**Get Unique**

**Generally speaking**

Before you get started on your company’s unique selling proposition, consider some general guidelines that all USPs should adhere to:

***A USP must be easy to communicate.***We live in an on-demand society, where customers want information now. If you cannot communicate your USP to your target market quickly and easily, it simply won’t work. This doesn’t necessarily mean that your USP itself must be short—but you must be able to condense the main message so that customers can hear and understand it within a matter of seconds (in the case of an advertisement) or minutes (in the case of a sales presentation). In fact, many companies build advertising slogans based on their USPs. Learn more in “The Power of Advertising Slogans” by HubSpot: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QTl6xUFxyOY>.

Consider a political campaign. It involves so many complicated issues, but candidates want voters to get a good idea of who they are and what they stand for—and they want to communicate that “USP” as quickly and simply as possible. That’s why they choose catchy campaign slogans. Learn about more presidential campaign slogans here: <http://www.presidentsusa.net/campaignslogans.html>.

***A USP must be meaningful to the customer.*** You can come up with a really clever USP, but if it’s not meaningful or useful to your customers, it’s worthless. Let’s say your target market consists of wealthy customers who can afford to buy your expensive fashions. A USP based on bargain prices and “getting the most for your money” is not going to resonate with them, since price is not an object. You must make sure that the benefit you’re offering is a benefit your customers truly desire. Volvo, for example, offers truck drivers the benefit of a smooth ride. Watch how the company dramatizes the message in its “Epic Split” commercial: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M7FIvfx5J10>. Do you think it resonates with Volvo’s target market?

***A USP must be specific.***Vague unique selling propositions cannot work. You can’t say, “Playing mini golf here is inexpensive,” or “This car’s audio system sounds great.” You must communicate the specific benefit customers will receive from giving you their business. For these examples, the benefits could be having a fun day out with the whole family for under $40, or driving to work while enjoying your favorite music with crystal-clear quality. One example of a specific and successful USP is Domino’s “Carryout Insurance.” See how the advertisements illustrate the USP effectively: <https://www.dominos.com/en/pages/carryout-insurance/?lang=en>.

***A USP must create desire and urgency.***Like any element of an effective marketing strategy, a unique selling proposition should make customers want to take action as soon as possible. Think about products, such as gaming systems, that customers get up early and wait in line to purchase. They simply can’t wait to get their hands on them. What USPs have contributed to this kind of desire and urgency?

***A USP must be able to be fulfilled.*** There is no bigger mistake a company can make than making its customers promises it can’t keep. It would be better to have no unique selling proposition at all than to have one you can’t fulfill. Let’s say you own the only tanning salon in town that offers airbrush tanning services. If you make that attribute your USP, customers can’t show up to discover your airbrush machine broken or the tanning technician unavailable. You must do anything necessary to make sure they can count on your product. If they can’t depend on that, you will lose credibility, and you will lose business. Starbucks’ “Barista Promise: Love Your Beverage or Let Us Know” is a good example of a business committed to its USP of satisfying customers’ requests.

***A USP must last for the life of the product or brand.*** Your unique selling proposition should be sustainable over a long period of time. The De Beers’ diamond USP, for instance, has been around since the 1940s! Remember, your goal is to become an “automatic” in customers’ minds when they encounter a specific need or want. The way to achieve this is by building an excellent USP and constantly repeating it to your target market. Customers will become confused if you switch USPs on them. The only good reason for changing your USP is if it isn’t working. And, if you’ve followed the correct steps for building your USP to begin with, you shouldn’t have a problem!

**Time to get started**

So, you’re ready to identify and start building a great USP for your company. The following six steps will take you through the process, but first, stop and ask yourself if your business already has a unique selling proposition. It’s possible that it does, and you just haven’t realized it. Maybe you purchased your company from someone else and simply inherited the USP. Does the USP work? If so, there’s no reason to change it; actually, changing it could confuse your customers and hurt your business. However, if the USP is not working, it’s time to get started on a new one.

