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Use Marketing's New USP to Boost Web Sales

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As most marketers know, the “USP,” or Unique Selling Proposition, was coined by Rosser Reeves of the Ted Bates & Company ad agency in the 1940s. It was developed to help their clients develop unique selling points that built brand appeal and recall.

According to Wikipedia, Mr. Reeves gave a precise definition of the Unique Selling Proposition when he stated,

1. “Each advertisement must make a proposition to the customer: ‘Buy this product, and you will get this specific benefit.’
2. The proposition itself must be unique—something that competitors do not, or will not, offer.
3. The proposition must be strong enough to pull new customers to the product.”

I’ve used the USP thousands of times in my 27+ years of marketing copywriting, to help my clients articulate their unique offering to customers and prospects. But unfortunately, many marketers and business teams I’ve worked with didn’t fully understand what the USP meant. Not in a way that described the unique solution they offered customers.

They couldn’t articulate their USP into a description of how their unique product met a specific need, even when I provided them with an outline for crafting their USP. So what they often gave me was: “We’re the only company that sells this technology to makes the machine go faster.” They often missed the ultimate “so what?” solution for the customer. (“So what if the machine goes faster? What problem does that uniquely solve for me, the customer?”)

Recently I’ve taken courses where I learned about successful selling approaches that tie a product’s features and benefits back to the customer’s NEED. Of course, you must first understand the customer’s need. Without that insight, it’s hard to tie your product to that need.

Marketing’s new USP may make all the difference for your business

Paige Arnof-Fenn, an accomplished international marketing and branding expert, recently spoke at a business meeting I attended in Boston. She said, “People aren’t surfing the Net anymore, they’re searching for very specific solutions.”

That’s exactly it! It’s about solutions.

Therefore, I have a radical proposal for the marketing world and for your business.

For marketing effectiveness, it may not be so much about a unique selling proposition anymore. It's time to evolve into marketing's new USP: the **Unique Solution Proposition**.

For instance, let's say a homeowner wants to have a beautiful, green lawn without spending precious time every weekend to make it flourish. That's his problem to be solved.

A lawn care company with the best solution isn't selling the homeowner a unique blend of grass seed (the unique selling point) or even a greener lawn with minimal work (the unique benefit). They're selling the home owner the easiest way to have the best lawn on the block and the freedom to enjoy life's other pleasures. That's the ultimate solution. See the difference?

Here's a formula for applying marketing's new USP to a marketing message or campaign, using this grass seed example:

1. Understand and define the deepest emotions about the problems, needs, hopes and desires of your target prospects and customers. "My customer takes pride in having the best lawn in his neighborhood, but he's frustrated by all the time and work it takes to make it happen." (Deepest emotions: pride and frustration)

2. Articulate exactly what your business can offer that uniquely solves the problem. "My seed blend has nutrients that help it practically grow by itself while killing weeds. Therefore, very little effort is required by the homeowner, especially if he uses a self-timed sprinkler system. Instead, he can spend weekends relaxing with his family or enjoying golf." (Deepest solution: A lawn that the neighbors will envy and free time for meaningful pursuits)

3. Clearly define and support the UNIQUE aspect of your solution (assuming you have one), so you'll stand out from your competition. "In dozens of lawn tests, no other seed product performed this way to provide a rich, lush green lawn with little effort. Here's one of those tests demonstrated in side-by-side time-lapse video." (Proof that substantiates the unique claim)

Try applying this formula to your business and see what a difference it can make.

With so much marketing clutter out there and so many competitive choices for your prospects and customers—the marketing's new USP will help you engage your audience and get them to buy from you more quickly and often.

These are just some of the ways you can boost your success on the Internet.

To learn more, you'll want to check out the ContentClear™ Marketing Method for Web Site Optimization, a clear, methodical 7-step approach to increasing Web conversions and sales.

Pam Foster, senior copywriter and online content consultant, is the founder of the ContentClear™ Marketing Method for Web Site Optimization (www.contentclear.com). Her diverse 28-year marketing communications background includes writing and consulting for many types of industries promoting B2C and B2B products and services. She has 13 years of experience in Web content writing and strategy, SEO, and information architecture, as well as direct mail – all for clients such as L.L. Bean, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Maine, the American Cancer Society, Harper College, AWAI, Downeast Energy and many others.

Pam is co-author of 9 Easy Steps to Planning a Profitable Web Site and several other books under the Internet Jungle Guide brand (www.internetjungleguide.com). She has won 100+ marketing awards including New England DMA (Direct Marketing Association), Web Marketing Association, Telly, and Catalog Age. She is an AWAI Copywriters Wall-of-Fame honoree. Pam works mainly with larger corporate clients, helping them optimize their Web sites to boost conversions and sales. She also offers personal coaching services to copywriters looking to elevate their Web content and client service skills and learn her 7-step Web site optimization method. You can contact Pam at pam@contentclear.com.

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