

IF THE COMPETITION IS DOING IT, DO THE OPPOSITE

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Have you ever found yourself in a position where you emulate a competitor because it appears that they came up with a good idea that worked? Do you spend the majority of your advertising money promoting the last 2 weeks of a month because that's how you have always done it? Do you hire salespeople from other dealerships in town because they are "experienced?"

Do any of these ad phrases look familiar to you?

- "LOWEST PRICES AROUND"
- "SAVE THOUSANDS"
- "PAYMENTS AS LOW AS..."
- "NO CREDIT, BAD CREDIT, NO PROBLEM"
- "\$\$\$ BELOW INVOICE"

There's a reason they do. It's because virtually every car dealer uses or has used these marketing lines among many others over and over again. When car buying customers open their newspaper or watch TV they hear and see the same message from every dealer in the area.

In a competitive market, many dealerships focus on price as the leading marketing hook to get a customer to shop their store. The fact is every other dealership is doing the same. In his book, *Differentiate or Die*, Jack Trout writes, "*Price is often the enemy of differentiation. By definition, being different should be worth something. It's the reason that supports the case for paying a little more – or at least the same – for a product or service. But when price becomes the focus of a message or a company's marketing activities, you are beginning to undermine your chances to be perceived as being unique. What you are doing is making price the main consideration for picking you over your competition. That's not a healthy way to go.*" Consider the way you market your dealership to customers. Is it based on price? Is price the primary reason customers visit your dealership, and if so, what is the impact on your store's profitability?

So if you have determined that you don't want to be known as the dealer that promotes price above everything else, what do you promote? Jack Trout writes about ad agency executive, Rosser Reeves, who coined the term Unique Selling Proposition, or USP for short. The book describes a 3 part definition of USP:

1. Each ad must make a proposition to the consumer. Not just words, not just product puffery, not just show window-advertising. Each ad must say to each reader: "Buy this product and you will get this specific benefit."

2. The proposition must be one that the competition 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.
3. The proposition must be so strong that it can move the mass millions (i.e. to pull over new customers to your product(Trout, 2000.)

Well, you don't need to move the "mass millions" but you do need to move the people in your market that buy cars. So what is your unique selling proposition? What is it that your dealership does (or can do) that the other dealerships can't (or won't?) It's worth your time to brainstorm with key people at the dealership and come up with these USPs. If they are compelling enough, begin marketing to your prospective customers using your unique selling proposition. Think through all of your advertising and marketing. For those of you that use an outside advertising agency, challenge them to come up with ways to position your dealership uniquely in the market.

There are many ideas worthy of exploring. For the purposes of this article, however, I will illustrate one. Many businesses have reaped the benefits of "cause-related marketing." People are inclined to support businesses that support causes that they care about. In Joe Marconi's book, Cause Marketing, he states the following facts:

- According to a study by Research International Ltd., 86% of consumers are more likely to buy a product associated with a cause or issue.
- About two thirds of Americans have a greater degree of trust in companies aligned with social issues.
- 64% of consumers feel companies should make cause-related marketing a part of their standard business practices.

While it is certainly easier for large, national companies to align with national causes it is still something that can be done locally with a strong positive impact. What issues are important to your local community? Are there charitable causes that the dealership has supported in the past but has not used in its marketing? Local charities are always in need of exposure and funds. Many support children's causes, military family programs, disease research, stray animal adoption, local high school sports or bands. The list goes on.

There are dealerships that will give a portion of revenue generated through car sales to the charity. This is an effort that is clearly marketed to consumers in the area. While we know that the dealership must offer a good product at a fair price with great service to win a customer's business, cause-related support can often times be the "tie-breaker" in winning or losing that customer's business.

There are many more ways for you to promote a unique selling proposition. You need to figure out what is best for your dealership based on its strengths and position in the marketplace. Let the other dealers in town do the same thing they have always done and simply blend in with the crowd. Remember, if the competition is doing it, do the opposite.

Do you have an unique selling proposition that you have been telling your customers about? If so I would like to hear about it. Please feel free to send me your stories and questions at jdoerrer@gamarketing.com. I am always interested to see how strategies like these are being used.