

How To Create A Unique Selling Proposition (USP)

By Jay Abraham

Even while you creatively imitate others, remember that it's also important to be different. Distinguish your business or practice from all the rest. Make your enterprise special in the eyes of your customer or client.

How do you get your business differentiated? By creating a Unique Selling Proposition - or USP.

A USP is that distinct and appealing idea that sets you favourably apart from every other competitor.

The long-term marketing and operational successes you achieve will, ultimately, be helped or hurt by the USP you decide upon.

The possibilities for building a USP are unlimited. It's best, however, to adopt a USP that addresses an obvious void in the marketplace that you can honestly fill.

Beware: It's actually counter-productive to adopt a USP if you cannot fulfil the promise.

Most business owners don't have a USP, only a "me too," rudderless, nondescript, unappealing business that feeds solely upon the sheer momentum of the marketplace. There's nothing unique; there's nothing distinct. They promise no great value, benefit, or service - just "buy from us" for no justifiable, rational reason.

It's no surprise then that most businesses, lacking a USP, merely get by. Their failure rate is high, their owners are apathetic, and they get only a small share of the potential business. But other than a possible convenient location, why should they get much patronage if they fail to offer any appealing promise, unique feature or special service?

Would you want to patronise a firm that's "just there," with no unique benefit, no incredible prices or selection, no especially comforting counsel, service or guarantee? Or would you prefer a firm that offers you the broadest selection in the country? Or one with every item marked up less than half the margin other competitors charge? Or one that sells the "Rolls Royce" of the industry's products?

Can you see what an appealing difference the USP makes in establishing a company's perceived image or posture to the customer? It's ludicrous to operate any business without carefully crafting a clear, strong, appealing USP into the very fabric of the daily existence of that business.

The point is to focus on the one niche, need or gap that is most sorely lacking, provided you can keep the promise you make.

You can even create hybrid USPs - combinations that integrate one marketing gap with another. Before you decide on a USP, though, be sure you can always deliver that USP through your whole organisation. You and your staff must consistently maintain high levels of quality or service.

If you decide your USP is that your company offers the broadest selection of products or services "instantly available" or "always in stock," but in reality you only stock six out of 25 items and only a few of each item, then you're falling down on the essence of your USP promise, and your marketing will probably fail. It is critical to always fulfil the "big promise" of your USP.

If you don't honestly believe you can deliver on your USP, pick another one to build your business on. Just be sure it's unique and that you can fulfil it.

Remember, the USP is the nucleus around which you will build your success, fame, and wealth, so you better be able to state it. If you can't state it, your prospects won't see it. Whenever a customer needs the type of product or service you sell, your USP should bring your company immediately to mind.

Clearly conveying the USP through both your marketing and your business performance will make your business great and success inevitable. But you must reduce your USP to its sinewy bare essence.

Try it. With paper and pen, prepare a one-paragraph statement of your new USP. At first, you will have trouble expressing it tightly and specifically. It may take two or three paragraphs or more. That's okay. Ruthlessly edit away the generalities, and tenaciously focus on the crispest, clearest, most specific promise you could possibly hold out. Then, rework it and hack away the excess verbiage or hazy statements until you have a clearly defined, clearly apparent Unique Selling Proposition a customer can immediately seize upon. And then, integrate your USP into every marketing aspect of your business, such as display advertising, direct mail and field selling.

Let's say you run display-type ads, and your USP is that you have better selection and follow-up service than any other competitor. There are several ways to integrate these qualities into your ads. For example: State the selection USP in the ad headline:

"We Always Have 168 different Widgets in No Less than 12 Different Sizes and 10 Desirable Colours, in price ranges from \$6 to \$600."

Or, if good service at an affordable price is your USP, use this as a model:

"ABC Tree Trimmers will trim and maintain your trees and shrubs six times a year, once every two months, and all it costs you is \$16 a month, billed quarterly."

By now you should have the general idea that you should carefully integrate your newly adopted USP into the headline and body copy of every ad you run. And in every direct-mail piece you send out.

But integrating your USP into just your ads and mailing pieces isn't enough. You must integrate its positioning statement into every form of your marketing. When your salespeople call on prospects, everything they say should clearly reinforce your USP. They should explain the USP to the customer in a clear, concise statement.

Throughout the sales pitch, your sales reps should refer to the USP benefits or advantages, showing the prospect why it's vastly superior to take advantage of your USP rather than your competitor's USP, if he or she even has one.

Don't try and merely have your salespeople "wing it." Insist that they do their homework. Make them sit down (figuratively speaking) and express the essence of your USP. Be sure they can clearly and powerfully express your USP in 60 seconds (the oral equivalent of a written paragraph), and then compellingly state how it benefits the prospect. Furnish your prospects with plenty of examples of how you honestly deliver your USP.

When an old, tired company or profession adopts a powerful, new, and appealing USP, it gives new life, new excitement, new interest and new appeal to the marketing plan. You're suddenly different, instead of just being another interloper preying on customers you've trapped into hearing your sales pitch! Now you're on the customer's side.

