



Building a Better Marketing Message

ALTHOUGH YOU DON'T RUN A RADIO STATION, SOME LESSONS FROM OLD-TIME RADIO PROFESSIONALS CAN HELP YOU CREATE A BETTER IMAGE.

By *old-time radio*, I mean the time when AM stations were worth listening to – when stations didn't all sound the same, when it was possible to drive across the country and listen to stations that had their own personalities. That's not the case today.

The manager of a small-town station once told me that he wished his station could sound like the powerhouse big-city station 120 miles away. Today the two stations sound alike because they both run network programming much of the day.

Back then, stations needed a slogan – what in standard business settings is generally called a *unique selling proposition*. For radio, the call letters and USP were repeated frequently. The program director at that powerhouse station liked to explain that when station employees felt that they were being far too repetitious, they still needed to double the number of times they used the call letters.

Repetition is Essential

NO MATTER WHAT YOUR USP, IT'S IMPORTANT TO STICK WITH IT.

You may find it boring, but repetition is the key to success because most people won't even notice your message the first dozen times that they see or hear it.

How long has Nike been using *Just Do It*? How many times have you heard or read *For Everything Else, There's MasterCard*? And Carlsberg's *Probably the Best Beer in the World* reminds me of the self-deprecating *We're Number Two*; *We Try Harder* that Avis used for many years.



YOU MAY HAVE NOTICED THAT THERE'S A LOT OF COMPETITION FOR YOUR ATTENTION THESE DAYS.

Before you start repeating the slogan, make sure it's unique, it describes what you do, and it contains information that matters to your prospective clients. In other words, stay away from *I'm Lovin' It* unless you want to receive a call from the legal department at McDonald's.

I Shoot People and Pets may have sounded clever to the photographer who used it, but might not have had the desired effect.

The unique selling proposition (some call it a *unique selling point*) is an old marketing concept. Rosser Reeves at Ted Bates & Company invented the term in the 1940s. The USP is the basis for successful advertising

campaigns and today the term is used more broadly to mean any aspect of a product or service that differentiates it from similar products and services.

To prospects and customers, your USP is what you are offering. It should be so compelling that it can serve as the headline for your ads. The USP isn't an afterthought for a prospect; it comes first.

Developing a Winning USP

WHAT ARE THE 3 MOST SIGNIFICANT BENEFITS OF YOUR PRODUCT OR SERVICE? AS YOU'RE THINKING, BE SURE TO LIST BENEFITS, NOT FEATURES.

Features are what your product or service is, its dimensions and specifications. Benefits describe what the product or service can accomplish for the prospect.

If you list only features, you have to depend on the prospect to understand what the feature is and why it's important. Home delivery is a feature for a pizza maker; the benefit is having dinner without the need to prepare it or go out to pick it up.

So you'll start by identifying features that you feel are important and convert them to benefits. Then describe the benefit in just a few words – no more than 10 and preferably in the 4- to 6-word range.

Now make sure it's unique. Google tells me that there are 61,269 pizzerias in the United States. The vast majority of them offer tasty pizza that will be ready in 15 to 30 minutes. Why should someone pick Ann Marie's Pizza over Antonio's Pizza? What does Ann Marie do that makes her pizza special? Different? Better tasting? A better value? Easier or faster to obtain?

Solve a Problem

IF YOU OFFER A SERVICE, WHAT PROBLEM DO YOU SOLVE? IT DOESN'T HAVE TO BE A PROBLEM THAT PEOPLE EVEN KNOW THEY HAVE. YET.

Before Fred Smith invented FedEx, nobody knew that being unable to deliver a package overnight was a problem. Your USP will be harder to sell to the public if they don't yet know that they have the problem you can solve because the first efforts must be devoted to convincing people that the problem exists. FedEx did a good job with that.

The USP should be something that can be stated as just a single sentence. Shorter is usually better. Condense your thoughts into one clear statement. Then stop. Do nothing. Set your one clear sentence aside for at least a week and then look at it again. Does it still make sense? Is it compelling?

The planet has survived until now without your unique product or service and it will probably continue to do so for the foreseeable future, so take the time to get your USP right. When you're absolutely, positively certain that it's exactly right, set it aside for another week

or two and if it still makes sense when you come back to it, the development is complete.

There is one final task to consider before using your USP: Are you over-promising? If FedEx had been able to provide overnight delivery for only one third of its overnight packages, it would be out of business today.

