

The image features a white background with vibrant, multi-colored paint splashes in shades of yellow, blue, orange, green, and purple. At the top center, the word "Marketing" is written in a grey, sans-serif font. Above it, the word "commonsense" is written in white on a red rectangular background.

commonsense
Marketing

HOW TO DIFFERENTIATE
YOUR SERVICE

BUSINESS



How to Differentiate Your Service Business

Put Yourself in the Mindset of Your Customer

When people need to hire a service business – like landscaping or plumbing or accounting – they have nothing tangible to base their decision on. They can't see or touch or examine your services like they can a boat or a pair of shoes or a shirt. So the presentation of your service has to be around you and the promise you make. . . because you have nothing physical to show them. The next level of complication comes with choice. How do people choose an electrician when they all appear to be the same? How do people know if one hairdresser is any better than the next?

The point is they don't know until they try them out.

As the owner of a Service Business, it's up to you to create an impression so you attract attention, and then build a story about your business so that you stand out from your competitors.



Research Your Competitors

There is a lot to be said for benefiting from the efforts and successes of others. Not having to spend resources such as manpower, time and money on developing new products and services and trialling marketing campaigns is very valuable.

And you can do this by researching your competitors so see what they're offering, what they're not offering and what opportunities there may be for you.

Step 1 - Identify Your Competitors

Firstly, you need to find out who your real competitors are. Some of these you will most likely know already, but a little bit of digging may reveal others you didn't know about.

Results for Google search for "roof tiler Newcastle". First 3 results at the top in the yellow panel are paid ads, as are the 6 on the right. The ones at left under the yellow area are "organic", which means they're not paid ads and they've got onto this page because their websites or the directories where they are listed have been optimised for the keywords "roof tiler Newcastle". Start by doing what 95% of people do these days – conduct a search online.

In this example we've typed "roof tiler Newcastle" into Google. (Do this for your own business and area)

Ads - Why these ads?

[Roofing Newcastle | Dohlyroof.com.au](#)
www.dohlyroof.com.au
Quality Workmanship, Competitive Pricing | Call Us Now 1300 533 629

[Roof Tiling from \\$26/Hour | ServiceSeeking.com.au](#)
www.serviceseeking.com.au/Roof_Tiling
Get Free **Roof Tiling** Quotes Online! Compare Prices Starting from \$26/hr

[Patented Roofing System | Hukok.com.au](#)
www.hukok.com.au/SlateRoofingSpecialist
Award Winning Slate Roofing System. Natural Slate, Ceramic, Flush Solar

[Roof Tiler Newcastle](#)
www.rooftilernewcastle.com.au/
Roof Tiler Newcastle - Newcastle Roof Tiler: **Roof Tiler Newcastle** provide a range of roofing services to customers in Newcastle, including roof tiling, roofing, ...

[Newcastle & Hunter Roof Tilers Directory](#)
www.tilers.com.au / Directory / Roof Tilers in NSW
11 listings - Looking for **Roof Tilers in Newcastle & Hunter**? Browse our directory listings to find **Roof Tilers** businesses near **Newcastle & Hunter**. With reviews ...

[Newcastle Roof Tiler](#)
www.newcastle-rooftiler.com.au/
Newcastle Roof Tiler - Oklabran Roofing Pty Ltd - **Roof Tiler Newcastle**. Oklabran Roofing Pty Ltd - Newcastle Roof Tiler provide a range of roof tiling services ...

[Kirumba Roof Tiling](#)
maps.google.com.au
Place page

[G & NC Watson Roof Tiling Service](#)
maps.google.com.au
Place page

[Stackbutt Roof Tiling](#)
maps.google.com.au
Place page

A 47 Young Road
Lambton
(02) 4956 1744

B 122 Kings Road
New Lambton
(02) 4957 4796

C 9 Cardiff Road
New Lambton
(02) 4957 2566



Ads - Why these ads?

[Roofing Solutions](#)
www.monster.com.au/Roofing
Great range of roofing solutions to enhance your home. Enquire Now!

