



THE DICKS + NANTON **CELEBRITY** BRANDING AGENCY

A Client Special Report

The Celebrity Branding Agency

**CREATING YOUR POWERFUL
UNIQUE SELLING PROPOSITION (USP)**

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SPECIAL REPORT: UNIQUE SELLING PROPOSITION (USP)

“Miller Lite. Tastes Great, Less Filling.”

“Burger King. Have It Your Way.”

“Domino’s. Your Pizza in 30 Minutes or Less.”

Above, as you probably already know, are three of the most famous advertising slogans of the past thirty or forty years.

What you might not know is that the real genius of each of those slogans is that, in addition to being memorable, they each contain the product’s **Unique Selling Proposition**, or “**USP.**” In each case, the slogans neatly capture what the advantage of that particular brand is over the competition in a compelling way.

Let’s briefly review them all to see how they accomplish this impressive feat. Miller, for example, came up with “Tastes Great, Less Filling” when light beer was relatively new. Diet food has a connotation of not tasting as good as “regular” food - so the brewer needed to reassure consumers that their light beer did, in fact, taste great even though it didn’t have as many calories. Even cleverer, by the way, is the fact that the copy doesn’t allude to calories or weight – instead, it says “less *filling*,” so many men didn’t have to seem like they were worried about their waistlines.

As for Burger King, the franchise was, for a long time, the only fast food provider that allowed you to custom-order a burger without making you wait a half-hour. That’s because McDonalds and the rest of the pack prepared all their burgers in advance; special orders disrupted their assembly line service. “Have It Your Way” delivered that message quickly and effectively.

Finally, Domino’s knew they could never make amazing claims about the taste of their pizza; it couldn’t stand the scrutiny next to a real neighborhood pizza place. So what was their advantage? They could get one to you fast. Thus, “30 Minutes or Less” became their catch-phrase (backed up by a claim at the time that they would refund your money if they were late, until too many car accidents resulting from overanxious delivery drivers caused a multitude of lawsuits). That catchphrase is still top-of-mind as ever, by the way, with a summer movie comedy of the same name being released in 2011.

In each of the above cases, the USP gave the products their full-on identity and also controlled how the public perceived them. That perception, naturally, tilted in the company’s favor. And that’s the ultimate value of a successful USP – it defines a product or service in such a way that it creates a winning advantage in potential customers’ minds, thus driving sales.

When it comes to marketing (or even creating) a business, the all-important first step is to determine what your own USP is. Everything else – strategy, campaigns, price points, website design, even business cards and letterhead – can and should spring from this one essential point...

...how do you benefit your customers in a way that your competition doesn’t?

And, by the way, if you can’t answer that simple question, you might want to go back and rethink your business until you can.

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USP PRELIMINARIES

But first, before you go back and do that rethink, you need to understand just what factors can go into creating a powerful USP. Who knows? You may already have one lurking in your business model that you may not have even been aware of.

Here are a few points to consider before you get started on your USP:

- **Lose the “U”**

No, we’re not literally telling you to lose the “U” in USP; we’re telling you to lose the “you” - because a USP is *not about you*. If you think a great USP is just telling people how amazing you are (or how amazing your business is), you’re already on the wrong track. People don’t care about how much you think of yourself – **they care about what’s in it for them**. Reread the central question we posed at the end of the last section – it focuses on *benefiting your customer*, not blowing your own horn.

Again, think about how the big companies advertise. Remember the Toyota tagline, “Oh, What a Feeling!” – it was about how *you felt* driving a Toyota, not how great Toyota vehicles were. Likewise, Nike’s “Just Do It” is about the customer, not the shoe company’s products – the implication is that Nike products *help* that customer “do it.”

Even if you’re a one-man band, like a medical or real estate professional, you still must focus on why you provide a better benefit than your competitors rather than your own personal superiority. In other words, if you’re a dentist, you shouldn’t advertise yourself with the line, “We feature the widest variety of cosmetic dentistry services.” Instead, you want your prospects to know that you offer “the most ways to improve your smile in the tri-county area” (or whatever region you’re marketing to).

- **Look for What’s Missing**

One of the most important features of a compelling USP is that it *fills a void*. If there is an obvious shortcoming in the current competition – or if you think you can create a convincing *perception* of a shortcoming - it’s a good direction to take.

And don’t overlook the power of creating that perception. Let’s return to Domino’s. Before they started pushing the idea that you should have a pizza in your hands in thirty minutes or less, do you think this was ever a serious issue to most people? No one ever really worried about how long it would take to get a pizza delivered – they just knew it would come eventually. Suddenly, Domino’s created a whole new speed standard which caught on in people’s minds. Sure, the competition tried to emulate that standard, but it was too late - people now associated Domino’s with “30 Minutes or Less.”

