer supplied a large percentage of the merchandise that Costco stocked (which lessens any one manufacturer's bargaining power). Moreover, because the items that the wholesale clubs stock produce high volumes of sales for manufacturers, manufacturers tend to be anxious to sell their goods to the wholesale clubs—in other words, the wholesale clubs are big volume buyers and thus have substantial bargaining clout with their suppliers. Costco management believed that if its current sources of supply became unavailable (for reasons of high supply prices or whatever), the company could switch its purchases to alternative manufacturers without experiencing a substantial disruption of its business—such ease of switching suppliers weakens supplier bargaining power and strengthens the bargaining power of a wholesale club.

Conclusion: The suppliers to the wholesale clubs tend to be a relatively weak competitive force—weak in the sense of being unable to put much pressure on their wholesale club customers in negotiating for better/higher prices and other more favorable terms of sale.

- ***The bargaining power and leverage of customers (the members of wholesale clubs)—***a very weak competitive force

In assessing this competitive force, students should refer to Figure 3.8 and the related discussion on pp. 60-63 of Chapter 3.

Wholesale club members buy in relatively small quantities; no single member accounts for a meaningful fractions of a wholesale club's total sales. Consequently, individual members of wholesale clubs have essentially no power or leverage to bargain with a wholesale club over the prices they will pay or over other terms and conditions of sale. A member can certainly not purchase a particular item (and obtain it for another retailer/discounter) and can also choose not to renew their membership, but this does not convey any bargaining power of consequence (any customer of any company in any industry can always refuse to purchase and take their business elsewhere). So even though a member's switching costs are relatively low, it does not result in having the clout to go to the Customer Service desk and bargain down a club's posted price on an item or otherwise obtain any benefit beyond what their membership card provides.

In perusing all the factors that result in strong buyer bargaining power (discussed on pp. 67-70 and summarized in Figure 3.8), class members should conclude that wholesale clubs face little to no competitive pressure of any consequence stemming from the bargaining power of their members. In support of this position, they can argue that:

- Buyers/members are small, numerous, and buy in relatively small quantities.
- There's no evidence indicating that clubs are frequently so overstocked with certain merchandise that a single member is able to bargain down the posted price of overstocked items.

- ***Conclusions concerning the overall strength of competitive forces:*** Competitive pressures associated with rivalry and substitutes are definitely the two strongest of the five competitive forces. Competitive pressures from the other three competitive forces are weak. On the whole, competitive pressures confronting wholesale clubs are "normal" or reasonable—not so strong as to unduly crimp profit margins but certainly strong enough to prevent wholesale clubs from earning well above-average profits and attracting outsiders to entry the industry. ***To some large extent, the competitive market success of a wholesale club is a function of keeping its costs to buy goods and operate its stores low enough to be able to charge "bargain prices", attract new members, and still achieve acceptable profitability.***

6. How well is Costco performing from a financial perspective? Do some number-crunching using the data in case Exhibit 1 to support your answer. Use the financial ratios presented in Table 4.1 of Chapter 4 (pages 83-86) to help you diagnose Costco's financial performance.

The financial and operating summary in case Exhibit 1 indicate that Costco's financial performance during the 2000-2011 period has been good (but short of what could be termed "excellent", partly, of course, due to the challenging macroeconomic conditions in North America that prevailed in 2008-2011). Students can point to any of several statistics and measures to support this conclusion:

- Net sales increased from $31.6 billion in fiscal 2000 to $87.0 billion in fiscal 2011, equal to a compound average growth rate (CAGR) of 9.6% since 2000; this growth rate is respectable given the tough economic conditions that existed in 2008-2011.
- Total revenues (sales plus membership fees) increased from $32.2 billion in fiscal 2000 to $88.9 billion in fiscal 2011, equal to an average annual compound rate of 9.7% from 2000 through 2011.
- Net income rose from $631 million in 2000 to $1.46 billion in 2011, a compound average growth rate of 7.9%.
- Diluted net income per share increased from $1.35 in 2000 to $3.30 in 2011, a compound average growth rate of 8.5%.
- Costco's profitability and expense ratios are shown below:

	2011	2010	2009	2008	2005	2000
Merchandise costs as a % of net sales	89.3%	89.2%	89.2%	89.5%	89.4%	89.6%
Selling, general, and administrative expenses as a % of total revenues	9.8%	10.1%	10.2%	9.6%	9.5%	8.6%
Operating income as a % of total revenues (operating profit margin)	2.7%	2.7%	2.5%	2.7%	2.8%	3.2%
Net income as a % of total revenues (net profit margin)	1.6%	1.7%	1.5%	1.8%	2.0%	2.0%
Return on equity (net income as a % of stockholders' equity)	11.6%	12.0%	10.8%	14.0%	12.0%	14.9%
Return on assets (net income as a % of total assets)	5.5%	5.5%	4.9%	6.2%	6.4%	7.3%
Current ratio	1.14	1.16	1.11	1.07	1.22	1.02
Days of inventory*	31.2	30.3	31.6	29.0	31.6	32.1

*Days of inventory equals merchandise inventories · [merchandise costs · 365]; students can get the formula for days of inventory from Table 4.1 in Chapter 4 of the text.

- Merchandise costs as a % of net sales have been declined slightly in recent fiscal years as compared to fiscal 2000.
- Selling, general, and administrative expenses have crept upward since fiscal 2000.

- Operating income as a % of total revenues (operating profit margin) has remained stable during the 2005-2011 fiscal year period, dipping only slightly during the depth of the recession in fiscal 2009; but the operating margin is materially lower than in fiscal 2000.
- Net income as a % of total revenues (net profit margin) has eroded slightly as compared to the levels in 2000, 2005, and 2008—but the fiscal 2009-2011 percentages still seem decent in light of the unusually weak economic conditions that prevailed.
- Return on equity dropped from 14.9% in fiscal 2000 to 12.0% in fiscal 2005, climbed back to 14.0% in fiscal 2008, and bounced around in the 10.8% to 12.0% range in fiscal years 2009-2011.
- Return on assets declined from 7.3% in fiscal 2000 to 6.4% in fiscal 2005, to 6.2% in fiscal 2008, to 4.9% in fiscal 2009, and then rose marginally to 5.5% in both fiscal 2010 and 2011.
- The company's liquidity is adequate, as indicated by the slightly above 1.0 current ratio levels in fiscal years 2005-2011.
- Days of inventory at Costco have remained quite stable in the 29-32 days range; inventories of about 1-month seem very reasonable. Costco management appears to have done a good job of inventory control.
- In fiscal 2011, Costco's long-term debt was $2.15 billion and has stayed about $2.2 billion for the past four fiscal years; long-term debt as a percentage of stockholders' equity in fiscal 2011 was a modest 17.1%. The company does not have a debt problem.

■ Net cash provided by operating activities at Costco has trended upward over the past fiscal 11 years, climbing from $1.07 billion in fiscal 2000 to $1.77 billion in fiscal 2005 and to $3.20 billion in fiscal 2011.

