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## Your USP (unique selling proposition):

### A 7-step guide to writing the core of your marketing message

*Dear Colleagues,*

I can't help thinking that if some of those financial institutions currently under so much pressure - or in the case of Lehman Brothers, AIG, Merrill Lynch and HBOS, already succumbed - had thought more seriously and carefully about their USP, they might not be in the position they are today.

An organisation's Unique Selling Proposition is at the very core of the business and the most important element of it is the word 'Unique'.

If your 'uniqueness' is the same as everyone else's, it isn't unique!

**It isn't easy...**

Creating your own USP may be one of the most difficult business tasks you undertake. It demands much thought and consideration - and for that reason alone is probably the reason why 99% of businesses don't have one!

**... but it has such value.**

And yet, if you do spend the time and effort to create your USP, the benefits are enormous. Suddenly you have a point of differentiation between you and your competitors which makes your potential customer's decision to buy from you so much easier. By defining your USP you have arrived at the major competitive advantage you have - and that means you can use it in all your marketing communications; on the phone, in ads, on flyers, in catalogues, in sales letters etc.

**So how do you do it?**

## Here's a 7-step guide to writing your USP

### STEP 1 - Define your target customer

Who are you aiming this message at? What sort of person buys your product or service? Male, female? Age? What interests are they likely to have? What sort of language do they use? Think carefully about this until you can create a mental picture of your customer.

### STEP 2 - Think about your target customer's problems

In order for a customer to buy from you, he/she must be 'in the market' to buy. In other words they must be ready to spend some cash on a product. Although there are occasions when someone buys a product on impulse i.e. at the supermarket checkout - the majority of purchases are made because the customer is ready to buy. Question: when are they most likely to buy? Answer: WHEN S/HE HAS A PROBLEM!

So think about the problems your potential customer might have when s/he is in the market for your product or service. Write them down - and keep writing until you can't write any more. Then think about it overnight. Ask your friends and colleagues to think about it. Ask your spouse to think about it. Then gather all their thoughts and continue writing.

### STEP 3 - Think about how you resolve those problems

When you have a definitive list of your customer's problems, write down all the ways in which you resolve them. It's important when you write the answers that you express your solutions in terms of his/her problem. It's best to start with all the ways in which you currently resolve the problems, then start adding different ways you could resolve them. Now you are thinking deeply about it.

A word of warning here! Be realistic. Don't start thinking about levels of service which you couldn't possibly achieve. That's a pointless exercise. But it's at this stage that you should start to unravel something that's unique about what you currently do, or what you could do in the future.

### STEP 4 - Look for uniqueness

Many of the solutions you come up with in Step 3 are likely to be universal throughout your industry. Don't discard anything at this stage. You may need to go back to a universal solution and make a new twist on it. Better though, with a little luck and imagination, you will uncover something that's unique to your business. What's the unique niche you fill? What's special about the products or services you provide? What's special about the payment/pricing/offer you make? What's special/different about the way you deal with your customers?

A good example of how to use a unique feature of your product and turn it into a benefit that was successful around the world, is M&M's USP '*Chocolate that melts in your mouth, not in your hand*'.

### **STEP 5 - What can you guarantee?**

If you are having trouble with uniqueness, then think about what you can guarantee to your customer. Even if you don't currently offer any form of warranty or guarantee, ask yourself what is your policy if a customer complains. Would you give them their money back? Would you replace the product? Would you spend more time to finish the job? Any of these consequences could easily be turned into a powerful guarantee.

The most successful guarantee-based USP is undoubtedly Dominos Pizza's '*We deliver hot, fresh pizza in 30 minutes or less - or it's free.*' And of course the best thing about a great USP is that it quickly becomes the central part of your marketing message and is used in all your marketing material.

I used a similar guarantee for a very successful campaign for an envelope printing company a few years ago: '*We'll deliver any quantity, up to 4 colours, in 5 working days or they're yours FREE!*' It took a while to convince the company that they would see enormous benefit from this. But it was something they had hidden in their terms and conditions and used over the phone when talking to their customers. They were afraid that too many customers would 'rip them off'. As it turned out, it forced them to be more efficient - and they never had to make a refund to a customer. A great result!

### **STEP 6 - Crafting and refining your USP**

Now comes the really difficult part! Creating a succinct yet powerful statement that expresses a significant benefit to your customer, that provides a solution to his problem and, if possible, comes with a watertight guarantee. Remember in STEP 1 you defined the customer, so make sure you use language he/she is comfortable with. Don't use jargon, but don't be afraid of keeping it very simple. You will probably need to write and re-write this many times before you get to a statement that does the job. But even then ask others for their opinion. Ask your current customers if they relate to it. In their eyes, does it express what you do for them? If it does, you are getting close! Then test it. Don't be afraid to refine it after a few days or a few weeks. You're sure to come up with a slightly better version once you start using it, so don't commit to huge print runs until everyone is comfortable with it.

### **STEP 7 - Using your USP**

As well as using your USP in all your advertisements and marketing material (catalogues, flyers, elevator speech, straplines, sales letters etc), you should also incorporate it into your business cards, your voicemail messages, compliment slips, web pages etc, etc. In addition, thanks to the depth of thought you have put into

creating your USP, you will probably find that your corporate Mission Statement will be influenced by, and include elements of, your Unique Selling Proposition.

Make sure all your employees know it and use it - constantly - in their communications and conversations with customers, suppliers etc. After all, you have invested much time and effort in creating your USP. You should gain as much advantage from it as possible.

*Good Luck!*

*Debby*

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