GUIDE

How to Create a Ferocious Unique Selling Proposition
Introduction

Unless you’re fortunate enough to be the only player in your industry (say, the only dedicated supplier of lion-taming equipment in North America), you’ll need to differentiate yourself from your competition through your unique selling proposition, or USP.

A strong, instantly recognizable USP can make or break businesses operating in competitive markets, so it’s essential that you leverage your USP and make it the cornerstone of your overall marketing strategy. Until you know what your USP is, and how to capitalize on it, your business will be just another voice clamoring to be heard.

What is a USP?

Simply put, your USP is what makes your business different from everyone else in your market. For some ventures, identifying a USP will be easier than others. For example, if your business really is the only dedicated supplier of lion-taming equipment in North America, this will be your USP. Sure, there are plenty of companies that sell general circus equipment, but your business focuses solely on high-end accessories for the discerning big cat behavioral performance artist — this is what sets you apart from the rest of the clowns.
Simply put, your USP is what makes your business different from everyone else in your market.

However, for most businesses, identifying a USP is not this easy. In fact, for more conventional companies, it can be very difficult. Fortunately, there are a number of ways you can make a name for yourself, even if you make or sell a common product or service. Let's look at some examples.

What Makes an Excellent USP?

The best USPs directly address a specific need experienced by a company's ideal customer. A great USP should also emphasize what individual quality separates a business from its competition.

Saddleback Leather

Credit where credit is due — if it hadn't been for the guys over at Fizzle, I might have gone the rest of my life without discovering Saddleback Leather. This company's USP (and website in general) perfectly exemplifies how it addresses customers' specific needs and highlights a truly unique quality of its products.

Now, you might think that finding a unique — and memorable — USP for a leather satchel company would be difficult. However, take a look at Saddleback's “About Us” page.
Amateur bullfighting. Escaping from a corrupt Mexican Federal Police officer. Trading puppies for 100 tacos in Juarez — Saddleback’s “About Us” page reads like a pilot for a new AMC show. This ties in perfectly with the rugged, adventurous spirit of the company's products.

As if that weren't enough, Saddleback also offers a 100-year(!) warranty, which the firm half-jokingly refers to as its “They'll Fight Over It When You're Dead” warranty. How many companies remind you to mention a product warranty in your will? Not only does this make a bold statement about the company's confidence in the craftsmanship of its products, it also appeals to its ideal customer — daring, thrill-seeking travelers who need bags that can survive their globe-trotting adventures.

Seriously, just writing about these bags makes me want to buy one. Genius.

**Voodoo Doughnut**

Donut shops are ten a penny — especially in Boston, where you can trip on a curb and practically fall into a Dunkin’ Donuts — but Voodoo Doughnut in Portland, Oregon, manages to make traditional baked goods sexy in a highly distinctive way.

Although virtually everything about Voodoo is unique, *its extensive range of donuts* (and the obvious relish with which the owners devise their sugary creations) set it apart from any other donut shop. In their quest to create a truly unique menu, Voodoo's owners even fell afoul of the
FDA after experimenting with two particular recipes that included Pepto-Bismol and NyQuil — stunts that could have threatened their business, but ultimately helped word of the small donut shop go viral.

Its hot pink rockabilly décor, cash-only policy and late-night opening hours have made Voodoo far more than just a donut shop — it’s a tourist attraction.

A diverse menu isn’t the only thing that makes Voodoo unique. Its hot pink rockabilly décor, cash-only policy and late-night opening hours have made Voodoo far more than just a donut shop — it’s a tourist attraction. Sure, you can get a donut almost anywhere, but Voodoo’s USP is the diversity of its menu and the experience of waiting in line for a decadent taste of what lies within.

The popularity (and notoriety) of the store has even allowed the owners to open a second branch in Denver, and additional stores are planned for other locations across the country. Voodoo’s USP gets people talking in a way that few social media marketing campaigns could ever hope to accomplish.

Unique Selling Proposition

Best Practices

So, now we’ve seen some examples of strong USPs, what should you bear in mind when trying to identify yours?

Get Inside Your Ideal Customer’s Head

Before you start thinking about which qualities set your business apart from similar companies, you need to know almost everything about your perfect customer.

When you’re identifying your ideal customer, consider the following:
• What does your perfect customer really want?
• How can your product or service solve their problem(s)?
• What factors motivate their buying decisions?
• Why do your existing customers choose your business over your competitors?

