



YOUR UNIQUE SELLING PROPOSITION

Create a unique selling proposition to ensure your marketing stands out.

By George Parker

What you have to impress upon prospective customers is the added value they can expect when they establish a relationship with you. It may be a specific feature so unique to your company that it can stand alone as a persuasive reason to deal with you. But the odds on finding and isolating that single 24-carat nugget of information that makes you so special are pretty small. More than likely, it's a combination of less spectacular reasons that, when added up, give you a definite perceived advantage over your competition.

This single feature, or combination of distinguishing features, has been given many names over the years by various marketing pundits, but the most commonly accepted and longest lived is the unique selling proposition (USP), a term coined by Rosser Reeves, the CEO of Bates Advertising back in the 1950s. The interesting thing about a USP is that this unique attribute or feature doesn't necessarily have to be unique to you, your product or your services; you only have to create the perception that it is unique in the mind of the audience you are addressing.

And if, in so doing, you become the only one in your business category talking about your product's special attribute, you end up owning its uniqueness.

USP in Practice

Here's an example: Reeves did this with US toothpaste brand, Gleam. At the time, toothpaste was seen as merely a cleaning and whitening aid. (In those days, most people smoked three packs a day of unfiltered cigarettes and drank litres of diesel-strength coffee, so bad breath and less than pearly-white teeth were fairly common problems.)

After talking to the people who made Gleam, Reeves discovered it contained chlorophyll, which was primarily a breath freshener. Reeves immediately renamed and advertised the product as "Gleam Toothpaste with miracle ingredient GL70". This so-called miracle ingredient was vigorously hyped as the answer to effective oral hygiene for people who couldn't brush after every meal because it helped fight both tooth decay and bad breath.

If you didn't want to put up with the operating-room taste of things like Listerine, this was seen as the answer to your problems. Within months, the product was selling like hotcakes to hordes of smoking, coffee drinking, hamburger-munching Americans.

But the most interesting part of the story is that just about every other brand of toothpaste on the market had chlorophyll in it. It was only because Reeves took the time to find out about every single product ingredient and its attributes, recognise that one of them presented an opportunity to create a USP, develop a completely new way to position Gleam from the way toothpaste had always been marketed to

the public, and then be the only one in the marketplace to talk about it (making it the core element of all the advertising), that he was able to turn a me-too toothpaste into a huge brand.

This concept of a USP is an important lesson to consider when putting together a marketing strategy. Do not doubt for one minute that there will be some particular facet of your business you can promote as being unique, whether it's in the products or services you create, the way you sell them or the second-to-none after-sales services you develop that keep customers coming back. Somewhere in that mix there will be something you can transform into a USP. All you have to do is find it, then communicate it to your potential market.

Nailing Your USP

Whether you're a start-up or reinventing yourself, identifying the essential core elements that can help build your company's name and reputation will get you started on the road to fame, fortune and fast cars.

As you develop a marketing strategy to use as the foundation of your communications plan, some questions to consider are:

- Are you unique?
- If so, in what way?
- Can you definitely prove it?
- If you're not unique, are you better at what you do than the competition? What exactly is it that makes you better?
- Can you demonstrate in easily understandable language what it is that makes you better or different?
- Do you provide quality, either at a price or irrespective of price?
- Do you provide value? And that doesn't necessarily mean offering the cheapest prices or matching those of some fly-by-night outfit that could very well not be around tomorrow.
- If you believe you provide value, can you express it in 20 words or less, spelling out what is the unquestionable benefit you provide at a fair price to satisfied customers?
- Do you back up your quality products or services with solid, no-questions-asked guarantees and unmatched customer relationships?
- Are you totally reliable? This goes beyond the two points above and is the reason why some companies have been in business for years, while seemingly not being different from other companies with similar products and services. Perhaps a better way of posing the question would be: Does your company have integrity?
- Do you give the impression that you've been around for a while and intend to be around for a good deal longer? And that anyone dealing with you (particularly in a B2B relationship) should be assured that you will unhesitatingly solve, to their complete satisfaction, any problems that may occur in your business relationship?

- Even though it may not necessarily be seen as an obvious bottom-line revenue generator, are you prepared to spend time helping solve customers' problems, irrespective of whether this is part of the service you normally provide?
- If you've been in business for a while, do you have solid and reference-proof case studies, particularly with locally recognisable satisfied customers that you can talk about in your advertising? Can potential customers call your existing customers to verify their experiences with you?
- If you went out of business tomorrow, would anyone care apart from you, your mother and your investors?

Let's assume you can answer yes to at least one of the above items. If so, congratulations, you have a USP. Put it down on paper and integrate it in all your marketing material.

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