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Why USPs Don't Work

By Debbie Jenkins

Why USPs Don't Work

by: **Debbie Jenkins**

The USP (Unique Selling Proposition) is based on the assumption that if you can't be better than the competition then being different will usually suffice.

It is true that most businesses scrape by in the midst of mediocrity. The bosses of these firms see an industry or profession that looks lucrative and join the ranks in a 'me too, I'd like some of that action', kind of way. If there's enough of a market for what they do then they'll pick up the odd client and eke out an existence without having to think or work very hard on their brand.

Most of these companies make up the headlines of casualties when the market they're in gets tough and only the outstanding or well-positioned firms stay safe.

So, the USP, in principle, enables the enlightened business owner to rise above the ranks and be noticed. This is usually achieved by:

High Value Promises

Guarantees

Under Promising and Over Delivering

Finding an under-serviced niche in your market

I applaud and support this way of thinking and believe that high value promises, guarantees and aiming to delight clients are all important. I actually believe that these things should be the baseline for any business.

So the notion of a USP is fantastic. There's just one tiny flaw...

Why USPs Don't Work

Finding your USP can be like the quest for the proverbial Holy Grail. You could end up spending inordinate amounts of money on research, product/service development and branding without ever really attaining a true USP. The quest to find 'unique' when 'relevant', 'outstanding' and 'decisive' are just as good can be frustrating and wasteful.

I've seen people stumble upon some really great propositions for their brand that would have worked like a dream, but then dismiss them because they're not "unique" enough.

Some of the problems with USPs:

Nearly every idea you come up with will have already been done, so struggling to find unique will be frustrating and wasteful

You'll spend lots of time trying to invent something truly unique and if you do ever find it you'll never really know if it's unique anyway

If you are unique then as soon as you start telling people the reasons why, somebody else will copy it and, alas, it is no longer unique.

Most people realise the above as soon as they start looking and instead of doing the hard work they'll just slap a USP label on something that is 'me too' or mediocre.

USPs feed money hungry textbook marketers with research, positioning and creative brainstorming projects. Then once somebody copies you it's back to the drawing board and they can get paid all over again.

I want you to get the notion of 'unique' out of your head by replacing it with 'decisive'. We'll look at how to achieve this shortly but first, I'd just like to tell you about a guy who came on one of my first Lean Marketing(tm) Master Classes...

Mister 73 USPs: A Warning

This guy's firm provided training and coaching in performance improvement and change management. He had an MBA and reportedly knew lots about marketing.

Just to set the scene...

Throughout the first half of the day he'd managed to disagree with and antagonise everyone in the room, including his own business partner.

He was quick to disagree and slow to explain his reasons why. We'd just started work on the "So What?" exercise when he said,

"I know what you're doing. You're trying to help us find our USP. Don't bother, I've already got 73 of 'em."

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I was surprised and impressed but not convinced, "73 USPs? Are you sure? Tell me about them."

Silence. The rest of the group were now all looking at him. He looked back with a look of concentration as he struggled to remember just one. He finally came back with, "Quality!"

Although I felt uncomfortable for the man with 73 USPs, I believed it was important to uncover what he really understood; for his benefit and the benefit of the rest of the group. I didn't want everyone believing that having so many USPs was a good idea. So I continued my line of questioning,

"How does quality set you apart as unique?"

Again, a long pause and then,

"Well, we provide the best quality solutions to all of our clients."

I continued with three questions in rapid succession, "Do you offer a guarantee?" "Are you sure your

competitors aren't saying and delivering the same thing?" "Who are your clients?"

His response to each question was, "No we don't guarantee it, how could we?" "We don't have any competitors because what we offer is unique!" "Anyone can benefit from what we do, so anyone willing to pay is a client!"

As you can see, Mister 73 USPs was in a tricky spot:

He didn't have one USP let alone 73

The 'USP' he chose was not unique

He had no idea who his competitors were

73 anything's in branding are usually 72 too many, no wonder he couldn't remember them!

He hadn't even defined his target as a type of business let alone pin-pointed an individual

He was entrenched with a belief that he'd seen it all before – this usually limits a person's ability to learn anything new

Now, I'm known for my ability to step right beyond the BS and for my edgy and sometimes dangerous manner with textbook marketers, but he was a delegate, so I swiftly moved on so that he could save face. I then continued to try and help him personally during the rest of the workshop but he really wasn't willing to part with the belief that he had 73 USPs. Nor would he accept that selling to everyone meant that he wouldn't appeal strongly to anyone.

