Finding your unique selling point: How to choose an unbeatable USP

Category: Branding
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Dive deep into the heart of any successful business and you'll find one crucial element: a value proposition.

Otherwise known as the "unique selling point", "unique selling proposition" or USP, this simple concept forms the foundation for the company's existence. It defines what your brand stands for, how you can position yourself in the marketplace, and why your customers should choose you over your competitors.

Your unique selling point is the heartbeat of your organisation – the thing that sets you apart from the others, and highlights the heart and soul of your company. Yet, only 69% of B2B companies have an established value proposition today.

Consider some of the biggest brands in the world, for instance. Starbucks is known for its commitment to tailor-made high-quality coffee, "We'll always make it right", while Apple earns their reputation as a cutting-edge industry innovator. Without these characteristics, both businesses would be just another competitor in the marketplace. With them, they've climbed their way to the head of their niche.

At Fabrik, we know that finding your USP can be one of the biggest challenges your brand will face. That's why we've put together this no-nonsense guide, to help you find your industry fingerprint, and discover the unique factor that will propel you into the next stage of success.

What is a unique selling point?

So, what is a unique selling point?

When you're first bringing your business to life, it's tempting to try and stand for everything. After all, what's more loveable than a brand that speaks to everyone?

Unfortunately, though you might like the idea of being an all-purpose company, the truth is that when you attempt to be everything to everyone, you end up appealing to no-one. That's where a unique selling point comes in handy. It's the individual stamp that you can put on your business, to tell a specific audience the definitive thing that you do best.

A unique selling proposition is something you'll need to establish at the beginning of your branding experience, before you start considering things like websites and marketing. That's because your USP contains all the things that you'll need to embrace in your advertising efforts. For instance, your USP should help you answer the following questions:

- What is your product or service, and why is it different to whatever is currently on the market?
- Who is your customer, and what is their specific pain point that you're hoping to address with your services?
- What's your personality, tone of voice, and brand vision? How do you plan to present yourself in the market?

If your first focus in building your brand is on standing out from the crowd, then everything you do from there on will be easier. Adoring fans will flock to your company, spread the word about your brand, and show you their loyalty. On the other hand, if you can't develop an effective USP, then it's tough to get people to pay attention.

Modern customers are overwhelmed with constant marketing and advertising messages, combined with the clutter of overflowing email inboxes. If you can't tell them quickly and effectively what makes you better than your competitors, then there's a good chance you'll lose their interest. Of course, pinpointing your unique selling point definition is going to take some creativity, and a lot of soul searching.



Finding your unique selling point definition: Simple steps

On the surface, defining your unique selling proposition or USP seems simple enough. All you need to do is figure out what benefit or factor makes you different to (or better than) your competitors. Of course, as the marketplace grows ever-more saturated, finding a way to distinguish yourself from the pack becomes a lot more complicated. In fact, you might even need a little professional help.

Finding your unique selling point will take a lot of time and

research – but without it, you're just selling another unremarkable commodity. Here are a few steps to get you started:

Finding your unique selling point step 1: Research

Before you can decide what makes your product special, you need to know what else your prospective customers have to choose from. That means conducting an in-depth competitor analysis for each of the major players in your industry. Ask yourself which products exist that could fill the same gaps as yours, and what USPs your competitors have. To learn as much as possible, check out your competitor's marketing materials, websites, and product descriptions.

You'll also need to do quite a lot of customer research too. After all, you're making your product or service for a specific person, and that means appealing to unique characteristics, preferences, and ideals. Take the time to assess customers in similar markets that might also appreciate what you have to offer. If possible, your aim should be to find something that you can offer your customers that no-one else can. For instance, other people might sell cakes, but they don't sell local, gluten-free cakes.

A SWOT analysis will help you to position yourself in the context of your competitors, while user personas will ensure that you structure your unique selling proposition to best suit the needs of your target customers.

Finding your unique selling point step 2: Finding your benefits

Once you have a good feel for the competition, you'll be able to start listing the strengths and weaknesses of your own brand in comparison. For example, your product might be

cheaper, more luxurious, or more focused on customer-service than other options in the market. The idea should be to select one of the items from your list of key benefits to focus on.

Try not to get carried away listing everything that makes your company incredible – that's what your marketing strategy is for. Instead, find the element that helps you to best solve your customer's problems, then highlight and shape it to make your brand more irresistible. Remember, you need to offer proof to make your unique selling proposition more powerful, so don't come up with a USP that's too vague or difficult to establish in concrete terms.