Conclusions regarding the data in case Exhibit 1: Costco's financial performance, while acceptable, could certainly be better. Profit margins, return on equity, and return on assets have gotten skimpier since 2000 and SG&A expenses as a % of total revenues seem to be creeping upward. None of the performance measures show an alarming deterioration in light of the weak economic environment that confronted the company throughout fiscal years 2009-2011.

You might also ask the class for their appraisal of the geographic operating data in case Exhibit 4. Here it can be seen that:

■ Costco's biggest geographic market and also its biggest source of profit (from a total dollar standpoint) is the United States.

■ In fiscal 2011, Costco's operating profit margin (operating income as a % of total revenue, including membership fees) was 2.1% in the U.S., 4.4% in Canada, and 4.2% in all other countries.

■ In fiscal 2010, Costco's operating profit margin) was 2.2% in the U.S., 4.4% in Canada, and 3.5% in all other countries.

■ From fiscal 2005 through fiscal 2011:

- Total revenues grew at a CAGR of 7.1% in the United States
- Total revenues grew at a CAGR of 13.5% in Canada
- Total revenues grew at a CAGR of 21.2% in all other countries with warehouses

- From fiscal 2005 through fiscal 2011:
  - Operating income grew at a CAGR of 3.0% in the United States
  - Operating income grew at a CAGR of 17.0% in Canada
  - Operating income grew at a CAGR of 26.8% in all other countries with warehouses
- Costco spent $876 million on capital expenditure in the U.S. in fiscal 2011; in Canada capital expenditure were $ 144 million, and elsewhere capital expenditures were $270 million. In both fiscal 2011 and fiscal 2009, Costco spent over $200 million on capital expenditures outside the U.S. and Canada—warehouse expansion outside North America is a Costco priority.

7. Based on the data in case Exhibits 1, 5, and 6, is Costco's financial performance superior to that at Sam's Club and BJ's Wholesale?

Students can use the data in case Exhibits 1, 5, and 6 to develop the following comparisons (however, you and your students should be aware that the 2008-2011 data for the fiscal year periods of the 3 companies are not identical):

	Costco	Sam's Club	BJ's Wholesale
CAGR* in net sales revenues, 2008-2011	7.0%	3.7%	6.5%
CAGR* in operating income, 2008-2011	7.4%	1.3%	2.2%
CAGR* in net income, 2008-2011	4.4%	n.a.	-8.2%
Operating income as a % of total revenues			
2011	2.7%	3.5%	1.9%
2010	2.7%	3.2%	2.2%
2009	2.5%	3.4%	2.2%
2008	2.7%	3.7%	2.2%
SG&A expenses as a % of total revenues			
2011	9.8%	n.a.	8.6%
2010	10.1%	n.a.	8.6%
2009	10.2%	n.a.	8.0%
2008	9.6%	n.a.	8.0%
Operating income as a % of total assets			
2011	9.1%	13.7%	9.0%
2010	8.7%	12.5%	10.3%
2009	8.1%	13.3%	10.9%
2008	9.5%	14.1%	9.5%
Net income as a % of total assets			
2011	6.2%	n.a.	4.1%
2010	4.9%	n.a.	6.1%
2009	5.5%	n.a.	6.7%
2008	5.5%	n.a.	6.0%
Average sales per location, 2011	**$147.1 million**	**$81.2 million**	**$56.3 million**

*CAGR = compound average growth rate

The comparisons are mixed. Costco had the fastest rate of growth in sales revenues, operating income and net income, and far and away the highest sales per store location. Sam's Club has had higher operating profit margins (which might partially be due to the fact that some of its distribution expenses might be shared with its sister division, Wal-Mart stores and supercenters). Facilities-sharing with other Wal-Mart operations probably also explains why operating income as a % of total assets at Sam's Club has been substantially higher than the operating return on assets at both Costco and BJ's. In 2008-2011, BJ's Wholesale had lower SG&A expenses as a % of total sales than did Costco and also higher operating income and net income as a % of total assets than Costco in 2 of the 4 most recent years.

8. How well is Costco performing from a strategic perspective? Does Costco enjoy a competitive advantage over Sam's Club? Over BJ's Wholesale? If so, what is the nature of its competitive advantage? Does Costco have a winning strategy? Why or why not?

Costco's strategic performance seems rather solid.

- Since its founding in 1983, Costco has grown to become the third largest retailer in the United States, the seventh largest retailer in the world, and the clear leader of the discount warehouse and wholesale club segment of the North American retailing industry.
- Average annual sales at Costco's warehouses have been on a nice growth trajectory for over a decade, increasing from $101.0 million in fiscal 2000 to $119.8 million in fiscal 2005 to $138.6 million in fiscal 2008 to $147.1 million in fiscal 2011 (see the data in case Exhibit 1).
- The number of business members has risen from 4.2 million in fiscal 2000 to 6.3 million in fiscal 2011, a modest CAGR of 3.8% (case Exhibit 1).
- The number of Gold Star individual members has grown from 10.5 million at the end of fiscal 2000 to 25.0 million at the end of fiscal 2011, equal to a CAGR of 8.2% (case Exhibit 1). The number of total cardholders has risen from 48,640,000 at the end of fiscal 2008 to 64,000,000 at the end of fiscal 2011, a CAGR of 9.7%.
- Costco has ample opportunities to open additional warehouses annually for many years to come, thus paving the way for continued growth in sales and membership.
- The company's stores attract upscale consumers in large numbers; many members are loyal Costco shoppers.

We think students should conclude that Costco has a competitive advantage over Sam's Club and certainly an advantage over BJ's Wholesale. The basis for Costco's competitive advantage relates chiefly to Costco's more appealing "treasure hunt" atmosphere and better selection of bargain-priced, upscale merchandise. Average sales per Costco warehouse are substantially larger than average sales at Sam's and BJ's. Such larger sales volumes at Costco stores, along with the short operating hours at its stores, very likely result in Costco having very competitive labor costs per dollar of sales.

BJ's Wholesale is clearly a distant third in the membership warehouse segment and will likely never match the other two rivals in terms of total numbers of stores or sales per store or overall customer draw and allure.

But all 3 competitors—Costco, Sam's Club, and BJ's Wholesale—appeal to members because of (1) their low prices (it is not clear that any one of the three has lower prices than the other two on such merchandise as paper towels or meats or toothpaste or pet foods) and (2) their ability to save customers money on the merchandise they stock.

Conclusions Regarding Whether Costco Has a Winning Strategy. In our view, it is fair to conclude that Costco has a winning strategy. As discussed in Chapter 1, there are three tests of a winning strategy:

(1) Does the strategy fit the company's situation?

(2) Is the strategy building competitive advantage?

(3) Is the strategy improving company performance?

As concerns Costco, the answers to these 3 questions are yes.