Look around. What *isn’t* your competition capitalizing on? There’s always something you can use to differentiate yourself from them. Just make sure it’s the *right* something. And the way you do that is to ask one simple question....

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- **Who Cares?**

No, we're not being sarcastic – the answer to “Who cares?” is crucial to determining whether you have, in fact, latched onto the right “something” for your USP. That's because, if the bulk of your potential customers end up reacting to your USP with a mighty shrug of their shoulders, then your USP isn't going to be an effective one.

Whatever your primary claim about your business is going to be, it has to be a statement that either already matters or you can *make* matter to your prospects. Let's go back to the Burger King USP. When that was formulated, the true “Burger King” was, of course, McDonalds. Their business model revolutionized the restaurant business and created the fast food franchise as we know it today.

The genius (and resulting fortune) of the Golden Arches' business approach was their system of preparing the burgers in advance so you could get your order quickly. BK flipped that approach by tapping into the downside – the fact that it's not easy to “hold the pickles” when the burger is already wrapped up and waiting in the heated holding area. “Have It Your Way” even quietly pointed out another advantage to their set-up – a customer is guaranteed a fresher burger when they're making it right in front of you, as the Burger King system ensured.

In both cases – freshness and ability to control what's on the burger – BK hit on issues that customers cared about a great deal. They could get the same food at pretty much the same speed and price – but also enjoy those additional advantages. BK discovered what was lacking in their overpowering competition and successfully exploited that weakness by making their customers *care* about that weakness. They still didn't overtake Mickey D's, but they did carve out a very profitable niche for themselves.

- **Make a Promise You Can Keep**

Above all, whatever you decide your USP is, make sure it's something you can actually *fulfill*. People are already prone to distrust marketing and advertising – they're bombarded with it 24/7 and know that most of it is a deliberate attempt to overhype and manipulate.

Anyone who's seen a movie trailer filled with excitement and explosions, only to go to the movie and discover they're watching an unintelligible, unmemorable and just plain dull cinematic disaster, knows how deep an impression deceptive advertising can make.

Movies can get away with that; they're in and out of theatres in a few weeks at most and don't have to concern themselves with the long-term damage misleading marketing can incur.

Professionals and businesses that are in it for the long haul are in an entirely different position. This is where the old expression, “Fooled me once, shame on you, fooled me twice, shame on me,” really comes into play.

If your main advertising ploy is a blatant lie or misrepresentation, then you begin losing customers not just for one-time sales, but for *life*. No one wants to be seen as a sucker – and very, very few will come back to you if they feel you sold them a bill of goods.

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That means your income stream will gradually dry out to a trickle.

Your objective is presumably to build a business, not tear it down. So create a USP that squares firmly with your reality.

USP PRINCIPLES

Let's switch gears from the broader criteria we discussed above to some more specific guidelines, in order to focus on what the actual content of a USP should consist of.

What aspects of a business transaction do customers care about enough that would swing their business your way? There are in fact an almost unlimited number of such aspects to choose from, depending on what you're selling – but we're going to break them down into some major categories that can help any business pick and choose to find what might (or already does...) work for them.

- **Lower Price**

This is a pretty obvious one – you're offering the same product or service as others do, but you charge less money. A great example of that is Wal-Mart's famous tagline, "Every Day Low Prices." Along these lines, there are also businesses where that type of USP is actually built into the name – such as "The 99¢ Store!"

- **Higher Quality**

Instead of charging less, you may instead want to offer more – more quality, that is. Whatever your product or service might be, if you believe there is enough of a customer base that will pay more for a higher standard of quality, this could be a way to go. No one expects to pay Hyundai prices for a Mercedes Benz, after all. You just have to make an effective case for that higher standard.

- **Demographics**

Back in the 1960's, Pepsi made a splash in the soda marketplace by advertising their soft drinks to "The Pepsi Generation." They successfully defined themselves demographically by appealing to the younger side of the then-growing generation gap.

Most large corporations since then have continued to target younger consumers, but, in truth, you can successfully go after any group of people – seniors, Latinos, African-Americans, and the affluent are just a few examples. Or you might want to sell specifically to those who work in a certain industry – doctors, lawyers, accountants, etc. Whatever the case, when you identify a large group with money to spend that's being underserved by a particular product or service you can provide, you could have a very effective USP on your hands.

- **Service with a Smile**

When you're coming up against the mammoth bureaucracy of a huge company, the advantages of an average mom-and-pop business can seem awfully inviting – for example, you can quickly get an actual human on the phone without going through a half-hour of pre-recorded options. Turn your individuality into an attractive USP by selling your hands-on service – this is an area in which people *do* care a lot.

