



Who Are You and Why Should I Buy Your Stuff?

MOST NEW BUSINESSES FAIL AND THEY DO SO, I THINK, FOR ONE OF TWO REASONS: FIRST, UNDERCAPITALIZATION. I CAN'T DO MUCH TO HELP WITH THAT. SECOND, LACK OF A UNIQUE SELLING PROPOSITION (USP) BECAUSE IF YOU CAN'T EXPLAIN CLEARLY, IN A DOZEN WORDS OR LESS, WHY SOMEONE SHOULD BUY WHAT YOU'RE SELLING, YOU WON'T SELL MUCH OF IT. I CAN HELP YOU THERE.

Yes, it really is that important.

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.

"When it absolutely, positively has to be there overnight." "Pizza delivered in 30 minutes or it's free." "The nighttime, coughing, achy, sniffing, stuffy head, fever, so you can rest medicine." Some of these may be more familiar than others.

"The nighttime, coughing, achy, sniffing, stuffy head, fever, so you can rest medicine."
—Nyquil

Anyone in business will know that the first one belongs to FedEx. Domino's Pizza developed the second, but later dropped the 30-minute claim because too many of their drivers were involved in wrecks while trying to meet that 30-minute guarantee. And the last one belongs to the cold medicine Nyquil.

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; it comes first.

Developing a Killer USP

QUICK! WHAT ARE THE 3 MOST SIGNIFICANT BENEFITS OF YOUR PRODUCT OR SERVICE? AND TELL ME EACH BENEFIT IN 4 TO 6 WORDS. IF YOU CAN'T DO THAT, YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT THE BENEFITS ARE. GO SIT IN A QUIET ROOM FOR A WHILE AND THINK ABOUT YOUR PRODUCT OR SERVICE. DON'T PROCEED TO THE NEXT STEP UNTIL YOU CAN DESCRIBE THE TOP 3 BENEFITS IN JUST A FEW WORDS.

Your list is ready? Great. Now pull out the dictionary and look up the word *unique*. Your USP must be unique. That's why the U is the first

letter in the initialism. *Tasty pizza* isn't unique. About 4 million shops across the United States (a wild guess) have tasty pizza. What's the primary reason somebody should pick your widget or your service over the competitor's widget or service?

What problem do you solve? It doesn't have to be a problem that people know they have. Before FedEx arrived on the scene, people didn't know 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 they have a

problem because your first efforts will have to be devoted to convincing them the problem exists.

Domino's had an easier job. People who are hungry know they want a pizza in 30 minutes or less. And if you have a cold, you want to be rid of the coughs, aches, sniffles, stuffy head, and fever so you can rest.

By now you probably have a paper that's full of notes. The USP needs to be just a single sentence. Shorter is better. Condense your thoughts into a single, clear sentence. Maybe you should hire a poet for this part because poets know how to work with words in a way that extracts the maximum amount of meaning from the smallest number of words. If you can't hire a poet, go back to that quiet room I sent you to earlier and think.

Set whatever you create aside and look at it tomorrow.

Look at it again next week.

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 this 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.

You can put your product or service where your words are, can't you? If FedEx promises overnight delivery but actually delivers only one

third of its packages overnight, people aren't going to believe the USP. In fact, the best way to kill a lousy product is to pair it with an outstanding USP, excellent marketing, and killer ads. If you can't deliver what you promise, go back to the beginning and start over.

Use Your USP

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. You've spent a lot of time working out the details of your USP so don't use "When it absolutely, positively has to be there overnight" on your business cards and "We deliver really quick" on the letterhead and "Guaranteed overnight delivery" on your website. One message. Repeated. Consistently.

And Prove It

YOU MAY ALREADY SUSPECT THIS, BUT MOST CONSUMERS DON'T BELIEVE EVERY WORD THEY READ IN ADVERTISEMENTS.

If you make a claim, it's nothing more than a boast ("We're the best corn floggers on the planet!") unless you can back it up with proof. When people compliment 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 corn flogger I've dealt with in 20 years and he's shown us how we can prepare our corn to be flogged so that we not only get better results but also save on the cost of corn flogging."

Speaking of claims and proofs, you're better off to under-state the claim. "The best corn flogger in Nebraska" is a lot more believable than "The best corn flogger in the world." Or maybe "The second best corn flogger west of the Mississippi." Avis did well with its long-running "We're number 2 so we try harder" campaign. This is tricky, though, because there's a danger that the prospect might decide to find out who is the *best* corn flogger west of the Mississippi.

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.

The only thing worse than failing to create a USP is neglecting to follow through on the USP after taking the time to develop one. Ω

What Every Good Marketer Knows by Seth Godin

SETH GODIN IS A SMART GUY WHO KNOWS MORE ABOUT MARKETING THAN MOST. THIS IS HIS LIST AND I HAVE USED IT WITH HIS PERMISSION.

- Anticipated, personal, and relevant advertising always does better than unsolicited junk.
- Making promises and keeping them is a great way to build a brand.
- Your best customers are worth far more than your average customers.
- Share of wallet is easier, more profitable, and a better a measure than share of market.
- Marketing begins before the product is created.
- Advertising is just a symptom, a tactic. Marketing is about far more than that.
- Low price is a great way to sell a commodity. That's not marketing, though; it's efficiency.
- Conversations in your marketplace happen whether you like it or not. Good marketing encourages the right sort of conversations.
- Products that are remarkable get talked about.
- Marketing is the way your people answer the phone, the typesetting on your bills, and your returns policy.
- You can't fool all the people, not even most of the time. And people, once unfooled, talk about the experience.
- If marketing is represented in a static annual budget, you see marketing as an expense. Good marketers realize that it is an *investment*.
- People don't buy what they need. They buy what they *want*.
- You're not in charge. And your prospects don't care about you.
- What people want is the extra emotional bonus they get when they buy something they love.
- Business-to-business marketing is just marketing to consumers who happen to have a corporation to pay for what they buy.
- Traditional ways of interrupting consumers (TV ads, trade shows, and mail) are losing their cost-effectiveness. At the same time, new ways of spreading ideas (blogs, permission-based RSS information, and consumer fan clubs) are proving how well they work.
- People all over the world, at every income level, respond to marketing that promises and *delivers* basic human wants.
- Good marketers tell a story.
- People are selfish, lazy, uninformed and impatient. Start with that and you'll be pleasantly surprised by what you find.
- Marketing that works is marketing that people choose to notice.
- Effective stories match the worldview of the people you are telling the story to.
- Choose your customers. Fire those who hurt your ability to deliver your story to the others.
- A product designed for *everyone* rarely appeals to *anyone*.
- Living and breathing an authentic story is the way to survive in a conversation-rich world.
- Marketers are responsible for the side effects their products cause.
- Reminding the consumer of a story they know and trust is a powerful shortcut.
- Good marketers measure.
- Marketing is not an emergency. It's a planned, thoughtful exercise that started a long time ago and doesn't end until you're done.
- One disappointed customer is worth ten delighted ones.
- In the Googleworld, the *best* in the world wins more often and wins more.
- Most marketers create good enough and then quit. *Greatest* beats *good enough* every time.
- There are more rich people than ever before, and they demand to be treated differently.
- Organizations that manage to deal directly with their end users have an asset for the future.
- You can game the social media in the short run but not for long.
- You market when you hire and when you fire. You market when you call tech support and you market every time you send a memo.
- Blogging makes you a better marketer because it teaches you humility in your writing.

I have slightly edited Seth Godin's words for space and, occasionally, for clarity. You'll find him at www.SethGodin.com and his blog is located at SethGodin.TypePad.com. Ω



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