- Costco's strategy seems quite well matched to market conditions in the membership warehouse segment of the retailing industry and to the company's resources and competitive capabilities. We can see no justifiable basis for criticizing the match-up.
- As indicated above, there is convincing empirical evidence that Costco enjoys a competitive advantage over its rivals insofar as attracting customers/members and generating high sales volumes per warehouse location. Costco is clearly the standout leader in the membership warehouse retailing segment, and its status as industry leader is unlikely to be challenged by Sam's Club any time in the foreseeable future.
- And Costco's bottom-line performance is satisfactory (although, as indicated above, there is room for profit margin improvement and better returns on investment). Costco is adding new stores at somewhat faster pace and there seems to be ample room in the marketplace to add more Costco warehouse stores annually for some years to come—this should lay a solid foundation for further growth in revenues, net income, and earnings per share, along with boosting Costco's stock price.

What really seals the case for Costco having a winning strategy is that Costco is likely destined to remain the clear market leader in the membership warehouse segment for some time to come. Neither of Costco's two rivals in the membership warehouse segment is in a position to challenge or overtake Costco as the market leader in sales.

9. Are Costco's prices too low? Why or why not?

This is an important question to pose to the class. In the case, students will read that Costco's markups and prices were so low that Wall Street analysts had criticized Costco management for going all out to please customers at the expense of charging prices that would increase profits for shareholders. In commenting on Costco's pricing strategy, one retailing analyst said, "They could probably get more money for a lot of the items they sell."

However, it is clear from reading the case that Costco's pricing strategy was to keep customers coming in to shop by wowing them with low prices. A key element of Costco's strategy to keep prices low to members was to cap the margins on brand name merchandise at 14 percent (compared to 20 to 50 percent margins at other discounters and many supermarkets). The margins on Costco's private-label Kirkland Signature items were a maximum of 15 percent, but the fractionally higher markups on Costco's private label items still resulted in its private-label prices being about 20 percent below comparable name brand items. According to Jim Sinegal:

> We always look to see how much of a gulf we can create between ourselves and the competition. So that the competitors eventually say, "These guys are crazy. We'll compete somewhere else." Some years ago, we were selling a hot brand of jeans for $29.99. They were $50 in a department store. We got a great deal on them and could have sold them for a higher price but we went down to $29.99. Why? We knew it would create a riot.
>
> We're very good merchants, and we offer value. The traditional retailer will say: "I'm selling this for $10. I wonder whether we can get $10.50 or $11." We say: "We selling this for $9. How do we get it down to $8?" We understand that our members don't come and shop with us because of the window displays or the Santa Claus or the piano player. They come and shop with us because we offer great values.

Furthermore, Sinegal was quite unimpressed with Wall Street calls for Costco to abandon its ultralow markups and pricing strategy, commenting "Those people are in the business of making money between now and next Tuesday. We're trying to build an organization that's going to be here 50 years from now."

Hence, class members have strong reason to believe that Costco's prices are indeed low (and perhaps at "rock bottom" levels). A good case can be made that Costco might indeed boost its profitability by charging a fraction more for much of the merchandise it sells—and as discussed above, an increase in Costco's thin profit margins is needed to materially improve its bottom-line performance.

Key Teaching Point Concerning Costco's Prices. Perhaps the best way to demonstrate to students just how low Costco's prices are is to have them look at case Exhibit 1 and lead the class through some number-crunching. The numbers in the table below—which you might want to use as the basis for a slide or transparency shown in class (or as a handout to class members)—reveals that Costco is selling its merchandise at barely more than breakeven prices (less than a 1% markup over full cost for fiscal years 2005 and 2008-2011). This becomes clear when one looks at the size of Costco's revenues from membership fees and then checks out what proportion membership fees represent of Costco's income before income taxes.

Income Statement Data	2011	2010	2009	2008	2005	2000
Membership fees (in millions)	$1,867	$1,691	$1,533	$1,506	$1,073	$ 544
Income before income taxes (in millions)	2,439	2,054	1,714	1,999	1,549	1,052
Membership fees as a % of Costco's income before income taxes	76.5%	82.3%	89.4%	75.3%	69.3%	51.7%
Amount of income before income taxes that was contributed by merchandise sales (in millions of dollars)	23.5% or $573 million	17.3% or $355 million		24.7% or $493 million	31.7% or $476 million	48.3% or $508 million
Net merchandise sales (in millions)	$87,048	$76,255	$69,889	$70,997	$51,862	$31,621
Dollar contribution of merchandise sales to income before income taxes as a % of Costco's net sales of merchandise	0.66%	0.47%		0.69%	0.92%	1.61%

What students ought to see from the above calculations is that anywhere from two-thirds to three-fourths of Costco's income before taxes in fiscal years 2005 and 2008-2011 has in effect come from membership fees. This means that Costco's markup on the merchandise it sells ends up covering the company's operating expenses with only a paltry 0.7% to 1% left over for contributing to pretax profit—in other words, Costco's prices are just barely above the breakeven level. These calculations also bolster the case of outsiders that Costco should consider increasing its prices at least slightly in order to boost profitability (and profitability is indeed in need of being boosted!).

The above calculations should suffice to demonstrate to class members that Costco's prices are indeed quite low (about as low as possible!!)—especially given that the company operates very lean and goes all-out to keep its operating expenses to a minimum.

Students should realize that Costco is very much a low-cost operator. As Jim Sinegal stated in a recent Costco annual report:

> Costco is able to offer lower prices and better values by eliminating virtually all the frills and costs historically associated with conventional wholesalers and retailers, including salespeople, fancy buildings, delivery, billing, and accounts receivable. We run a tight operation with extremely low overhead which enables us to pass on dramatic savings to our members.

10. What do you think of Costco's compensation practices? Does it surprise you that Costco employees apparently are rather well-compensated? Better compensated than employees at Sam's Club or BJ's?

Costco's compensation and benefit levels are substantially higher than those at Wal-Mart (and presumably those at Wal-Mart's Sam's Club subsidiary—many of the Sam's Club locations are adjacent to Wal-Mart Supercenters).

Starting wages for new Costco employees were in the $10–$12 range in 2011; hourly pay scales for warehouse jobs ranged from $12 to $23, depending on the type of job. Salaried employees in Costco warehouses could earn anywhere from $30,000 to $125,000 annually. For example, salaries for merchandise managers were in the $58,000 to $68,000 range; salaries for supervisors ranged from $45,000 to $73,000; and salaries for general managers of warehouses were in the $90,000 to $125,000 range.