Advertising and marketing professionals know that the best way to kill a bad product or service is to pair it with an outstanding USP, excellent marketing, and great ads. If you can't deliver what you promise, go back to the beginning and start over.

Either find a way to deliver what you're promising or change the promise to match what you can deliver.

Use Your USP Consistently

NOW THAT YOU'VE CREATED THE USP, IT'S TIME TO PUT IT TO WORK ON YOUR BUSINESS CARD, YOUR COMPANY'S LETTERHEAD, YOUR WEBSITE, AND ALL ADVERTISING MATERIALS.

Be consistent. FedEx retired *When it Absolutely, Positively Has to be There Overnight* in 2004 and switched to *Relax, It's FedEx*, and then in 2009 to *The World on Time*. Each of the slogans was used for a relatively long time.

FEDEx MATCH COLOR	PANTONE® EQUIVALENT	CMYK	RGB	WEB-SAFE HEX
FedEx Purple	PANTONE 2685	C80 M100 Y0 K0	R152 G0 B153	99 00 99
FedEx Light Platinum™	PANTONE 877	C0 M0 Y0 K37	R153 G153 B153	99 99 99
FedEx Light Platinum Reverse**			R204 G204 B204**	CC CC CC**
FedEx Light Gray	PANTONE Cool Gray 6	C0 M0 Y0 K37	R153 G153 B153	99 99 99
FedEx Light Gray Reverse**			R204 G204 B204**	CC CC CC**
FedEx Orange	PANTONE 021	C0 M65 Y100 K0	R255 G102 B0	FF 66 00
FedEx Green	PANTONE 361	C75 M0 Y100 K0	R0 G204 B0	00 CC 00
FedEx Blue	PANTONE Process Blue	C100 M0 Y0 K0	R0 G153 B204	00 99 CC
FedEx Red	PANTONE 186	C0 M100 Y80 K0	R255 G0 B51	FF 00 33
FedEx Yellow	PANTONE 1235	C0 M00 Y100 K0	R255 G204 B0	FF CC 00
FedEx Yellow Uncoated†	PANTONE 1160†			
FedEx Gray	PANTONE 404	C0 M0 Y10 K50	R153 G153 B153	99 99 99
White		C0 M0 Y0 K0	R255 G255 B255	FF FF FF
Black		C0 M0 Y0 K100	R0 G0 B0	00 00 00

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*When reproduction techniques or restrictions prohibit the use of FedEx Light Platinum, you may use FedEx Light Gray.

†This color is not a process color and therefore cannot be reproduced using standard printing processes.

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Throughout the company's entire life, the FedEx colors have been purple (PMS 2685) and orange (PMS 021). The orange color has been replaced for certain subdivisions (FedEx Ground uses green), but the company doesn't use purple one day, blue the next day, and green next week because somebody thought variety would be good.

Variety is not good. Pick a color and stick with it. This is important whether you're FedEx or a single-person plumbing business.

Prove Your Claim

CONSUMERS DON'T READ EVERY WORD IN ADVERTISEMENTS AND THEY DON'T BELIEVE THE ONES THEY DO READ, SO IT'S UP TO YOU TO PROVE THAT YOUR CLAIMS ARE VALID. A CLAIM WITHOUT PROOF IS NOTHING MORE THAN A BOAST.

When someone compliments your product or service, ask if they will provide a testimonial. Not just a *Joe is a really nice guy* testimonial but something like this: "Joe is the most reliable framis pelter I've dealt with in 20 years and he's shown us how we can prepare our framis to be pelted so that we not only get better results but also save on the cost of the pelting."

There's nothing wrong with editing the testimonial for brevity, accuracy, and grammar so long as you present the edited version to the client for approval before you use it.

Speaking of claims and proofs, you're better off to under-state the claim. "The best framis pelter in Utah" is a lot more believable than "The best framis pelter in the world." Or maybe "The second best framis pelter west of the Mississippi." Avis did well with its long-running *number two* campaign, but this can be tricky because the prospect might decide to find out who the best framis pelter west of the Mississippi really is.

What makes your business unique is valuable to your prospects only if it's something they want, so take the time to get yours right and then put it to work.

Getting it right also means concentrating on a product or service that people want to buy or can be convinced to desire. Those who try to sell something that nobody wants will find that no marketing or sales professional will be able to change the outcome.

Assuming that you have a product or service that potential buyers recognize as having value for them, the only thing worse than failing to create a USP is neglecting to follow through on the USP after taking the time to develop it.

So, with apologies to Nike, JUST DO IT! 🐘