
developing a unique selling proposition

Making a clear statement of what your business is really about

Alan Hargreaves



alanhargreaves.com

In brief

A unique selling proposition helps you focus on what differentiates you from your opposition. It does not necessarily mean you must have the best product or service. But it does mean you have a key strength which you believe a client will value, and which you believe you can deliver at all times.

The following pages will walk you through a simple process to develop such a statement. It will be put in the context of the competition and it will cover the key determinants of your marketplace. In doing so, consider both what you offer, and what the industry offers, in the following categories:

- strengths
- people
- customers
- product & services

Write your answers in the table marked Relevant Propositions.

When you have completed this process, rank yourself and your competitors by these yardsticks. This will clarify where you have a competitive advantage and will point you toward a proposition that works for you.

In the last step, write down your draft USP. Don't rush to a conclusion. Take time to review it. Test it out with colleagues, your team and people outside your business. The best USPs arise from a variety of inputs. Develop it into a succinct statement that makes it clear what you stand for in the marketplace.



Step One

Strengths

List what you see as the key selling propositions that are unique to you. What is it about you personally, or your business, that is special? For example, are you fast, prompt, thorough, punctual, responsive, presentable, diligent, flexible, multi-skilled, reliable, friendly, experienced or businesslike? If you are someone who always meets deadlines, don't hold back. Make it clear that your service and product are highly dependable. You may not like McDonalds, but appreciate the sheer consistency of their product offering. That is their strength. What are others in your industry?



Step Two

People

Are your people a real strength? What is it about your team that adds serious value to the presentation and delivery of your products and services? Are they smarter, friendlier, happier, more focused or more committed to making it work for the customer? Does your team possess talents that are unique, or superior to industry standards. What can you say about others in your industry?



Step Three

Customers

Next, think about what your product provides in terms of customer satisfaction. People buy goods and services to find a solution - something that makes them feel good. What problem or need can your solution address? Exactly what problem do you solve? How does the customer feel when you achieve that? You must make your USP appeal to the client at an emotional level. This is fundamental to a USP that works. It must make them feel good. Advertisements for shavers talk less about the quality of the blade and more about the feel of the blade gliding smoothly over the skin. What is the “look & feel” of your product or service? What about your competitors?



Step Four

Product

Think about your actual product. Is there a feature or capability that is unique or superior to the competition - something which allows you to confidently say: “No, we don’t do that. What we focus on is ...”. Remember that there is not much business sense in focusing on quality if what the market wants is quantity. Similarly, a complicated service may be less of a solution than a promptly delivered simple one. The famous Avis line “We try harder” clearly acknowledged that Avis weren’t number one in a way that nobody cared.



Step Five

Review

Examine at least three competitors, direct or indirect, preferably one large, one medium and one small. Review the propositions they represent. This will help you look beyond the obvious and will make clear the advantages of different-sized enterprises. What are the key propositions that they are selling? Examine them in the same areas - their people, their “feel”, their product and their service. Add any others you can think of.



Relevant propositions

Yours and your competitors

KEY PROPOSITIONS ABOUT ...	YOU IN PARTICULAR	YOUR INDUSTRY IN GENERAL
Strengths		
People		
Customers		
Product/Services		
Other		



Step Six

Rank Yourself

Rank yourself and the competition from 1 to 10 in all the areas you have listed. Now look where you have an advantage over any of the competition. Are you able to attract business away from some of the larger players due to your size or flexibility? Are there aspects of your product where you have a natural advantage that you can develop more aggressively?



Rank yourself

Where do you stand?

KEY PROPOSITIONS ABOUT ...	YOU	DIRECT COMPETITOR	SMALLER COMPETITOR	MEDIUM COMPETITOR	LARGE COMPETITOR
Strengths					
People					
Customers					
Product/Services					
Other					