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- **No-Cost Education**

In many business sectors, the pros don't take the time to explain why they're doing what they're doing for you – they just do it (providing you pay them to, of course). If you can provide no-cost materials to educate your potential customers about your particular industry, it creates added value to your product or services, especially if you offer free help with that product or service.

For example, think about the effective Home Depot commercial campaign that showed the store personnel teaching their customers about how to do simple home improvement tasks. Education may be an intangible that might only resonate for certain businesses such as that one, but, when used appropriately, it can make for a solid USP.

- **...or Your Money Back**

One of the quickest ways to build new customer trust, especially if you're a relatively unknown commodity, is to offer rock-solid guarantees, warranties and assurances that surpass the competitions. By knowing that if they take a chance on you, their bet is covered by your policies, they're much more likely to go ahead and give you a try.

The strongest statement you can make along these lines is if you can guarantee something that the competition either won't or can't. Just using a tagline that says something like, "We Guarantee X, Y & Z – Our Competition Won't" gives you an instant one-up that any prospect can quickly comprehend.

- **Bonus Time**

Many kids used to buy a box of Cracker Jack not because of the popcorn snack itself, but for the free toy that would be contained in the box. Having a consistent giveaway component in your brand can work similarly to bring in sales.

On the adult side, the beauty products company Clinique makes it a point several times a year to promote "Clinique Bonus Time" at all the major department stores – so that if you spend a certain amount of money on their products, you get a bonus. This has become an important long-term marketing tool for their company as well as a vital part of their USP.

Offering bonuses, reward programs, gift certificates and other incentives for good customers can also be an important aspect of your USP, as well as good business. Everyone loves to feel like they're getting something for nothing – even if, paradoxically, they're spending money to make it happen!

- **Wide Variety**

There used to be a commercial for a phone directory that always made us chuckle. A character in the ad would say that the directory not only covered a wider area than a rival directory, but it also contained more listings. Well, if you thought about that for a moment, the one kind of makes the other thing happen automatically!

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Nevertheless, offering more choices than the primary competition can be a definite selling point for your business, especially if the customer still isn't quite sure what he or she wants to buy. Knowing that you can provide a wide array of choices is reassuring and makes prospects feel they can make a more educated decision if they know everything that's available.

- **Batteries Included**

Most of us can identify with the childhood memory of getting a brand new toy, excitedly opening it up and then completely deflating when it was obvious that toy needed batteries to run – and there were none in the house at the moment.

That's why packaging your product or service with everything a customer needs can make for an effective USP. People are busy, and offering a solid "Done-For-You" approach resonates with people who have hectic schedules or simply don't want to be bothered taking a few extra steps. "One Stop Shopping" always has a certain appeal.

- **Nowhere Else**

This is the ultimate USP – you're *the only one* who can deliver a certain product or service. "Not available anywhere else" is a strong statement and can obviously only be used in certain situations. When you are selling a unique product, however, remember that education must be a part of the USP – if potential customers aren't familiar with what it is you're selling, they may be hesitant to buy it!

As we noted at the top of this list, there are theoretically an infinite number of USPs that can be crafted, because there are an infinite number of possibilities to the marketplace. You can also create a potentially powerful combination of two or more of these ideas (for example, "Same Price - Superior Quality"). While the above list hits on the strongest elements a USP can contain, there may be still others more suitable to selling your business or service.

PUTTING YOUR USP INTO ACTION

Once you've settled on a potential USP, first test it out on some business associates you trust – and even some potential customers - to get their reactions. Remember, the primary question you want answered is – *will this help sway a customer in my direction?* Also, is it strong enough, memorable enough and does it offer enough of a benefit to my potential target group?

Make sure the opinions you get on these questions are informed and from people you respect. If your budget allows, you might even want to hire a firm to do some market research.

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Remember that the USP is *one of the most important decisions you will make* when it comes to your business, so it shouldn't be undertaken lightly.

When you've made the final decision to move forward with a USP, you must make sure that it carries through in every aspect of your business. We're not just talking about marketing, although, obviously, that's critical. We're talking about how your receptionist answers the phone, what you put in your email signature, how you approach customers about sales and how you think about your business. As we noted at the beginning of this report, *everything* should spring from your USP.

And always make sure you and your staff can adequately communicate your USP quickly and effectively to anyone you're introducing your business to. If you can't, you've got the wrong USP.

Finally, remember that times change and so do marketplaces. The Pepsi Generation couldn't last forever and neither can your USP. Don't stubbornly cling to something that no longer has the effectiveness it once had; you'll find that a new and improved USP that fits the current moment in time can reenergize your company and make it seem brand new.