Moreover, Costco employees enjoyed a benefit package that included the following:

- Health and dental care plans.
- Convenient prescription pick-up at Costco's pharmacies, with co-payments of $3 for generic drugs and generally no more than 15% co-pay for brand-name drugs, subject to a minimum co-pay of $10 for brand-name drugs and a maximum co-pay of $50).
- A vision program that paid up to $60 for a refraction eye exam (the amount charged at Costco's optical centers) and had $150 annual allowances for the purchase of glasses and contact lenses at Costco Optical departments or $100 annual allowances if purchased elsewhere.
- A 401(k) plan where Costco matched hourly employee contributions 50 cents on the dollar for the first $1,000 annually to a maximum company match of $500 per year. Eligible employees qualified for additional company contributions based on the employee's years of service and eligible earnings. The company's union employees on the West Coast qualified for matching contributions of 50 cents on the dollar to a maximum company match of $250 a year; eligible union employees qualified for additional company contributions based on straight-time hours worked. Company contributions to employee 410(k) plans were $287 million in fiscal 2009, $313 million in fiscal 2010, and $345 million in fiscal 2011.
- A dependent care reimbursement plan.
- Confidential professional counseling services.
- Company-paid long term disability coverage equal to 60 percent of earnings for workers that were out for more than 180 days on a non-worker's compensation leave of absence.
- All employees who passed their 90-day probation period and were working at least 10 hours per week were automatically enrolled in a short-term disability plan covering non-work related injuries or illnesses for up to 26 weeks. Weekly short-term disability payments equaled 60 percent of average weekly wages up to a maximum of $1,000.
- Generous life insurance and accidental death and dismemberment coverage.
- An employee stock purchase plan.
- A health care reimbursement plan where benefit eligible employees could arrange to have pre-tax money automatically deducted from their paychecks and deposited in a health care reimbursement account that could be used to pay medical and dental bills.
- A long-term care insurance plan for employees with 10 or more years of service.

Good wages and benefits were said to be why employee turnover at Costco ran 6-7 percent after the first year of employment. Some Costco employees had been with the company since its founding in 1983. Many others had started working part-time at Costco while in high-school or college and opted to make a career at the company. One Costco employee told an ABC 20/20 reporter, "It's a good place to work; they take good care of us." A Costco vice president and head baker said working for Costco was a family affair: "My whole family works for Costco, my husband does, my daughter does, my new son-in-law does. Another employee, a receiving clerk that made about $40,000 a year, said "I want to retire here. I love it here." An employee with over two years of service could not be fired without the approval of a senior company officer.

Although admitting that paying good wages and good benefits was contrary to conventional wisdom in discount retailing, Jim Sinegal was convinced that having a well-compensated workforce was very important to executing Costco's strategy successfully. He said, "Imagine that you have 120,000 loyal ambassadors out there who are constantly saying good things about Costco. It has to be a significant advantage for you….. paying good wages and keeping your people working with you is very good business." When a reporter asked him about why Costco treated its workers so well compared to other retailers (particularly Wal-Mart which paid lower wages and had a skimpier benefits package), Sinegal replied: "Why shouldn't employees have the right to good wages and good careers?"…….It absolutely makes good business sense. Most people agree that we're the lowest-cost producer. Yet we pay the highest wages. So it must mean we get better productivity. Its axiomatic in our business—you get what you pay for."

Having brought out these points, you should then press the class for their opinions as to whether Jim Sinegal is right. There are several questions you can pose to stimulate discussion:

- Do you agree with Jim Sinegal's views about the importance of having well-compensated employees at Costco?
- Are Costco's employees overpaid?
- Could Costco boost profitability by trimming back on its fairly high levels of compensation and its probably pricey fringe benefit package?
- What are the benefits to Costco and its shareholders of compensating employees so well?
- Are shareholders well-served by the company's practice of paying good wages and fringe benefits? Would Costco shareholders be better off if the company's pay scales were somewhat lower and its fringe benefit offerings less costly? Why or why not?
- What does Costco's practice of paying good wages/salaries and having an attractive fringe benefit package tell us about the company's values?
- If Costco opts to boost profitability by increasing its profit margins, would it be better to raise prices very slightly (say 0.5%) rather than to trim back on compensation and benefits for its work force?

It is reasonable for class members to suspect that wages and fringe benefits at Wal-Mart/Sam's Club were skimpier than those at Costco. But it is pretty hard to disagree with Jim Sinegal's philosophy and beliefs about the merits of good compensation for Costco employees.

11. What recommendations would you make to Costco top executives regarding how best to sustain the company's growth and improve its financial performance?

Costco is not a company with glaring problems and shortcomings that desperately need to be fixed. On the whole, we think students should recommend that the company "stay the course" and continue with the present strategy largely unchanged from what we see the company doing as of the end of fiscal 2011. The company has a sound strategy and no major overhaul is called for—some minor tweaking and fine-tuning might well be proposed by class members.

There are a couple of issues that you should press the class to deal with:

- What can/should Costco management do to try to boost profit margins and spur improvements in the company's bottom-line? The above analysis of the company's financial performance indicated there was room for improvement in the company's overall profitability.
- Should the company avoid incurring additional long-term debt, even if it means curtailing the number of new warehouses opened annually?
- Should international expansion be given more emphasis than expanding the warehouse locations in the U.S. and/or Canada?

Costco's options for boosting its profit margins are fairly limited:

- Boost profitability by doing a better job of containing selling and administrative costs. The problem with this option is that Costco is already a lean operator; management has long been has been aggressive in controlling operating costs and finding ways to operate cost-efficiently. There are not likely many ways to trim costs by very much.
- Raise prices fractionally. This is probably the quickest and surest route to better profitability. But the culture at Costco and Jim Sinegal's strong conviction about charging the lowest possible prices will make this option a tough sell.
- Continue to open new stores and grow sales at existing stores.
    - Sales growth at existing stores might well over time produce better profitability, since costs at existing stores might not rise appreciably as store traffic and sales volumes grow. Costco might be able to spur sales growth at existing stores by adding new product lines (like furniture) or having more big ticket "treasure hunt" items in its merchandise lineup.
    - Aggressively recruiting new members for existing stores would help grow membership fees and boost store traffic and sales volume.
    - Opening new stores should definitely act to boost total sales and total profits—but it may not do much for profit margins due to the extra costs associated with a new store opening—see the pre-opening expenses shown in case Exhibit 1.

The company has the financial resources to continue to grow its business and open new warehouse locations, but some class members could make a good argument that the challenging macroeconomic environment and the current amount of long-term debt (while not burdensome) still make it advisable to keep the number of new store openings within the number than can be financed with internal cash flows—so as to avoid incurring much additional long-term debt. Some class members might favor raising prices slightly so as to boost cash flows from operations and thereby generate more funds to finance growth internally.

Winding Up the Class: You can end the class by pointing out that Costco Wholesale is a perfect example of a company that

- Has a good strategy and
- Is executing the strategy with a high degree of proficiency.

Costco, in our view, is a company that illustrates why Chapter 1 stressed the point that:

Good strategy + Good strategy execution = Good management

EPILOGUE

At the end of the 3rd quarter of fiscal 2012, Costco operated 602 warehouses, including 435 in the United States and Puerto Rico, 82 in Canada, 32 in Mexico, 22 in the United Kingdom, 13 in Japan, eight in Taiwan, seven in Korea, and three in Australia. Four warehouses were opened in the 1st quarter of fiscal 2012; two warehouses in Japan were opened in the 2nd quarter; and five warehouses were opened in the 3rd quarter, bringing the total to 602 as of May 6, 2012. The company expected to open an additional six new warehouses prior to the end of its 2012 fiscal year on September 2, 2012.

