



What are USP and UBP?

Why they're different and why you need both.

First, USP and UBP are acronyms for Unique Selling Proposition and Unique Buying Proposition... but what does that really mean?

You'll see many different descriptions of USP and UBP, usually vague, sometimes interchangeable and often times somewhat inaccurate. Some use different variations of the terms (selling advantage, value proposition, etc.) for what are essentially the same product or service differentiation descriptors.

Differentiation is at the heart of the matter; bringing the "unique" to unique selling and buying propositions. These propositions are the attributes used to describe the difference between one product or service and another.

Reality in Advertising written back in 1961 introduced the concept of the Unique Selling Proposition or USP. Because the idea was first explored over forty years ago, it has been amended many times and few today know the original definition of a USP.

"...Each advertisement must make a unique selling proposition to the consumer.

This proposition must be one that the competition either cannot or does not offer. It must be unique- either a uniqueness of the brand or a claim not otherwise made in that particular field of advertising. The proposition must be so strong that it can move the masses; pulling new customers to your product. The stated difference must be very important to the consumer..."

- Excerpt from *Reality in Advertising* by Rosser Reeves

Reeves, the originator of the USP, did not believe that advertising should or could persuade people on a subconscious level. He felt that a straight-forward, rational argument was the scientific way to approach advertising, so USP was originally defined as a selling technique to aid the buying component.

It was only later subdivided by others into separate unique selling and buying propositions. However, this split has in part, led to today's interchangeable use and misuse of the USP and UBP terms by sellers and marketers alike.

It is now accepted that consumers purchase based not only on needs and wants; but both conscious and subconscious desires. Purchase decisions involve a complex set of decisions that are influenced by both logic and emotion.

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Emotional Buying-

What people do is often quite different from what you, or even they, think they'll do. People rationalize decisions with facts, but tend to make many decisions based on feelings. Emotion is central to the decision-making process.

Ask someone what they need or will purchase and they disconnect from the emotional side of the brain (the area where decisions are made) to tap into the logical side of the brain (the area that gives answers,) this is why logical arguments and their subsequent responses aren't always reliable. This is why it is critical to look at both the buying and selling perspectives objectively.

The Definition Break Down-

If you look at the definitions of the words separately it is a little easier to understand what USP and UBP definitions really should be; how they're different, and why they're both equally important to examine.

u-nique –adjective

The only one of a type or having no like or equal; unparalleled, limited in occurrence to a given class, situation, or area.

sell-ing –verb

Pertaining to a sale or sales; to persuade or induce someone to buy something or cause something to be widely accepted, to convince people to accept a product or service.

buy-ing -verb

The act of purchasing: to acquire the possession of, or the right to something. To buy; purchase or possess a valuable or desired item, obtain a bargain, to accept or believe, "to buy into."

prop-o-si-tion –noun

A plan or scheme proposed; anything stated or affirmed for discussion, such as a statement of an argument or an essential idea to be advocated. A characteristic that is affirmed or denied, then characterized as either true or false.

The Still's "Distilling marketing" process defines USP and UBP as follows:

Unique Selling Propositions (USP) are the special elements inherent in a particular company, product or service and the way those attributes are presented by a seller as the reason their product or service is different and better than that of the competition.

Unique Buying Propositions (UBP) are the attracting elements of a particular brand (company, product or service) and how they are perceived by a buyer as the reason the

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product or service is more desirable than the competition; including intangible benefits such as social status, value, security, and how it fits into the users' sense of self.

Because of the important differences between the business and consumer perspective as well as the emotional and psychological cues the consumer perspective involves, The Still believes it is critical to examine, develop and implement attributes of both unique selling propositions and unique buying propositions in order to be effective.

Failure to Develop Uniqueness-

Why do so many advertisers fail? The reasons vary, but critical failures often originate from the very start; the seller did not consider a strong USP and UBP for their product or the marketer did not build his advertising upon it. If there is no desire or perceived value to the product or service, the consumer will not buy or make it part of their daily routine and life, therefore not "adopting the brand," regardless of the seller's investment.

A product or service's attributes are the key selling propositions and differentiators that attract consumers, and awareness of those attributes, often determines market penetration. These attributes and awareness are a few of the key factors in consumer's perception and adoption of the brand.

This is one of the reasons it is critical to assess the market as early in the product life cycle as possible. Developing USP and UBP that matter to the customer and meet their needs, or better yet their desires, is the best way of building a real and lasting brand.

About the Author

David Hickman is a Partner at The Still and has over 25 years of marketing and advertising agency experience. He has directed several national ad agencies in New York and Atlanta as a Vice-President, Creative Director, Art Director or Marketing Director.

About The Still

An intellectual property creation, marketing, and media consulting firm, The Still handles all aspects of your company's branding and positioning efforts. The Still provides media metrics analysis, marketing audits, and market research, as well as marketing execution and idea creation. See http://www.ideaDistillery.com/About_The_Still.html

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