

Your Unique Selling Proposition: Use It. Or Lose Everything.

By veteran copywriter and
copywriter's coach, Chris Marlow

At the foundation of every selling message — whether a brochure, print ad, or direct mail piece — should be a unique selling proposition (commonly known in marketing circles as the “USP”).

The USP tells your prospect what differentiates your product from everyone else’s in your category. And it’s the single most important reason your prospect will buy from you...or from someone else.

But incorporating the USP into the selling message of every sales piece is often overlooked. With the distraction of deadlines and other demands, pieces get printed and mailed without a review of whether a company’s most important message is conveyed. And when those marketing pieces are for generating leads or sales, the results can be disappointing — or even devastating.

That’s because the first thing a prospect asks when looking at your mailing is, “So why are you better than the next guy? What makes you so unique?” If you don’t answer that question adequately, then you’re just a “me too”...and not many of us are compelled to buy on that basis.

Without the proper positioning of your product’s USP in your direct mail piece, you can expect lackluster response rates. On the other hand, if your competition does a poor job of conveying their USP, you can gain an advantage by making your USP the primary “concept” in each of your mailings.

Here’s a worthy exercise: Gather all your sale materials and review them to see what pieces support your USP. Most likely, you’ll find headlines and introductory paragraphs that need to be changed...and even entire mailing concepts that need revising.

If you think it’s time to review or rework your UPS, start with these basic questions:

1. What makes my product different from the competition?
2. What makes my product better than the competition?
3. What features does my product have that the competition’s products don’t?
4. What benefits does my product have that the competition’s doesn’t?
5. What can my product offer that the competition can’t?

6. Is my product unique on price, functionality, compatibility, ease-of-use, market share, customer service, development, past performance, etc.?

Note the differentiators in the following software company USPs from some of my past direct mail projects (the Unique selling Proposition is in bold):

- “Track-It!® is a proven PC management system that offers **more functionality** for the price than any other Help/Desk/Inventory solution.” (Intuit)
- “The world’s **most advanced** server security technology.” (VeriSign)
- “**Designed by electricians** for the electrical contracting industry.” (BlueVolt)
- “PageTools is the first collection of 10 blockbuster additions to make PageMaker 5.0 **work faster, easier and far more efficiently...**” (Extensis)
- “The most **sophisticated and complete** answer to the macro virus threat.” (Symantec)

Once you’ve developed or revamped your USP, take a look at all your advertising and marketing materials. The logo tagline is often built from the USP, so it’s important to make sure it accurately reflects the unique selling message of your company or your product.

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Award-winning copywriter Chris Marlow has written for the nation’s leading businesses for more than two decades. For information on powerful copywriting, visit:

<http://www.chrismarlow.com>

Chris also offers business and copywriting coaching to new, aspiring, and seasoned copywriters who want to accelerate their success. Check out the benefits of coaching at:

<http://www.TheCopywritersCoach.com>

Chris has also created the world’s only large-scale survey of copywriter pricing and economics. Find out what others charge and earn at:

<http://www.FreelancersBusinessStore.com>

And for free information on how to quickly build a profitable freelance business, sign up for Chris’ **Freelancer’s Business Bulletin** at:

<http://www.FreelancersBusinessBulletin.com>

PO Box 1134, Palm Desert, CA, 92261

P: 760-340-2045/F: 760-406-6200

Email: chris@chrismarlow.com

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