The table below shows Costco's income statement for the third quarter (twelve weeks) and first thirty-six weeks of fiscal 2012, both ended May 6, 2012.

COSTCO WHOLESALE CORPORATION
CONDENSED CONSOLIDATED STATEMENTS OF INCOME
(dollars in millions, except per share data)
(unaudited)

	12 Weeks Ended		36 Weeks Ended	
	May 6, 2012	May 8, 2011	May 6, 2012	May 8, 2011
REVENUE				
Net sales	$ 21,849	$ 20,188	$ 65,538	$ 59,460
Membership fees	475	435	1,381	1,277
Total revenue	22,324	20,623	66,919	60,737
OPERATING EXPENSES				
Merchandise costs	19,543	18,067	58,613	53,059
Selling, general and administrative	2,151	1,991	6,472	5,970
Preopening expenses	6	8	22	24
Provision for impaired assets, closing costs and other, net	1	1	2	7
Operating income	623	556	1,810	1,677
OTHER INCOME (EXPENSE)				
Interest expense	(19)	(27)	(73)	(80)
Interest income and other, net	18	5	65	14
INCOME BEFORE INCOME TAXES	622	534	1,802	1,611
Provision for income taxes	217	193	657	569
Net income including noncontrolling interests	405	341	1,145	1,042
Net income attributable to noncontrolling interests	(19)	(17)	(45)	(58)
NET INCOME ATTRIBUTABLE TO COSTCO	$386	$324	$1,100	$984
NET INCOME PER COMMON SHARE ATTRIBUTABLE TO COSTCO:				
Basic	$0.89	$0.74	$2.53	$2.26
Diluted	$0.88	$0.73	$2.50	$2.22
Shares used in calculation (000's)				
Basic	433,791	436,977	434,180	435,913
Diluted	439,166	443,570	439,748	442,727

Plainly, the above results show that Costco's performance continued to be good during the first three quarters of fiscal 2012.

Net sales increased $1.67 billion or 8.2% in the third quarter of fiscal 2012, and $6.1 billion or 10.2% in the first thirty-six weeks of 2012. These increases were attributable to sales gains at warehouse locations open at least twelve full months and sales at the 20 net new warehouses opened since the end of the third quarter of fiscal 2011. Sales gains at warehouse locations open at least twelve full months were 5% and 8% in the third quarter and first thirty-six weeks of 2012, respectively, and were positively impacted by increases in both shopping frequency and the average amount spent per visit by Costco members.

In May 2012, Costco purchased the outstanding 50% ownership interest in Costco de Mexico from Controladora Comercial Mexicana, S.A.B. de C.V. ("CCM") for approximately $$760 million, thus giving Costco 100% ownership of the 32 Costco warehouses in Mexico. Previously, the Costco Mexico joint venture had been 50% owned by each of Costco Wholesale and CCM and operated by Costco Wholesale.

For the latest information on developments at Costco Wholesale, please check the company's latest financial results and press releases in the Investor Relations section at **www.costco.com**.

CHAPTER 2

CHARTING A COMPANY'S DIRECTION: VISION AND MISSION, OBJECTIVES, AND STRATEGY

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Chapter 2 presents an overview of the managerial ins and outs of crafting and executing company strategies. Special attention is given to management's direction-setting responsibilities – charting a strategic course, setting performance targets, and choosing a strategy capable of producing the desired outcomes. The chapter also examines which kinds of strategic decisions are made at what levels of management and the roles and responsibilities of the company's board of directors in the strategy-making, strategy-executing process.

LECTURE OUTLINE

I. **Introduction –** Crafting and executing a strategy are the heart and soul of managing a business enterprise.

II. **What Does the Process of Crafting and Executing Strategy Entail?**

1. Crafting and executing a company's strategy is a five-phase managerial process:

   a. Developing a strategic vision of the company's long term direction, a mission that describes the company's purpose, and a set of values to guide the pursuit of the vision and mission.

   b. Setting objectives and using them as yardsticks for measuring the company's performance and progress.

   c. Crafting a strategy to achieve the objectives and move the company along the strategic course that management has charted.

   d. Executing the chosen strategy efficiently and effectively.

   e. Monitoring developments, evaluating performance, and initiating corrective adjustments in the company's vision and mission, objectives, strategy, or execution in light of actual experience, changing conditions, new ideas, and new opportunities.

2. **Figure 2.1, The Strategy-Making, Strategy-Executing Process,** illustrates this process.

III. **Task 1: Developing a Strategic Vision, A Mission Statement, and a Set of Core Values**

1. Developing a Strategic Vision

   a. Top management's views and conclusions about the company's long-term direction and what product–market–customer mix seems optimal for the road ahead constitute a **strategic vision** for the company.

   b. A number of factors need to be considered in deciding what words to use when creating the vision which will tell the company 'where we are going.' **Table 2.1, Wording a Vision Statement** – the Dos and Don'ts, explores some of these critical word choices.

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2. Communicating the Strategic Vision

    a. A strategic vision has little value to the organization unless it's effectively communicated down the line to lower-level managers and employees.

    b. An effectively communicated vision is a valuable management tool for enlisting the commitment of company personnel to engage in actions that move the company forward in the intended direction.

    c. A strategic vision can usually be stated adequately in one to two paragraphs, and managers should be able to explain it to company personnel and outsiders in 5 to 10 minutes.

ILLUSTRATION CAPSULE 2.1

Examples of Strategic Visions – How Well Do They Measure Up?

Discussion Question: (1) What appears to be missing from the Coca-Cola vision statement presented in Capsule 2.1?

Answer: (1) Brevity – the statement is very long which makes it difficult to meet the 5-10 minute insider/outsider explanation criteria. (2) Future – the statement does not include a forward looking component which makes it very static.

Discussion Question: 1 What is effective in the Proctor & Gamble vision statement presented in Capsule 2.1?

Answer: The statement is short, making it focused and memorable. The vision described is feasible and makes good business sense.

    d. A well thought-out, forcefully communicated strategic vision pays off in several respects: (1) It crystallizes senior executives' own views about the firm's long-term direction; (2) it reduces the risk of rudderless decision making; (3) it is a tool for winning the support of organization members to help make the vision a reality; (4) it provides a beacon for lower-level managers in setting departmental objectives and crafting departmental strategies that are in sync with the company's overall strategy; and (5) it helps an organization prepare for the future. When management is able to demonstrate significant progress in achieving these five benefits, it can count its efforts to create an effective vision for the company as successful.

3. Developing a Company Mission Statement

    a. The distinction between a strategic vision and a mission statement is fairly clear-cut: A **strategic vision** portrays a company's aspirations for its *future* ("where we are going"), whereas a company's **mission** describes its *purpose* and its *present* business ("who we are, what we do, and why we are here").

    b. A company mission statement should ideally (1) identifies the company's products/services, (2) specifies the buyer needs that it seeks to satisfy and the customer groups or markets it serves, and (3) gives the company its own identity.

4. **Linking the Vision/Mission with Company Values**

    a. By **values or core values**, we mean the beliefs, traits, and ways of doing things that management has determined should guide the pursuit of its vision and mission.

