



U.S.P.: THE COMPETITION KILLER

A U.S.P. is a Unique Selling Position. A tag line, or signature if you will, that you give yourself and then include on everything you print, every talk you give, every article you write for the newspaper, every ad you place, in your voice mail message, on your website, your business cards, your fax cover sheet ... everything you say and do.

A U.S.P. is a short statement that tells people who you are as an individual. You need one if you want to separate yourself from the other suppliers.

To be the most effective, your U.S.P. should contain at least the following 3 components -

- A statement about the unique services you provide - something that no other supplier provides, or at least advertises or promotes that they provide.
- A statement about your prospects greatest pain or desires. (You do know specifically who your prospect is, don't you?)
- A Guarantee.

And it should all be done in 20 words or less.

Your U.S.P. should also be -

- Unique
- Specific
- Believable - but outrageous enough that prospect will read it, stop-in- their-tracks and say, "Really? How do they do that?"
- Concise
- Connect emotionally with your prospects through fear of loss, greed, ego, desire, pain, frustration, to be better off than the Jones's, save more, make more, have more, spend less, get better service, etc., and, be
- Measurable

Think about the services you provide as a supplier that you could make into a U.S.P., a hook, so to speak, that would get your prospects to look up and take notice?

A service you offer and can 'qualify' that others don't? Don't either offer in writing, or don't 'qualify'. What one thing can you put in writing and offer that will separate you from all of the other photographic restorers?



What one thing - a service, a specialized area of knowledge, a product, a savings, a means of communicating –

- Is going to separate you from all of the other suppliers?
- Can you 'qualify' it?
- When you put it into words, will it cause people to sit up, take notice and respond?
- Is it easy to remember and repeat?
- Is it an 'offer' your customers will respond to?

HOW TO CREATE A UNIQUE SELLING POSITION (USP)

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.

A USP is that distinct and appealing idea that sets you and your business, or practice, favourably apart from every other generic 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 dynamically 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 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 that 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 Position 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 presentation.

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, invoiced 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.

Be sure you 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.

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, analyze 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 your USP is giving advice, assistance and superior service; it can't stop with mere sales rhetoric. It must become total company conduct.

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. 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 cheque, include a prepared letter expressing your deep commitment to your USP, and apologizing 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 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 you, the company or the profession.