Step Seven

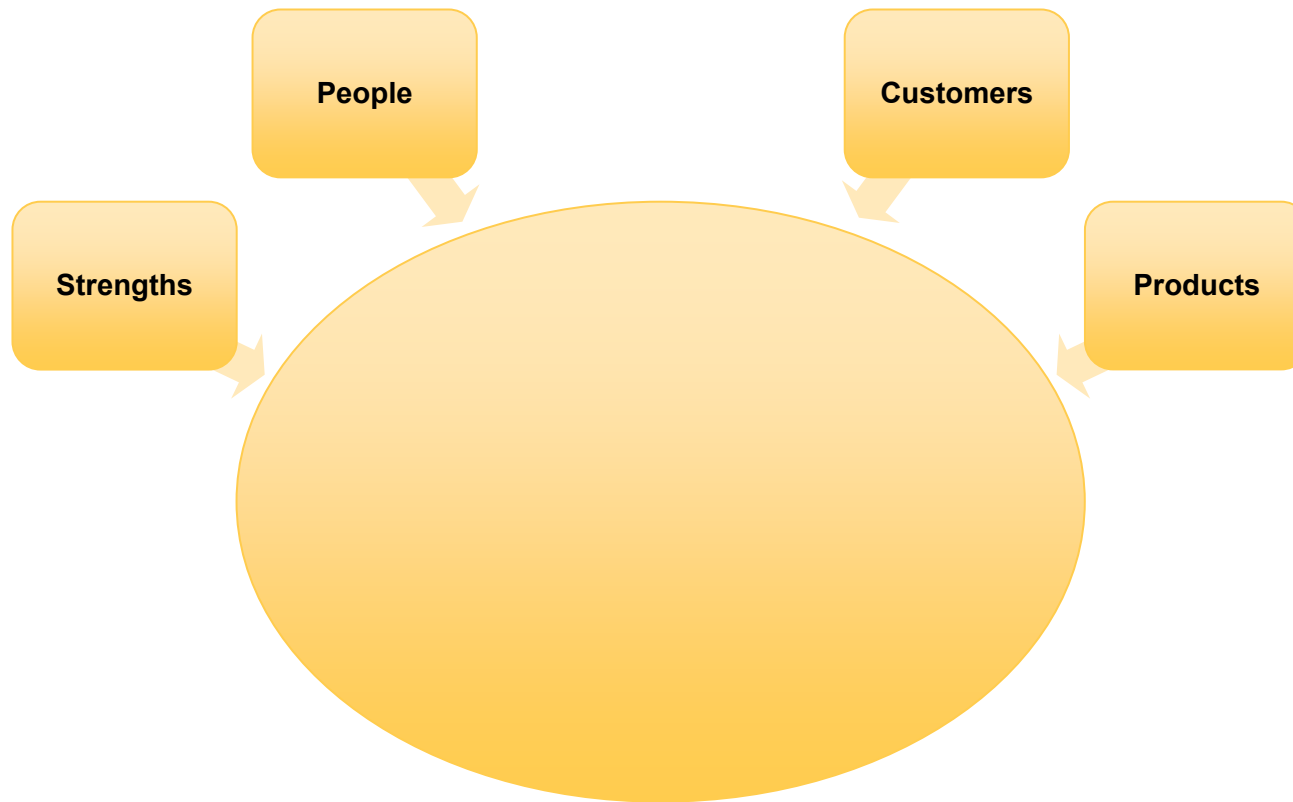
Your USP

Narrow down your key advantages and work them into a simple tag line that emphasises your strong suits. This is the first draft of your Unique Selling Proposition. Write it on a piece of paper and stick it on the wall. Think about it over the next few days. Consult others. Compare it to others. Over time, develop it into a strong statement of your market position.



Your first draft

Write your USP in the space below



For more information, visit my website www.alanhargreaves.com

Hi, I'm Alan Hargreaves. I specialise in simplifying complex business problems. In over 35 years as a business executive, I have never found an issue that cannot be addressed through identifying the essential but simple steps required to make any problem manageable. It might be your career, your firm, your team or your strategy. It doesn't matter. All hurdles can be lowered through dispassionate analysis, and all executives can embrace simple processes to take them forward. Using these techniques, I have helped hundreds of people through the various stages of their business or career development. It may be the challenge of taking on new responsibilities; it could be the task of managing a business you have created yourself; it may be handling a difficult team in the midst of major change. I use a straightforward combination of key principles to get results: collaboration, adaptation, simplification and action. You can contact me anytime at alan@alanhargreaves.com.



alanhargreaves.com