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CORE CONCEPT

A company's values are the beliefs, traits, and behavioral norms that company personnel are expected to display in conducting the company's business and pursuing its strategic vision and mission.

b. Most companies have articulated four to eight core values that company personnel are expected to display and that are supposed to be mirrored in how the company conducts its business.

ILLUSTRATION CAPSULE 2.2

Zappo's Mission and Core Values

Discussion Question: Zappo states that its mission statement is influenced by a set of ten core values. What are these values and how do they influence the mission statement?

Answer: Zappo's mission is based upon their internal philosophy of "WOW" which is externally expressed as: to provide the best customer service possible. Each value statement focuses on a different facet of the enterprise and discusses how that facet helps provide the "WOW" through service, change, fun, creativity, growth, learning, positive attitude, passion, frugality, and humility.

IV. Task 2: Setting Objectives

1. The managerial purpose of setting **objectives** is to convert the strategic vision into specific performance targets. Objectives reflect management's aspirations for company performance in light of the industry's prevailing economic and competitive conditions and the company's internal capabilities.

CORE CONCEPT

Objectives are an organization's performance targets—the specific results management wants to achieve.

2. Well-stated objectives are specific, quantifiable or measurable and contain a deadline for achievement.

3. Concrete, measurable objectives are managerially valuable for three reasons: (1) They focus efforts and align actions throughout the organization, (2) they serve as *yardsticks* for tracking a company's performance and progress, and (3) they motivate employees to expend greater effort and perform at a high level.

CORE CONCEPT

A company exhibits **strategic intent** when it relentlessly pursues an ambitious strategic objective, concentrating the full force of its resources and competitive actions on achieving that objective.

4. The Imperative of Setting Stretch Objectives – The experiences of countless companies and managers teach that one of the best ways to promote outstanding company performance is for managers to deliberately set performance targets high enough to stretch an organization to perform at its full potential and deliver the best possible results.

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5. What Kinds of Objectives to Set

> CORE CONCEPT
>
> **Financial objectives** relate to the financial performance targets management has established for the organization to achieve.
>
> **Strategic objectives** relate to target outcomes that indicate a company is strengthening its market standing, competitive vitality, and future business prospects.

a. Two very distinctive types of performance yardsticks are required:
   - Those relating to financial performance
   - Those relating to strategic performance

b. A company's set of financial and strategic objectives should include both near-term and longer-term performance targets.

c. When trade-offs have to be made between achieving long-term objectives and achieving short-term objectives, long-term objectives should generally take precedence.

6. The Need for a Balanced Approach to Objective Setting - Of equal or greater importance than financial performance is a company's strategic performance—outcomes that indicate whether a company's market position and competitiveness are deteriorating, holding steady, or improving.

> CORE CONCEPT
>
> The **Balanced Scorecard** is a widely used method for combining the use of both strategic and financial objectives, tracking their achievement, and giving management a more complete and balanced view of how well an organization is performing.

7. **The Need for Objectives at All Organizational Levels**

a. Objective setting should not stop with top management's establishing of companywide performance targets.

b. Each area of the organization does its part and contributes directly to the desired companywide outcomes and results.

c. This means setting performance targets for each organization unit that support, rather than conflict with or negate, the achievement of companywide strategic and financial objectives.

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ILLUSTRATION CAPSULE 2.3

Examples of Company Objectives

Discussion Question: 1. What is the prominent purpose of an organization's stated objectives?

Answer: Objectives identify an organization's performance targets. They serve to function as measures for tracking the organization's performance and progress toward achievement of desired goals.

Discussion Question: 2. What are some specific examples that are included in the Capsule:

Answer: Some specific examples include:
Nordstrom – Increase same store sales by 2-4% (Financial)
Goodyear – Increase operating income (Financial) and reduce the percentage of non-branded replacement tires sold (Strategic). Increase the number of retail outlets in China (Strategic).
PepsiCo – Build on the existing better-for-you nutrition business (Strategic). Improve production efficiency in packaging and water use (Financial).

V. Task 3: Crafting a Strategy

1. Strategy Making Involves Managers at All Organizational Levels

   a. A company's senior executives obviously have important strategy-making roles.

   b. An enterprise's chief executive officer (CEO), as captain of the ship, carries the mantles of chief direction setter, objective setter, chief strategy maker, and chief strategy implementer for the total enterprise. Ultimate responsibility for leading the strategy-making, strategy-executing process rests with the CEO.

   c. In most companies, the heads of business divisions and major product lines, the chief financial officer, and vice presidents for production, marketing, human resources, and other functional departments have influential strategy-making roles.

   d. It is a mistake to view strategy making as exclusively a top management function, the province of owner-entrepreneurs, CEOs, and other senior executives.

   e. Managers with day-to-day familiarity of, and authority over, a specific operating unit thus have a big edge over headquarters executives in making wise strategic choices for their operating unit.

   f. In most of today's companies, crafting and executing strategy is a collaborative team effort in which every company manager plays a strategy making role —ranging from minor to major—for the area he or she heads.

2. A Company's Strategy Making Hierarchy

   a. It follows that a company's overall strategy is really a collection of strategic initiatives and actions devised by managers and key employees up and down the whole organizational hierarchy.

   b. The larger and more diverse the operation of an enterprise, the more points of strategic initiative it has and the more managers and employees at more levels of management that have a relevant strategy-making role.

   c. ***Figure 2.2, A Company's Strategy-Making Hierarchy***, shows who is generally responsible for devising what pieces of a company's overall strategy.

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CORE CONCEPT

Corporate strategy is strategy at the multi-business level, concerning how to improve company performance or gain competitive advantage by managing a set of businesses simultaneously.

Business strategy is strategy at the single-business level, concerning how to improve the performance or gain a competitive advantage in a particular line of business.

d. In diversified, multi-business companies where the strategies of several different businesses have to be managed, the strategy-making task involves four distinct types or levels of strategy, each of which involves different facets of the company's overall strategy:

1. Corporate strategy—consists of the kinds of initiatives the company uses to establish business positions in different industries, the approaches corporate executives pursue to boost the combined performance of the set of businesses the company has diversified into, and the means of capturing cross-business synergies and turning them into competitive advantage.

2. Business strategy—concerns the actions and the approaches crafted to produce successful performance in one specific line of business. The key focus here is crafting responses to changing market circumstances and initiating actions to strengthen market position, build competitive advantage, and develop strong competitive capabilities.

3. Functional-area strategies—concern the actions, approaches, and practices to be employed in managing particular functions or business processes or key activities within a business. Functional-area strategies add specifics to the hows of business-level strategy. The primary role of a functional-area strategy is to support the company's overall business strategy and competitive approach.