Once you've got your unique selling point definition, bring your entire team together and ask them to help you to distil it down into a couple of sentences that easily roll off the tongue. Think of it like making a slogan for your business. Your unique selling proposition needs to be powerful, clear, and easy to remember. After you have a few different ideas, take them out and test them on the market, pay attention to the feedback you receive, and ask yourself whether your USP really gets the job done.

Finding your unique selling point step 3: Communicating your USP

Finally, to help ensure that you've really established an unbeatable USP, you'll need to make sure that you've got something that you can communicate in everything you do. Think about how your unique selling proposition and your brand name go hand-in-hand. Ask yourself how you're going to show off what makes you special in your logo, your packaging, and the tone of voice you use online.

If the benefit you've come up with is too broad, or it might go over the heads of your target audience, then you may need to start again. While you can change your USP from time to time to make it more "fresh" and modern, you'll ultimately

want to keep hold of the same underlying values throughout the life of your business, so it's crucial to make sure that you get it right the first time around.

Planning out how you're going to use your USP to sell your company to customers in the future will help you to not only ensure that your value proposition works, but it'll also give you a direction to go in when you start thinking about things like brand awareness, and how you're going to market your product or service to consumers.

Identity inspiration: Unique selling point examples

When it comes to finding your unique selling point definition, competitor analysis is useful for a range of reasons. First of all, evaluating your competitors will help you to figure out what your strengths and weaknesses are in comparison to other entities in the same industry space. The more you can distinguish yourself from similar brands, the more memorable you become.

Secondly, a little bit of industry research can work wonders when you're looking for inspiration. For instance, you might look at another similar brand and see something they do well, but you could do better. Or, you might find a company in your space that completely ignores something that your brand can focus on to earn more customer affinity. To help you get started on your quest for stimulus, take a look at some of these industry-leading unique selling propositions.

Basecamp unique selling point:

A type of project management software designed by a company called "37 Signals" – Basecamp offers a great insight into what a unique selling proposition should be. According to the information on their website, Basecamp is a tool that millions

of people online use for collaboration and online projects, perfectly designed for entrepreneurs, freelancers and small businesses.



Note that although there's potential for Basecamp to be used by larger companies, the brand has focused on selling themselves to smaller groups, potentially in need of more intimate software, and lower pricing. By deciding on one customer, rather than just selling to anyone, Basecamp set themselves apart in the market.

Starbucks unique selling point:

The unique selling proposition for Starbucks is simple enough: "Love your beverage or let us know. We'll always make it right". Starting off as a small coffee shop in Washington, Starbucks had a long way to go in order to become one of the most recognised brands in the world. However, they managed to accomplish their goals by choosing an important unique selling point.



Starbucks don’t define themselves as the cheapest, most luxurious coffee around. Instead, they focus on drilling down into the ultimate desire of all coffee connoisseurs – finding their perfect beverage. Yes, Starbucks source high-quality beans, and they’re known for their luxury. However, the main driver behind their success is the fact that they make your drink to your standards. No exceptions.

FedEx unique selling point:

Another company that knows how to get to the heart of its customer’s concerns with a USP, is FedEx. Although the company no longer uses the slogan: “When it absolutely, positively has to be there overnight”, it was that phrase that made the company one of the most appealing package delivery forces in the world.



When you’re looking for someone to help transport letters or products around the world, you don’t need the business with the best packaging or the most interesting logo – you need a brand that gets the job done quickly and securely. While FedEx’s current slogan isn’t quite as effective, their USP remains the same.

Tesco unique selling point:

Known for being the largest retailer in the United Kingdom, and the third largest in the world, Tesco has some serious brand presence. However, the company earned their recognition not by promising the cheapest prices, or the widest selection of products. Instead, they focused on creating “value” for customers by promising to “treat people the way we like to be treated.”



Customers love Tesco because they do their best to deliver exceptional experiences – no matter what. From their customer service efforts, to their vast range of varied products, Tesco stand out for their devotion to their consumers above all else. Although the company has evolved with the years, its USP holds strong, hence the slogan: “every little helps”.

Zappos unique selling point:

Last, but not least, Zappos is yet another company with an exceptional unique selling proposition. Over the years, they’ve earned their reputation for being the most customer-friendly, convenient online store for anyone who wants to buy a great pair of shoes. In part, they earned their brand loyalty by offering things like free returns and shipping. But it’s their USP that prompted them to take that focus in the first place.



Credit: Zappos

Zappos didn't want to be known as just the cheapest source of online shoes. They also wanted their customers to see them as the friendliest, most convenient place to shop online. The brand began by making their return policy incredibly simple, and focused on delivering customer service that removes some of the fear and uncertainty involved with buying clothing online.