However, remember this axiom: You will not appeal to everybody. In fact, certain USPs are designed to appeal to only one segment of a vast market. There is a vast gulf between the upscale clients and the bargain seekers, and you probably can't reach them both. Which do you want to stake out as your market niche?

Don't adopt a USP that you can't deliver, or further marketing is useless. Also, analyse the market potential of various USP positions in terms of volume, profits and repeat business.

For example, the highest marketing niche may be in the exclusive, expensive USP, but the biggest money may be made in the discount-volume USP. There's a place for both, but if you try to ride two horses, you'll probably bite the dust. Remember too, that if your USP is giving advice, assistance and superior service; it can't stop with mere sales rhetoric. It must become total company conduct. If someone calls in with a question, the people answering the call must extend themselves.

The same goes for every person who interacts with that customer, from the cashier and the delivery person to the service or repair people. You and your employees must live, breathe, and act your USP at all times.

Sit down and write a synopsis of your USP for your staff, how you're trying to carry it out, and how everyone can project that USP to the world. Make their co-operation a condition of employment. The entire company must adhere to the USP.

Talk to your staff, write scripts, hold contests, and reward people who distinguish themselves in promoting your USP. Set an example so that your staff can see the USP in action.

How can you ensure that you are in the hearts and minds of your customers after the sale?

Here are a few good approaches:

* Immediately following a sale, write, call or visit your customers. During this follow-up effort, see that the customers feel important and special, and that their initial purchases are "resold." Repeat your USP and remind the customers how it helped them make their purchasing decision. Reassure customers about their wise decisions, and show how the same USP that served them this time will be there to serve them in the future.

* And again, state your USP, telling customers why you've adopted it, and why it's such an advantage to them. People rarely understand the benefits you provide them, unless you carefully educate them to appreciate your efforts on their behalf.

* A post-purchase follow-up incorporating the essence of your USP is vital, regardless of how frequently you "back-end" or resell to that customer. You enhance the customer's loyalty and value to your business by following up after the sale. At the very least, a follow-up call, letter, or sales appeal drastically reduces or eliminates cancellations, returns, refunds, complaints, adjustments and disputes, and reassures customers of the prudence of their recent purchase.

Good marketing requires that you give customers rational reasons for their emotional buying decision. There is a formula for success, and the USP is truly an integral part of that formula.

Don't underestimate the profit potential inherent in special offers. Acquiring first-time customers usually costs a small fortune.

Space ads have to reach tens of thousands of readers to produce a few hundred customers, so it may cost you \$10 or more to acquire a customer. The same goes for TV, radio, or direct mail. Field sales-people may have to call on 15 to 30 prospects before they make one sale, so the cost of acquiring a new customer may be "hundreds" of dollars.

But once you satisfactorily deliver your product or service and have a core customer base, you can continuously rework and resell at a very modest cost per sale. When you have a list of customers who have already shown their willingness to spend money on your products or services, it costs very little to go to them with additional special offers.

If broad choice is your USP, have a customer-service representative contact your customers to see if everything is satisfactory. If everything is not, offer to replace, repair or correct the product or service. Your customer-service people should know just as much about available choices and options as your salespeople. Give them reasonable authority to replace, repair or reinstall if there is any dissatisfaction. They should provide evidence to any customer with a problem, complaint or question that the USP is real and that the entire company is enthusiastically committed to doing whatever it takes to promptly fulfil the USP promise.

Your real wealth comes from repeat or residual business which will only happen if every aspect of your business is a continuous extension of your USP.

You can send a personal thank-you note, letter, or a computer-typed letter to customers. You can send a gift or a gift certificate. You can send items to correspond with holidays: A box of candy on Valentine's Day; a poinsettia, a turkey or ham at Christmas; a birthday card - the possibilities are many. If you add up the customer's value in future business or

repeat sales, you can probably justify a sizeable investment in his or her goodwill.

Everyone likes to be acknowledged and feel they are special.

You should even integrate your USP into every contact with dissatisfied customers!

Whenever someone asks for a refund, replacement, or adjustment, instead of resenting the fact that you have to give back money, use that opportunity to re-convey the essence of your USP - either in person or by letter. If you have an exchange department, instruct that staff to courteously and sincerely reiterate your firm's USP, and assure the dissatisfied customer of the firm's commitment to offer more service, greater selection, better guarantees or whatever. Then, if you issue credit or a check, include a prepared letter expressing your deep commitment to your USP, and apologising for any inconvenience, disappointment or dissatisfaction. With every refund, send a letter expressing disappointment that you did not fulfil the customers expectations, and strongly restate your firm's USP and your commitment to it.

Then ask the dissatisfied customer to please give you another chance to make good! And make it worth their while by giving them a discount certificate, a special bonus, offering three widgets for the price of two, or some other preferential treatment that shows unhappy customers you want their business back, that you appreciate them, and that you will make good.

Above everything else, never, ever lose track of the fact that USP is all about the customer or the client. It is not about me, you, the company or the profession. Don't make the mistake of aggrandising your business. Instead, help your customer or client do some aggrandising.