**Step One**—**Start with a great product.** A unique selling proposition is worthless if it’s not backing up an excellent good or service to begin with. Your product should fill an existing need for your customers. You cannot create a need where there is none. This is not to say that new products can’t be successful, but they should correspond with new needs in the target market—usually caused by changes in society or technology. Take tablets, for example. A need for them didn’t exist several years ago. However, changes in society and technology have now created a demand, and companies create their USPs from there—the most advanced operating system, the best display, etc. Both Microsoft’s Surface Pro and Apple’s iPad Pro offer many high performance features that computer users seek. See how Microsoft highlights the versatility of its operating system to accommodate creatives who develop new computer code in this advertisement: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=McQOXdjdVhU>.

**Step Two**—**Conduct reliable research on the needs, wants, and buying motivations of your target market.** It goes without saying that you should identify your target market before even thinking about building a unique selling proposition. No business can be all things to all people. If you try, you’ll wind up disappointing everyone and pleasing no one. There are several ways to learn more about your target market’s needs and wants, including:

* Hiring a professional market-research firm—You might not want to spend the money, but think of it as an investment, or spending money to make money. Making a profit depends on your ability to reach your customers with a message that makes them want to buy your product. A professional market-research firm will have more resources than you do to gain valuable information about your target market.
* Holding focus groups with customers and potential customers—If you cannot afford to hire a professional firm to do your research, holding focus groups with customers and potential customers can be a great alternative. This is a time when you can “pick their brains” about their needs, wants, and buying motivations. Be sure to offer them some sort of incentive for participating—coupons, free food, etc.
* Brainstorming with your staff—You may be a business owner or manager, but you’re also a customer. What are your own needs, wants, and buying motivations? Put yourself in your customers’ shoes to determine what they need you to offer them.

As the result of your research, identify the top 10 needs and wants of your target market.

**Step Three—Rank your company in relationship to your competitors.** Look at the top 10 needs and wants of your target market. They may include things such as value pricing, convenience, reliability, etc. Then, consider your own company as well as your competitors. Which business is succeeding the most at fulfilling which needs? It may be helpful to make a chart for this step.



After completing the rankings, consider your company’s position:

* What are your strengths and weaknesses?
* How are you particularly unique?
* What performance gap are you filling in your industry?
* Most importantly, how do you stand out? What is special about you that cannot be easily imitated or duplicated by others?

Answering these questions should lead you to your unique selling proposition. Remember, this is an exclusive, one-of-a-kind benefit that only your company can offer.

**Step Four**—**Articulate your unique selling proposition.** Once you’ve determined what you can offer that your competitors can’t, it’s time to get your USP down on paper. Be creative. Remember, your USP can appear in many places, and in many combinations, including your:

* *Product.* Are you the only grocer in town who offers organic produce?
* *Offer.* Will your moisturizer create younger-looking skin in just one week?
* *Guarantee.* If your customers don’t love their haircuts, do you promise full refunds?
* *Pricing strategy.* Do you offer the lowest prices on cable television, period?
* *Placement.* Are you the only company offering free Wi-Fi at local fast-food restaurants?

**Step Five—Integrate your unique selling proposition into all aspects of your business.**

A USP doesn’t do your company much good if you get it down on paper and then forget about it. You must integrate it into every aspect of your business. This includes, but is not limited to:

* Advertising
* Sales copy
* Business cards
* Brochures
* Flyers
* Signs
* Sales pitches and scripts
* Letterhead and letters
* Postcards
* Website
* Internet marketing

**Step Six—Put it on repeat.** To remember your USP and to automatically think of your business when certain needs or wants arise, your customers must hear your proposition over and over and over. Think of an advertising jingle that gets stuck in your head. It may be annoying, but it sure is effective, isn’t it? And, if that company has done its job right, that jingle will contain its USP. (For a fun mash-up of popular commercial jingles, visit <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O6Ky6NXMUJo>. How many do you recognize? What USPs do they represent?)

Another reason to keep repeating your USP is to guard and defend it. As soon as they can, your competitors will attempt to neutralize your USP, either by minimizing it or copying it. The more you can take “ownership” of your USP, the better. Use your unique selling proposition in every situation you possibly can, as loud as you possibly can, as long as you possibly can!

**Summary**

USPs must be easy to communicate, be meaningful to the customer, be specific, create desire and urgency, be able to be fulfilled, and last for the life of the product or brand. To create a workable USP, start with a great product, identify the top needs and wants of your target market, rank your company in relationship to your competitors, articulate your idea, integrate it into all aspects of your business, and repeat it as much as possible.