What makes a killer unique selling proposition

Your unique selling point is the ingredient that makes selling your product, or identifying your brand easier. While your content marketing strategy, your ad campaigns, and your brand building efforts will all go some way towards ensuring the success of your company, it's your USP that gives these elements the weight they need to truly have an impact.

As capturing the attention of banner-blind customers becomes increasingly difficult, your unique selling proposition is the

element that captures the hearts and memories of your audience. It combines with your personality, your marketing solutions, and your brand image, to create something timeless and inherently persuasive.

To help you improve your chances of a more appealing USP, we've put together three simple tips that could not only simplify your value proposition, but help you to discover the best way of communicating with your audience too. Your unique selling point should define:

1. A brand that solves problems

If you want to be successful in business, it all starts with understanding one simple secret: customers don't want to buy your products. What consumers want, is an opportunity to make their lives better, to solve their problems or achieve an essential goal. This could be as simple as buying a sandwich because you're hungry, or a set of tools to fix a sink. Getting your customers "engaged" with your brand, means discovering their pain points, and finding a way to manage them.

Consider the cosmetics industry, for instance. Companies like Loreal and Max Factor don't simply sell hair and makeup products – they offer lifestyle ideals: style, confidence, and glamour. In a problem-solving context, cosmetics companies are telling people they can address their self-esteem issues by buying specific products.

To create a USP with clout, start by examining your customer profiles, and thinking about how you can market your products in a way that shows those specific people you understand, and can fix their problems. Remember, the more you can adjust your voice and brand to the preferences of your audience, the more powerful your brand becomes.

2. An irresistible product or service

Once you know your customers and the precise problems they face, you'll need to decide why they should choose your business over your competitors. For some brands, this will mean considering your marketing mix, including the product, price, place, and promotion of your company. Most brands will situate their unique selling proposition around one of the "P's" of exceptional marketing.

For instance, as we mentioned above, Zappos focuses on the "People" with its USP. The company has designed a solution that makes purchasing footwear online simpler for its customers. Other brands will concentrate on "Place", identifying their business as a "local" source of assistance, or a company that sources parts and materials from a specific place. Perhaps the most challenging "P" to address is "Price". If you make your value proposition all about being the least expensive option on the market, you could risk losing your customers the second someone comes along and finds a way to offer your product for less.

No matter which "P" you target, you should always make sure that you're making a clear promise to your customers. Guarantee something that only you can offer, and make sure that you stick to that promise in everything you do. FedEx guarantees it can get a package to its destination overnight – and that's what it does. Any failure to meet your promise could damage your reputation forever.

3. A clear elevator pitch

Finally, once you've decided who your perfect customer is, how your business can solve their problems, and why they should choose you over the competition, you'll need to establish how you're going to embed your USP into your marketing.

Crucially, a USP informs your marketing efforts, but it's more

a part of your brand manifesto than an advertising technique. In other words, your unique selling point needs to be something that's clear, simple, and immediately obvious. Thinking of your proposition in the form of an elevator pitch is a great way to condense what makes your company special into something you can use to inform your brand.

For those who have never tried an elevator pitch before, it looks a little something like this. For this example, we're going to create a pitch for an imaginary branding company:

- Who is your company for? [Other businesses who need to find their brand voice]
- What do they need? [Help earning brand awareness and identifying their company]
- What's the name? [Branding Company]
- What makes it different? [It's the only holistic branding business that offers analytics, planning, guidance, and design, for long-term and short-term projects]
- Unlike [other branding companies that only offer design or audits]



It’s time to uncover your USP

Your unique selling point definition is the navigation that steers your company towards its individual goals. Your value proposition will guide you into the waiting arms of your target audience, help you to choose a voice and marketing strategy that speaks their language, and ensure you make the right decisions about future growth.

At the same time, your USP helps you to hone in on the primary reason why your brand exists. This should help to give you the foundation you need to improve on what you do best. With a unique selling proposition in mind, you can consistently adjust your advertisements, design elements, and branding efforts to create a unified and unforgettable experience for your customers. In other words, you can create a brand that’s ownable, and entirely yours.

Since a strong unique selling point has the power to make or break your business in competitive industries, it’s not a simple thing to find. In fact, some businesses spend months,

or years looking for theirs. However, if you can find the right USP, then you can make that feature the cornerstone of your brand and marketing strategy, ensuring that you can speak directly to your customers – rather than becoming another voice clamouring for attention.

All the best brands are unique, so what makes your company special?

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