4. Operating strategies—concerns the relatively narrow strategic initiatives and approaches for managing key operating units (plants, distribution centers, geographic units) and for specific operating activities with strategic significance (advertising campaigns, the management of specific brands, supply chain-related activities, and Website sales and operations). Operating strategies add further detail and completeness to functional-area strategies and to the overall business strategy.

e. In single-business enterprises, the corporate and business levels of strategy making merge into one level—business strategy. Thus, a single-business enterprise has only three levels of strategy:

1. Business strategy for the company as a whole.

2. Functional-area strategies for each main area within the business.

3. Operating strategies undertaken by lower echelon managers to flesh out strategically significant aspects for the company's business and functional-area strategies.

f. Proprietorships, partnerships, and owner-managed enterprises may have only one or two strategy-making levels since in small-scale enterprises the whole strategy-making, strategy-executing function can be handled by just a few people.

3. Uniting the Strategy-Making Effort

a. Ideally, the pieces and layers of a company's strategy should fit together like a jigsaw puzzle. Anything less than a unified collection of strategies weakens company performance.

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b. Achieving unity in strategy making is partly a function of communicating the company's basic strategy theme effectively across the whole organization and establishing clear strategic principles and guidelines for lower-level strategy making.

4. A Strategic Vision + Objectives + Strategy = A Strategic Plan

a. Developing a strategic vision, setting objectives, and crafting a strategy are basic direction-setting tasks. Together, they constitute a strategic plan for coping with industry and competitive conditions, the expected actions of the industry's key players, and the challenges and issues that stand as obstacles to the company's success.

CORE CONCEPT

A **strategic plan** lays out the company's future direction, performance targets, and strategy.

b. In companies committed to regular strategy reviews and the development of explicit strategic plans, the **strategic plan** may take the form of a written document that is circulated to managers and perhaps, to selected employees.

c. In small, privately owned companies, it is rare for strategic plans to exist in written form.

VI. Task 4: Executing the Strategy

1. Managing the implementation of a strategy is easily the most demanding and time consuming part of the strategy management process.

2. Converting strategic plans into actions and results tests a manager's ability to direct organizational action, motivate people, build and strengthen competitive capabilities, create and nurture a strategy-supportive work climate, and meet or beat performance targets.

3. In most situations, managing the strategy execution process includes the following principal aspects:

- Staffing the organization to obtain needed skills and expertise.
- Developing and strengthening strategy-supporting resources and capabilities.
- Creating a strategy-supporting structure.
- Allocating ample resources to the activities critical to strategic success.
- Ensuring that policies and procedures facilitate effective strategy execution.
- Organizing the work effort along the lines of best practice.
- Installing information and operating systems that enable company personnel to perform essential activities.
- Motivating people and tying rewards directly to the achievement of performance objectives.
- Creating a company culture and work climate conducive to successful strategy execution.
- Exerting the internal leadership needed to propel implementation forward.

4. Good strategy execution requires diligent pursuit of operating excellence and it is a job for a company's whole management team.

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VII. Task 5: Evaluating Performance and Initiating Corrective Adjustments

1. The fifth phase of the strategy-management process, monitoring new external developments, evaluating the company's progress, and making corrective adjustments, is the trigger point for deciding whether to continue or change the company's vision and mission, objectives, strategy, and/or strategy execution methods.

2. As long as the company's strategy continues to pass the three tests of a winning strategy, simply fine-tuning the strategic plan and continuing with efforts to improve strategy execution are sufficient.

VIII. Corporate Governance: The Role of the Board of Directors in the Strategy-Making, Strategy-Executing Process

1. Although senior managers have lead responsibility for crafting and executing a company's strategy, it is the duty of the board of directors to exercise strong oversight and see that the five tasks of strategic management are done in a manner that benefits shareholders, in the case of investor-owned enterprises, or stakeholders, in the case of not-for-profit organizations.

2. A company's board of directors has four important obligations to fulfill:

   a. Oversee the company's financial accounting and financial reporting practices.

   b. Critically appraise the company's direction, strategy, and business approaches.

   c. Evaluate the caliber of senior executives' strategic leadership skills.

   d. Institute a compensation plan for top executives that rewards them for actions and results that serve shareholder interests.

ILLUSTRATION CAPSULE 2.4

Corporate Governance Failures at Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac

Discussion Question: 1. In what way did the Board of Directors at Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac contribute to the financial failure faced by both organizations?

Answer: The government appointed boards failed to understand the risks associated with the sub-prime mortgage loan strategies their respective organizations were pursuing. The audit and compensation committees at both organizations were ineffective and allowed management to effectively substantiate their own performance bonuses with internally developed financial reports. In the case of Freddie Mac, management went so far as to manipulate financial data to improve bonus pay. The boards of both companies also failed to heed internal and external warnings of the impending financial crisis which lead to losses for both firms totaling more than $100 billion in 2008.

3. Every corporation should have a strong independent board of directors that:

   a. Is well informed about the company's performance.

   b. Guides and judges the CEO and other top executives.

   c. Has the courage to curb management actions the board believes are inappropriate or unduly risky.

   d. Certifies to shareholders that the CEO is doing what the board expects.

   e. Provides insight and advice to management.

   f. Is intensely involved in debating the pros and cons of key decisions and actions.

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ASSURANCE OF LEARNING EXERCISES

1. Using the information in Table 2.1, critique the adequacy and merit of the following vision statements, listing effective elements and shortcomings. Rank the vision statements from best to worst once you complete your evaluation.

   The student should produce a table similar to the following:

Company Name	Effective Elements	Shortcomings
Amazon	• Graphic • Feasible • Easy to communicate	• Vague • Not distinctive
BASF	• Directional • Focused • Desirable	• Not forward looking
Mastercard	• Desirable • Easy to communicate	• Vague or incomplete • Not distinctive
Hilton Hotels Corporation	• Directional • Focused • Feasible • Desirable	• Not forward-looking • Not distinctive

   A suggested ranking of the vision statements from best to worst is: Hilton Hotels Corporation, BASF, Amazon, MasterCard.

2. Go to the company websites for Intel (http://www.intc.com); Home Depot (http://corporate.homedepot.com); and Avon (www.avoncompany.com) to find some examples of strategic and financial objectives. Make a list of four objectives for each company, and indicate which of these are strategic and which are financial.

   Below are examples that students might find:

   Intel

   1. 2011 10-K Statement, Changing primary focus from the design and manufacture of semiconductor chips for PCs and servers to the delivery of solutions consisting of hardware and software platforms and supporting services.
   2. 2nd Quarter 2012 Press Release, Increase revenue between 3% to 5% for the year (Financial).
   3. 2nd Quarter 2012 Press Release, Rich mix of Intel based Ultrabook, tablet, and phone introductions (Strategic).
   4. 2nd Quarter 2012 Press Release, Long Term investments in product development and manufacturing (Strategic).

   Home Depot

   1. 10-K Statement, Exit Home Décor market segment (Strategic).
   2. 10-K Statement, Focus on Do It Yourself, Do It For Me, and Professional Customer market segments (Strategic).
   3. 1st Quarter fiscal 2012 Press Release, Grow sales by 4.6 for the year (Financial).
   4. 1st Quarter fiscal 2012 Press Release, Raise EPS by 17% to $2.90 for the year (Financial).

