



## **Your Hook is Your USP**

A USP is what distinguishes you from the pack. It increases perceived value, expertise, and credibility — without needing to state it outright.

But since I hear this question often, particularly from copywriters just entering the field, it's because it's never an easy process. You either have to dig deep to find your USP, or create one from scratch. And that's why people need a little help in defining it.

I understand. So to help you, here's a tip.

In marketing, every product or service has three levels. They include:

- The core product.
- The product itself.
- The augmented product.

What does this have to do with developing a USP? Before I share it to you, let me explain what these three product levels mean.

- **The core product** is the actual end-result, the benefits that the product offers. It's what the product does for people. As Theodore Levitt once said, people don't buy quarter-inch drills. They buy quarter-inch holes.
- **The actual product** is what the product is and consists of. This includes the things that make the product a product. Those are the features, the components, the ingredients, even the packaging.
- **The augmented product** is what is added to the product or offer to augment it. Things like free shipping, guarantees, customer support, premiums, etc.

Now, in the context of copywriting (the business or the service of copywriting, that is), you can look at it this way (please note this is an example and not the example):

**1) Core Product:** Generate and/or increase response.

That's the ultimate result, or at least the reason why most customers buy a product.

**2) Actual Product:** The copy itself.

Writing the copy includes research, writing the first draft, and delivering the final draft. It includes all the elements that help to achieve the core product: headline, storyline, bullets, product details, offer, response device, etc.

The actual product is also directly tied to the market. Therefore, it also includes the market you're selling to, such as focusing on a specific industry or audience, or a particular kind of copy such as sales letters, direct mail, websites, etc.

**3) Augmented Product:** Whatever you add beyond the actual product.

Things you add to the service to “beef it up,” such as extras, value-adds, add-ons, bonuses, premiums, gifts, additional promises, and so on, which can vary tremendously from copywriter to copywriter, and industry to industry.

For example, it can include formatting, graphic design, layout suggestions, project management, market research, rewrites, guarantees, split-testing the actual copy before the final draft, exclusivity, rush service for quicker turnarounds, etc.

### **How do you use these three layers to define a USP?**

Think of these three layers in the form of a bulls-eye, where you have three concentric circles. The centre of the bulls-eye being the core product, the middle layer being the actual product and the outer layer the augmented product.

Now, here’s the fun part. To develop a unique selling proposition, you can add, remove, change, or give a unique twist to any of these three levels.

The easiest way, of course, is to go from the outside in. (It’s easier to aim for the outer circle than the bulls-eye itself.) That is, find ways to augment your product that few do or that no one does. It may not be one single thing. It may be a combination of them.

Bulls-eye analogy aside, why is this the simplest way?

Because coming up with different angles or variations of the centre of the bulls-eye requires a bit more creative thinking. It’s easier to add to the existing product or its market than it is to repurpose it, rebrand it, or redefine the market for it.

(Mind you, developing a USP from within usually produces the best “hooks,” the most prospects, and the greatest perceived value.)

Nevertheless, here’s an example of working with the outside layer.

You can offer design suggestions, layouts and mock-ups, additional tips on how to best use the copy, offer free revisions, writing copy for other parts of the sales funnel (opt-in page, order page, thank-you page, auto-responders, etc), and so on.

### **Here’s an extra tip.**

Don’t offer these willy-nilly. Always place a value on these augmented elements or add-ons. Why? Because if you don’t, people will assume that it’s part of your original offering. It may even decrease your perceived value.

The idea is to increase the perception of higher value. And to do that, you must not only add value to the core offer but also make it visible.

For example, don’t say your copy comes with formatting and layout suggestions (or worse yet, assume clients will know the implication). Instead, say you will throw in formatting and layout suggestions, which are additional services, *free of charge*.

Plus, add a dollar value on those add-ons as if you were to sell them separately. Don’t say your copy comes with one or two revisions. Say your copy comes with an additional revision, free of charge, worth £\_\_\_\_.

Aside from the increase in perceived value, this tactic also helps to prevent freeloaders and deal-seekers from asking for concessions. If they want “a good deal,” doing it this way will make them feel like you’re already making concessions.

If they start to haggle at any point, then you have tools to work with — by removing the extras and their associated dollar value. This is better than offering discounts.

