



The Raphel Report

**Observations on marketing,
advertising, sales and
promotions
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What's Your USP?

In the small town of Littleton, New Hampshire there is a store called "Chutters." They carry candy, candles, gifts, gourmet food and collectibles. But their primary identification is having the "World's Longest Candy Counter" - 111 feet, 11 inches long. They are listed in the Guinness Book of World Records and recently received the Retailer of the Year award from New Hampshire's Small Business Administration.

In our first few years in business as a small children's clothing shop we looked for a reason for people to shop with us. We had very limited resources, so decided we would promote ourselves as the store with "The World's Largest Selection of Children's Gloves, Hats and Mittens." These items, at the time, sold for one dollar or less so we could stock them in large quantities. Customers came from miles away to choose from this large selection and, while they were shopping, might also buy a child's snowsuit that sold for twenty times more than the just-purchased hat, scarf, glove or mitten.

These promotions relate to a successful marketing concept first introduced by advertising Hall-of-Famer Rosser Reeves more than fifty years ago that still works today.

Reeves was Chairman of the Board of the Ted Bates Advertising Agency in the 1960s and, in a rare and exclusive interview, was asked about the marketing technique he developed to sell products he defined as the product's "Unique Selling Proposition" or USP.

You can adopt and adapt this idea for your business that makes you different, separate, apart and in front of the competition.

Are there rules to follow to create your USP? Yes. Here are a few:

1. Make your business interesting--not the ad.

How many times have you watched a TV commercial that grabbed your attention, made you laugh (or wince) but if you are asked a minute or two later, "What was advertised?" you can not remember.

The oft-repeated TV ad of an automobile (any automobile) speeding through the countryside passing other cars may be exciting to watch but what makes the car different than any other car?

Reeves called these "distraction techniques." They make you watch the ad but your interest is with the pretty girl, the sudden accident, the humorous moment but, uh, what was the product again?

2. Give your business a "yours-alone" distinction.

In 1954 two men named Charles White and John MacNamara walked into Reeves' office. MacNamara was president of M&M Candies. He said their advertising wasn't successful. They talked for a few minutes and Reeves quickly saw the advertising idea was inherent IN the product (re-read rule #1). It was the only candy in America that had chocolate surrounded by a sugar shell. This meant the candy would not melt in your hand. This was the candy's USP and led to his slogan: "M&M candies melt in your mouth not in your hand."

A slogan still used today, more than 50 years later . . .

3. Have an easy-to-remember slogan

Some years ago, I was walking through the aisles at the food industry's annual convention and met Michael Copps, CEO of the Copps Supermarket chain in Wisconsin. He said he was interested in having someone work with his company as an advertising consultant. His immediate need was a slogan for their planned expansion. Something that would alert customers in new areas that his supermarkets would soon arrive. He asked me to think about it and call him later that week.

Remembering Rosser Reeves's USP, I asked, "If I give you the slogan now will you hire me as your consultant?"

He said, "Sure. What's the slogan?"

I said, "The Cops Are Coming!"

This reference to the popular expression quickly said his supermarket would soon appear in the area.

"You're hired," he said. His advertising agency quickly picked up this USP theme creating animal cartoon characters, each representing a different area of the supermarket, wearing Keystone Cops costumes. The campaign won many advertising awards and each opening drew great crowds. They wisely followed up their arrival with the slightly changed phrase: "The Cops Are Here!" - an extended USP.

4. What have other businesses done that worked?

Look how other business establish this distinction in their ads which is why Maxwell House coffee is still "good till the last drop."

5. Repeat it.

More often than not you'll discover there are certain ideas, techniques, concepts that are reproduced in the most successful campaigns. If it works, repeat it. Again. And again. And again. And . . .

We wanted to increase our Saturday business. Our shopping area was named "Gordon's Alley." We started running ads with the theme, "If it's Saturday, it must be Gordon's Alley."

What did that mean? Really . . . nothing. But the implication was if you did NOT shop our stores on Saturday, you were missing something special. ("The Pie Lady's Here Today! If it's Saturday, it must be Gordon's Alley.")

Saturday quickly became our biggest business day and we ran this same theme for twelve years.

When we thought of replacing this with something new and different our newspaper advertising salesman for the paper told us the Pepsi-Cola story.

Many years ago, a senior executive of Pepsi told his ad agency he thought it was time for the agency to replace the current ad. He asked, "How many people do you have working on my account?"

"Fifty-seven," replied the ad director.

"Fifty-seven?" asked the CEO. "What do they all do?"

"Well, one comes up with new ideas and the other fifty-six make sure you don't change what's working now."

