

Double Your Store Traffic - Part 2

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Part 2: Create A Unique Selling Proposition so that your customers will know why they should buy from you.

Your customers want to know what is unique about your store. Why should they buy from you? How are you different from anyone else? No, it's not cheap prices, it's not good service, and it's definitely not because you've been in business for 89 years and 5 generations.

They want an emotional, compelling reason that is going to jump out and grab them, practically forcing them to come in and shop you. They want to know how you are different and better than your competitors.

Few home furnishings retailers can adequately answer these questions, and as a result they fail to meet an important consumer need. Usually retail owners list reasons that are tied to things that they care about.

They give vague and general statements that fail to make an emotional

connection to customers. That's why, if you don't already have an explicit and compelling Unique Selling Proposition (USP), now might be the perfect time to draft one.



A USP is not the same thing as a mission statement. Your mission statement's purpose is to give your company a direction. If done properly, it should be used as a tool to get employee's and management on the same page and make them feel that they are part of something important. Once employees are emotionally invested, their whole outlook changes, and so does their level of productivity. A mission statement should be used as a tool to create a vision for your company. It typically should not be used in your marketing. That's what a USP is for.

You can have several Unique Selling Propositions. If you have three or four specialties, like marketing to the affluent, interior design, bedding and appliances, you can have a USP for each one of these areas. If you want to reach an affluent buyer, your USP must be different than the one you use to sell cheap mattresses to the masses.

Your USP Must:

- Be Deeply felt.

- Create an emotional connection.

- Instantly tell people why they should consider doing business with you.
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- Be Specific
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- Be Concise
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- Be Meaningful.
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Your USP should cause your prospects to say, "Oh really... how do they do that?" If they don't have to stop and think about how you do what you say you are going to do, then your USP isn't doing its job.

Here are some examples of what a USP is not. None of these statements are specific, concise or meaningful. Any store, any company, selling any type of product, could make these kind of general claims.

- "Just do it™."
- "We try harder™."
- "Service so amazing you'll be blown away."
- "We help people make their dreams come true."
- "We really care."
- "We help our customers get exactly what they want, at a price they can afford."

Lets look at what is probably the best Unique Selling Proposition of all time from Dominoes Pizza. "Fresh Hot Pizza in 30 minutes...or it's FREE."

Why is this such a good example? First because it is a concise statement that tells you instantly why you should buy from Dominoes. It doesn't say "best tasting" or "organic ingredients" or "cheap, low priced pizza."

If you are hungry now, and you don't want to wait forever to eat, you know where to go. It doesn't try to be all

things to all people. Like we mentioned earlier, it's not "organic pizza," so they are going to miss out on some section of the population that wants organic ingredients. That's Okay! It's not the best tasting gourmet pizza. And that is just the point. It doesn't have to be. Most retailers make a mistake by marketing "Too Big." Don't try to reach too many people and not really focus on any one market segment. This is one benefit of using a well crafted USP. It allows you to call out to your perfect prospects and get their attention.

Another huge benefit of developing a USP for your store is the impact it can have on prices. As you start to focus your marketing to a targeted group of people, with a message that shows how you offer something truly unique and beneficial, you will automatically separate yourself from price competition. Customers base their decisions on price when they have no other reason to buy from you. They automatically default to price. If you develop something truly different and unique, you will not only generate more traffic, but also increase your ability to keep margins healthy.

Start to Develop Your USP by asking yourself the question, "Why Does My Company Exist?" Why does the world need our products and services? Can they get what I offer at a competitors store? Don't be ashamed if you have to say yes to this question. It should cause you to really take a look at your business and see what you do offer to the world.

Here's an example of a USP that a marketing and advertising company might use to get furniture retailers to purchase their services. Notice how specific USP #1 is. It does not contain any vague, general statements. Instead it makes a specific promise of sales, over a stated time period, and tells prospects what will happen if we fail to deliver. Compare it with USP #2.

USP #1: You'll Sell 77 Additional Units (Sectionals, Sofas, Bedroom Sets, Mattresses) In The Next 24 Months Directly From Our Strategies Or We'll Pay You \$2,000.00 From Our Retirement Account!

USP#2: You'll Sell More Furniture In The Next Few Months From What We Share Or We'll Give You a Refund.

You can see that the first USP is much more powerful. Many companies could make the claim stated in USP #2, but when you read USP #1, you will probably think, "Oh really...How do they do that?" Here are a few examples of USP's that a furniture store could use.

- “How to give your home an extreme \$50,000 makeover, on a 17,000 budget.”

- “Did you know buying furniture from us can raise your credit score 20 points in 90 days?”

- “Your guests will say, “Your home is amazing!” in 37 seconds flat...we guarantee it!”

- “Furnish your master bedroom like a kings mansion with only \$5,975.00!”

- “We’ll help you make your home look like you paid an interior designer thousands of dollars...and we’ll do it for free!”

- Don’t spend a penny on interior designers...use Our 17 point design checklist and give your home an Extreme Makeover for FREE.

- We’ll hold your hand and personally guarantee that your guests will be “oohing” and “awing” every time they enter a room in your home.

I'm always astounded when somebody tells me that there's really no difference between them and their competitors; if that's true, in my opinion, they should fold up their tent and call it quits. The blunt truth is, when you have trouble enunciating a USP, you have much bigger business problems than advertising alone might solve.

And ad pros do clients an enormous disservice when they try to disguise the absence of a USP or a valid reason for existence with clever advertising, emulating the magician's principle of distraction.

There is no ad campaign or promotion that can make up for missing this core business principle. If you have a hard time defining your Unique Selling Proposition, how are your customers supposed to know why they should buy from you?