(Never discount! Never.)

### **Next in the layers is the actual product.**

What can you change, add, or remove from the actual product to make it unique?

For instance, how do you conduct your research? Do you interview the client or the client's clients? Do you have a preparatory questionnaire they must fill out before work commences? How is your copy written and delivered, exactly?

While it is easier to work with the augmented product first, there is also an easy way to work with the middle layer, which is of course defining the market.

Specifically, niche marketing.

Niche marketing is “to find a niche and fill it.” But with an existing product, it's to focus on a particular audience segment, an industry, or a certain style of copy.

You could be a copywriter specialising in, say, health products. You could even hone it down to, say, nutrition and foods. You could even be a copywriter who focuses on diets and weight-loss exclusively.

### **But don't just focus on industries or niches.**

Remember, it's the "actual" product. What you choose to work on and deliver can also be specialised. You don't have to add or change anything, either. You can simply remove something to make yourself unique.

They say that less is more. In fact, offering less or focusing strictly on a certain type of copy can create instant demand and credibility, because being a specialist creates the perception of greater expertise and skill.

I know a copywriter who focuses strictly on catalogue copy. I know another who does email campaigns only. I know a third who writes for social media. I know some copywriters who specialize in a combination of niches and copy types — such as direct mail for the financial industry. And they're doing extremely well.

But that's not all. Don't restrict yourself to the medium, either.

For example, you might be a copywriter who focuses strictly on headlines. As a result, you become known as the headline expert. When people (or other copywriters) need help with their headlines, they turn to you.

Or you might be one who only focuses on initial drafts in plain text. While that might seem like a lesser offering, you can say that this is a benefit since you're entirely focused on the

research and the content — unlike other copywriters who offer too much, overextend themselves, and dilute their value as a result.

A neurologist is still a doctor. But you wouldn't have a general practitioner work on your brain, right? Much less a podiatrist or coroner. You want a doctor who specializes in the specific problem or area that needs attention.

*Copywriters are no different.*

Finally, the innermost layer, the centre of the bulls-eye, is the hardest part.

Copy is copy. And copy has one principal function. And that's to sell. But let's say that your copy's goal is to increase the client's existing response, as it is with most copy. Ask yourself, what other benefits do you offer?

I don't mean additional benefits provided by the augmented product. I'm talking about the copy itself. What else does your copy do for your clients? What else does your copywriting service specifically bring to the table?

Sure, the ultimate goal is to boost sales and profits.

But perhaps it's to make the client look good as to increase referral clients. Maybe it's to increase visibility or generate more word-of-mouth. Or perhaps it's to attract qualified staff or potential investors.

You can and should think of all the benefits your copy delivers.

### **Don't just stick with the obvious.**

Take some time (even write a list, if you have to) of all the advantages your specific copy offers. What kind of results have you achieved in the past? What other benefits (including unsought benefits) did your clients receive?

(Sometimes, asking for or re-reading client testimonials can offer some clues. If not, take some time to interview some of your past clients. Ask them what your copy or copywriting service did for them, beyond just increasing sales.)

Here's a "off-the-top-of-my-head" example. Say your client is also looking for copy that "sounds like them." In other words, they want a copywriter with a knack for writing in their voice, their language, and their communication style.

In this case, it makes your *ghost writing ability* far more effective than other copywriters. That's a USP right there. (As your "hook," you might call yourself "The Chameleon Copywriter" or your copy service "The Copywriting Cloner.")

### **What about you?**

Again, you need to sit down and take some time to really think about this. It might not come overnight. For me, as an example, it took over a decade to find the various benefits my copy specifically brings to the table.

It won't take a decade. The difference here is, you have a leg up because you have some tips in this article to give you a head start.

In the end, there are so many ways to develop a good USP. There are so many variants, too. Each way comes with a plethora of possibilities. The idea is to be a bit creative, a bit of a contrarian, and a bit different.

Sometimes, you have to look at and copy from (and not just think) “outside the box.”

See other industries. Look at other services. Check out non-competing products. You never know. In one of them may lay the seed of something amazing.

And being amazing doesn't have to require a massive change, either. Just by being 10% different, unique, original, or special is enough to make you stand out like a sore thumb in an overcrowded, hypercompetitive marketplace.