I don't pretend to be a life coach (I leave that to people who are good at it) and don't believe it's my job

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to change people's beliefs, so at the end of the class, unprompted, I gave him his course–fee back.

He wasn't going to use our information and ideas anyway.

So why am I telling you this sad story? Why, because most textbook marketers, in my experience, really don't understand USPs. It's just another buzzword they throw at you to sound clever and important but under the surface their USPs are usually little more than over–dressed features.

USPs are mythological artefacts that rarely exist today except in the imaginations of textbook marketers or the truly inspired.

DPPs – Decisive Power Points

Right, back to the programme... I'd like you to ignore 'unique' and replace it with 'decisive'.

Decisive is more effective than unique for a number of reasons:

Unique doesn't necessarily mean favourable – Decisive does!

If all else is equal your DPP will tip the scales in your favour – it will be the deciding factor

DPPs work from your client's viewpoint – they are triggers that help your client decide, not just things that you think are unique

Decisive is much easier to find and maintain than Unique

There's an example of our DPP chart (high and to the right is where you want your benefit to be) on our site at

The Decisive Power Point chart and detailed instructions on how to use it is covered thoroughly in our ebook called Coaching Charisma – Using The Power of Your Brand to Magically Attract New Business. This 64 page book is a must read for any coach who is struggling to stand out in the crowd.

Speak Soon

'Dangerous' Debbie Jenkins

"Dangerous" Debbie Jenkins is a speaker, author and stand–up comedian. Get her latest course – "CoachesCan!" Attract More Clients & Enjoy More Success By Doing & Spending Less and you can even set your own course fee!

Assembly Work At Home Scams

By Tina Barraclough

Why USPs Don't Work

Many people who need extra money would like to work from home. Unfortunately, some companies cheat people out of their money by preying on this desire to make money from home.

Most work at home "opportunities" look like legitimate ways to make extra cash. They often advertise ads in local newspapers, magazines, or through E-MAIL. These ads typically say something like "EARN &2,500 A MONTH GUARANTEED WITHOUT LEAVING YOUR HOME" send \$20-\$40 for details.

While many work at home scams exist, I would like to tell you about one of the common work at home scams, known as 'ASSEMBLY WORK AT HOME'

The ads are enticing; "Get an assembly work at home job and make loads of money! "Can these ads be trusted? NO! Are there legitimate work at home assembly jobs available? In all reality, you will not find a legitimate assembly work at home job.

The majority of these ads are worthless. They attempt to prey on the disabled, the elderly, and most of all, those of us who would like to work at home, or start their own home based business.

Here is what usually happens if you answer to one of these "assembly work at home" information request ads. First, you request "free" information about this opportunity. You then receive "basic" information that asks you to typically pay between \$20 and \$40 dollars for the complete details and materials to get started earning money right away.

After you pay them their fee, you get back a packet of information about the assembly work at home opportunity, and which companies are waiting to hire you. Here's the catch: you will most likely never make a dime from any of these companies. Why? Because after you purchased the supplies and or equipment needed to get started, and have done the work, these companies will not pay you. In fact, many people have had these companies refuse to pay for their work because it did not [and will not] meet their quality standards. "Unfortunately, no work is ever "up to standard" leaving you with expensive equipment and/or supplies, and no income.

If you are victimized:

If you become a victim of an "assembly, or other "work at home scheme, ask the company for a refund. If they refuse, or give you an evasive response, tell them you plan to notify LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICIALS.

Keep careful records of everything you do to recover your money. Document your phone calls, keep copies of all paperwork such as letters and receipts, and record all costs involved, including the time you spend.

If the company refuses to refund your money, contact:

Your LOCAL BETTER BUSINESS BUREAU at:

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Your LOCAL or STATE Consumer Affairs Agency

The U. S POSTAL INSPECTION SERVICE at:

Your STATE'S ATTORNEY GENERAL'S OFFICE at:

,or the office in the STATE

where the company is.

The advertising manager of the publication that ran the ad you answered.

To learn more about Work-at-Home Schemes, contact the following:

Your local BETTER BUSINESS BUREAU

DIRECT MARKETING ASSOCIATION

FEDERAL TRADES COMMISSION

NATIONAL FRAUD INFORMATION CENTER

1-800-876-7060

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Tina Barraclough is a stay at home mom and owner of

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