It is typical for independent furniture store owners to look at their overall operation and say, "Our company does a great job. We serve our customers well, but don't offer anything that much more unique or different than our competitors." If you find yourself thinking this or saying this, then please use these three shortcuts to help you to develop your own USP.

USP Shortcut #1: Expertise

Here is an example that isn't from our industry, but it is instructive. There was a plastic surgeon in California who used lots of big, glossy and expensive magazine ads to promote his practice. Over time, he found that the local market was becoming saturated, and that all of his competitors were advertising the same way. So, he positioned himself by promoting his expertise by crafting a very different USP. His message was, "Hey, I'm going to provide you with the 8 steps you should take before you get plastic surgery."

Those eighteen words totally changed his business. He was still a plastic surgeon doing business in the same old way, but his new USP re-positioned him as an expert and a consumer advocate. He addressed a need of potential clients by offering to give them the information needed to make a good "buying" decision. This is an approach that can easily work for any furniture retailer. If you choose to craft a USP that establishes your expertise, make sure that the information you provide is of high quality, and explained masterfully. A little bit of a sales pitch will be necessary. For this to work, you need to tell your customers, "Hey you need to call me because I'm going to be the one that's going to help you get rid of all the circumstances, all the emotional factors that are in your way, in order to make a decision to buy furniture."

USP Shortcut #2: Personality

Use a monthly newsletter to keep in touch with the top 20% of your clients. This simple and affordable act will help you to build and sustain your most profitable relationships. In addition you should:

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- Put your name on all advertising messages.
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- Sign your name at the bottom of ads.
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- Use your own voice on the radio and TV ads.
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- Your voice should be recorded on the telephone on-hold message.
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- Put your photo on your website and on all marketing materials. You can also use a photo of your family, or your staff, or even of you and your dog.
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- Use a conversational tone in your messages. They should sound as if you were speaking to a friend. Don't be afraid to be funny, conversational, and personal.
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- Talk about your life in the messages you send to your clients. Use stories, and give them reasons to like and trust you.
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Shortcut #3: Don't Sell Furniture

Have your USP "sell" something other than home furnishings. For example:

- "Sell" credit repair so that you can be the furniture credit repair expert.
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- Don't talk about the fact that you know mattresses; instead sell relief from back pain.

- Don't advertise the fact that you have a broad selection of wall/home theater units; instead sell the entertainment experience.

- Don't write copy about you sofa brands; instead sell comfort and warmth.

- Don't focus on furniture items for sale; instead sell the prestige of owning fine home furnishings.

Tools Used To Create the USP

Survey your customers, to find out the reasons why they do business with you.

Getting this information from your customers is critical. The best way to get it in the most accurate form, is to hire an experienced surveying company to do the research via telephone.

Typically people won't tell you to your face if they have a problem, or are frustrated with your store... but they will talk behind your back. Allow them to do so freely. You want to get the real story, not the sugar coated version.

If hiring a third party is cost prohibitive, the next best option is to send out a written survey. Make it anonymous, and offer a gift such as a \$5 gas card, or a gift card to your store in return for filling it out. Consider including this gift in each survey you send out to invoke the "Law of Reciprocity." Many customers will feel that since they just received something of value from you, that they are obligated to fill out the survey. If you choose to go this route, definitely include a postage paid return envelope.

Ask questions to help you to get the following information:

- "What makes "XYZ Furniture" different from other retailers?"
- "Why do your customers continue to support "XYZ Furniture", and not other retailers?"
- Why do customers leave "XYZ Furniture" to shop elsewhere?

- What do other retailers, or even other completely different businesses do to differentiate themselves, and set themselves apart?

- What does "XYZ Furniture" do better than the competition?

You also need to ask yourself a few questions such as:

- What is Our Sales Story? Why are we in business? How did we get in business? What do we believe in? Is it different, exciting or strange?

- What could you do that would be so crazy, wild and completely out of the box, that it would make your store totally unique? Why not consider ideas from other industries such as a drive up window for furniture retail, an in-store nail salon or a movie theater in the showroom?

After you have answered these questions, and obtained supporting information from your customers, you can start to craft your USP. At this point, remember to consider the following criteria when building a USP:

- Make it Specific.

- It must be Clear.

- Are you really Unique?

- Keep it concise. Make it short enough that you can say it in one, or at the most 2 sentences.

- Is it an emotional appeal?

- Does it talk about a benefit to your buyer? Make sure it refers to what THEY want, not what you think is important. This is a cardinal sin in advertising, talking about yourself, not “What’s In It For Them.”

- Does it explain why your customer should do business with you above any and all other options, including doing nothing, or whatever they are doing now... regardless of price.

Admittedly, this is not an easy thing to do. It’s not something you can sit down and develop in one day or even a week. It takes time, effort and a true desire to differentiate yourself from your competition. Too many Home Furnishings stores spend a fortune on advertising that looks just like their competitors down the street. Your new USP will help you create an advertisement that brings in traffic by the droves, because your customers know what you offer, and why they should come and buy from you.

Most advertising problems stem from the lack of a foundation. The USP provides this foundation, and provides clarity for your customers. How can you convince your customers to come and buy from you if you don’t have a clear understanding of why you are different and better than your competitors? And remember this excludes the fact that you may be the low price leader. Anyone, and everyone can advertise low prices. You must have something else unique to get your customers’ attention.

Once you have done the heavy lifting of creating the USP, you will have a solid foundation for all of your marketing messages. Plus your customers will be able to clearly identify why they should buy from you and not your competitors, or the big box stores.

NEXT ISSUE:

In the next issue of FURNITURE WORLD, this series will discuss a strategy that will allow you to reduce your advertising costs, get better returns on your advertising dollars, increase traffic and sales. It’s called the Iron Clad Contact Collection System.

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