Remember — it’s not enough to merely target a rough demographic. You need to know exactly who you want to sell to and why.

Remember — it’s not enough to merely target a rough demographic. You need to know exactly who you want to sell to and why. Once you know this, you can get to work on the next USP best practice, which is...

**Explain How Your Business Solves Your Ideal Customers’ Problems**

Consumers don’t want to buy products — they want to solve their problems. This could be as simple as purchasing a reliable set of tools that will last for years, but it can (and frequently is) much more complex.
Take the cosmetics industry, for example. Companies in this space don't just sell make-up — they sell lifestyle ideals; glamour, confidence, and style. Think about this in a problem-solving context; people who may not feel glamorous, confident or stylish will if they use a particular product. This lies at the heart of most cosmetics advertising, and this concept applies to many other industries, too.

To create a strong USP, you have to examine the profile of your perfect customer and then market your products in a way that shows them you can meet their needs and solve their problems. If your prospective customers choose your products, how will their lives be improved? What makes your business so different that prospective customers should choose your products or services? The answers to these questions should form the bedrock of your USP.

**Make Your Business Irresistible to Your Customers**

Now that you know who your ideal customer is and the problems they face, it's time to tell them precisely why they should choose your business over your competitors.

FedEx is the perfect example of this principle. Sure, there are dozens of package carriers people can choose from (including the USPS), but FedEx's slogan of “When it absolutely, positively has to
be there overnight” transformed the company from just another logistics company to a market-leading global brand. Even though the company dropped the slogan years ago, FedEx’s USP and branding helped it become a proprietary eponym — a trademarked name often used as a generic term, like Kleenex, Band-Aid and Coke.

Another USP best practice you should think about in this stage is making your customers a promise. FedEx, for example, guarantees it can get any package (from anywhere) to its destination overnight. This not only addresses customers’ specific need (reliable package delivery), but also makes them a promise — to deliver their packages with care, on time, every time.

Create an Elevator Pitch

So, you’ve figured out who your perfect customer is, explained how your business can solve their problems, and told them why they should choose you instead of the competition. However, you’ll rarely have the opportunity to wax lyrical about any of this at length. Just as advertisements have mere seconds to capture consumers’ attention, your USP should be almost immediately obvious.

Thinking of your USP in terms of an elevator pitch is a great way to condense what makes your business different, and how you can use it as the foundation of your marketing efforts.
Thinking of your USP in terms of an elevator pitch is a great way to condense what makes your business different, and how you can use it as the foundation of your marketing efforts.

Let’s see how this works, using our lion-taming equipment supply business as an example. Note that everything in brackets can be changed to suit the specifics of your company, and that this framework can apply to both companies and individual products.

- For [lion tamers]
- Who [need high-quality lion-taming equipment]
- [Lucky Leo’s Lion-Taming Equipment Emporium]
- Is [the world’s only dedicated online lion-taming equipment distributor]
- That [provides the very best lion-taming equipment, delivered straight to your door].
- Unlike [other circus equipment supply companies],
- [Lucky Leo’s Lion-Taming Equipment Emporium] is the only e-commerce business in North America that caters specifically to these performers.

See how easy it is once you have all the pieces of the puzzle? If someone asks about your business, you can use this as a snappy, concise way to explain what your company does. Thinking of your business or products in this way allows you to focus on what really matters — your ideal customer — and identify any glaring problems with your USP.

**ABOUT WORDSTREAM**

WordStream, Inc. provides software and services that help marketers get the maximum results from their online marketing efforts. WordStream’s easy-to-use software allows for more effective paid search and social campaigns with the 20-Minute Work Week, a customized workflow that guides marketers through steps that can greatly improve their AdWords, Bing, Yahoo, and Facebook campaigns, plus tools for call tracking, keyword optimization, and more. WordStream also offers an award-winning free PPC tool, the AdWords Performance Grader, which evaluates users’ Google AdWords accounts and provides valuable tips for improvement. WordStream is a Google Premier Partner.
STOP WASTING MONEY IN ADWORDS

Get actionable advice on how to improve your account now with WordStream’s FREE AdWords Performance Grader.

Wasted Spend
$49.81 in projected 12 month wasted
$12.45 already wasted in the last 90 days

GRADE YOUR ACCOUNT

www.wordstream.com/google-adwords