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Avon

1. 10-K Statement, improving brand competitiveness by focusing research and development resources on product innovation and by increasing our advertising (Strategic).

2. 10-K Statement, elevating organizational effectiveness by redesigning our structure to eliminate layers of management in order to take full advantage of our global scale and size (Strategic).

3. 1st Quarter fiscal 2012 Press Release, Maintain $0.92 dividend for 2012 (Financial)

4. 4th Quarter fiscal 2009 Year Press Release, operating margin reaching 15% by 2013 (Financial).

3. The primary strategic initiatives of Ford Motor Company's restructuring plan executed between 2005 and 2010 involved accelerating the development of new cars that customers would value, improving its balance sheet, working with its union employees to improve manufacturing competitiveness, reducing product engineering costs, reducing production capacity by approximately 40 percent, and reducing hourly head count by 40 to 50 percent. At the conclusion of the restructuring plan in 2010, Ford was ranked first among U.S. automobile manufacturers by J.D. Power in initial quality and had earned more than $5.4 billion in pre-tax profit on net revenues of $64.4 billion. Explain why its strategic initiatives taken at various organizational levels and functions were necessarily tightly coordinated to achieve its commendable results.

   The student should point out that Ford's restructuring plans were comprehensive and impacted virtually all aspects of the business. In order to deliver on the plan several key functions were involved:

   Engineering:

   - Development of new cars
   - Reducing engineering costs

   Finance:

   - Improving the balance sheet

   Operations:

   - Improving manufacturing competitiveness (unions)
   - Reducing production capacity
   - Reducing hourly headcount (unions)

   The student should note that of all of these specific objectives, the one that presented the most significant challenge was operations where key goals were directly related to renegotiation of union terms. Finally, the student should illustrate that no single objectives could stand on their own. In other words, the company would only achieve success if all functions delivered on the plan.

4. Go to the investor relations website for Walmart (http://investors.walmartstores.com) and review past presentations it has made during various investor conferences by clicking on the Events option in the navigation bar. Prepare a one- to two-page report that outlines what Walmart has said to investors about its approach to strategy execution. Specifically what has management discussed concerning staffing, resource allocation, policies and procedures, information and operating systems, continuous improvement, rewards and incentives, corporate culture, and internal leadership at the company?

   The student should be able to identify core strategic elements focused on low cost and value:

   - Walmart Discount Stores: Wide, clean, brightly-lit aisles and shelves stocked with a variety of quality, value-priced general merchandise

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- Walmart Superstores: Convenient, one-stop family shopping featuring our famous Every Day Low Prices
- Walmart Neighborhood Markets: quick and convenient shopping experience for customers who need groceries, pharmaceuticals, and general merchandise all at our famous Every Day Low Prices.
- Walmart Express Stores: offer low prices every day in a smaller format store that provides convenient access for fill-in and stock-up shopping trips in rural and urban areas.
- Marketside: Small community pilot grocery stores specializing in fresh, delicious meals at great prices.
- Walmart.com: The convenience, great merchandise selection, friendly service and Every Day Low Prices of your neighborhood Walmart to the Internet.

The student should be able to identify core cultural elements that impact all aspects of life as a Walmart employee (Source: http://walmartstores.com/AboutUs/295.aspx:)

- Open Door: Our management believes open communication is critical to understanding and meeting our associates' and our customers' needs. Associates can trust and rely on the open door; it's one of the most important parts of our culture.
- Sundown Rule: Observing the Sundown Rule means we do our best to answer requests by the close of business on the day we receive them. Whether it's a request from a store across the country or a call from down the hall, we do our very best to give each other and our customers same-day service. We do this by combining our efforts and depending upon each other to get things done.
- Grass Roots Process: Sam's philosophy lives on today in Walmart's Grass Roots Process, our formal way of capturing associates' ideas, suggestions and concerns.
- 3 Basic Beliefs & Values: Our unique culture has helped make Walmart one of the world's most admired companies. Since Sam Walton opened Walmart in 1962, our culture has rested on three basic beliefs. We live out these beliefs each day in our interactions with our customers and each other.
- 10-Foot Rule: The 10-foot Rule is one of our secrets to customer service. During his many store visits, Sam Walton encouraged associates (employees) to take this pledge with him: "I promise that whenever I come within 10 feet of a customer, I will look him in the eye, greet him, and ask if I can help him."
- Servant Leadership: Sam Walton believed that effective leaders do not lead from behind their desks. "It's more important than ever that we develop leaders who are servants, who listen to their partners – their associates – in a way that creates wonderful morale to help the whole team accomplish an overall goal," Sam said.
- Teamwork: Sam Walton, our founder, believed in the power of teamwork. As our stores grow and the pace of modern life quickens, that philosophy of teamwork has only become more important over the years.
- Walmart Cheer: Don't be surprised if you hear our associates shouting this enthusiastically at your local Walmart store. It's our cheer, and while it might not sound serious, we take it seriously. It's one way we show pride in our company.

5. Go to www.dell.com/leadership and read the sections dedicated to its board of directors and corporate governance. Is there evidence of effective governance at Dell in regard to (1) accurate financial reports and controls, (2) a critical appraisal of strategic action plans, (3) evaluation of the strategic leadership skills of the CEO, and (4) executive compensation?

   Students should recognize there is evidence the board of directors for Dell has responsibility to exercise oversight and direction over management. First, there are 12 directors, and 10 of these directors are independent. The definition of independence is: "A director will be considered to be "independent"

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only if the Board affirmatively determines that the director does not have any direct or indirect material relationship with Dell that may impair, or appear to impair, the director's ability to make independent judgments."

The Board has established a set of Corporate Governance Principles that are designed to reflect a set of core values that provide the foundation for the Board's approach to governance. These Principles clearly outline the roles of the Board and management. A review of these roles indicates the Board has significant responsibilities in the following areas: management planning and oversight, strategic and operational planning, major corporate actions, financial reporting, governance, compliance and risk management, and general advice to management.

The Principles distinctly outline the following: Board composition and structure which includes standards for a Board member to be declared independent; guidelines for the conduct of Board meetings; and activities related to other Board operations and practices which includes open access to management. The information in the Principles indicates the four obligations outlined in this chapter for a company's Board of Directors are most likely fulfilled.

6. Based on the information provided in Illustration Capsule 2.4, explain how corporate governance at Freddie Mac failed the enterprise's shareholders and other stakeholders. Which important obligations to shareholders were fulfilled by Fannie Mae's board of directors? What is your assessment of how well Fannie Mae's compensation committee handled executive compensation at the government-sponsored mortgage giant?

The student should be able to provide an exhaustive list of failures of the Board of Directors. Leading failures resulting in the financial collapse include:

- It was a politically appointed board
- The Board did not understand the financial risks associated with the business strategy
- The Board did not monitor the decisions of the CEO
- The Board did not exercise effective oversight of the accounting principles employed which allowed executives to manipulate earnings statements
- The Board approved an excessive compensation plan that allowed executives to gain performance bonuses based upon the manipulated earnings

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