[Tiling Tilers](#)
www.greyarmy.com.au
The Grey Army supplies experienced reliable tradesmen - free quotes

[Whirly birds / Air vents](#)
www.pgroofingsydney.com
Summer specials - 1300 135 006
Free Quotes - lowest prices

[Tiler Newcastle Quotes](#)
www.homehelp4u.net/Tiling
Compare Local **Tilers**
Australia Wide. Compare and Save!

[Slate Roofing Sydney](#)
www.mrslaterroofing.com.au/SlateRoof
Specialist in New Slate Roofs & Repairs. Call Today 0434 984 229

[Newcastle Roofing](#)
www.asl.com/Newcastle-Roofing
Get **Newcastle Roofing**
Find **Newcastle Roofing**

Results for Google search for "roof tiler Newcastle". First 3 results at the top in the yellow panel are paid ads, as are the 6 on the right. The ones at left under the yellow area are "organic", which means they're not paid ads and they've got onto this page because their websites or the directories where they are listed have been optimised for the keywords "roof tiler Newcastle".

This brings up a list of roof tilers in the Newcastle area that could very well be your competitors if you were a roof tiler in Newcastle! There may be others too that you know about, but perhaps they don't have any online presence, so they're not showing up. (People usually don't move past page 1 - so this is where you want to be!)

Looking at these will show you the competitors that haven't made it to the top of the search engine results but who are willing to pay money to get noticed. They have paid money to appear whenever anybody enters the search terms that you just did.

You could also look in the local paper in the classifieds section and see who's got ads under your business classification. If the ad doesn't tell you much, then you or a friend will need to a bit of snooping.



Step 2 - Analyse Your Competitors

1. Next, go and have a look at those that have websites and see what services they're offering, how they've positioned their company, if they have any areas of speciality, or they have any special offers going.
2. Make a list of their strengths and weaknesses. Here's an example of what to do for each competitor (you may need to do some snooping and call them up and ask them for a quote – or get a friend to do it for you)

Strengths: List what you think they do very well

Weaknesses: List all the things you think could be improved

Strengths

- Large team
- Have some particular piece(s) of equipment
- Have been in business for a long time
- Offer a wide range of services
- Have a website
- Listed high up in search results on page 1 of Google

Weaknesses

- Slow to respond to enquiries
- Don't do roof repairs
- Website is only 2 pages and doesn't provide much information
- Have no customer testimonials on website
- Handwritten quote was given on a cheap form and didn't provide detailed summary of work to be undertaken and didn't specify any guarantee. Basically just a price
- Doesn't work weekends

Do this for each competitor in your area.

This is a very important and powerful exercise!



Step 3 - Discover Your Opportunities

Here's what you need to be investigating and analysing:

- What do they sell?
- What are their prices?
- How are they advertising?
- How does their marketing compare to your strategies?
- Do they have a website?
- What information is on their website?
- What special features do they offer such as service offerings, purchase methods etc?
- What are they claiming about their products/services?
- What proof are they offering? ie customer testimonials, pictorial, guarantees?

Once you've done a pretty thorough analysis of your competitors, you'll probably find gaps in the marketplace which you could be exploiting. You may also find some product and service ideas that you could be offering to your customers!

Using our earlier example of roof tillers – here's a summary of possible service and marketing opportunities for a switched on roof tiler in Newcastle. ...

Weaknesses

Slow to respond to enquiries

Don't do roof repairs

Website is only 2 pages and doesn't provide much information

Have no customer testimonials on website

Handwritten quote, no detailed summary and no guarantee.

Doesn't work weekends

My Opportunities

Hire a Virtual Assistant to answer all calls within 5 rings and text me the details. I'll set a standard to call people back within 1 hour. Advertise this standard.

Focus on roof repairs as our specialty.

Build a comprehensive website with photos of our work, before and after shots, info on typical roofing issues, etc

Put customer testimonials (written and video on our website)

Use the Tradie Marketing Secrets quoting template to prepare all quotes so customers know what they're getting (and not getting) and can see the difference between us and the competitors

Promote a Saturday service for 2 months and see if there's a real need for it. Target working couples who can't take time off during the week.



Summary

Taking the time to identify and thoroughly analyse your competitors will give you a valuable insight into their strengths and weaknesses and help you to clarify your points of difference.

You will may also discover some great opportunities that you hadn't thought about before.

- Gaps in their marketing or services levels could provide you with powerful marketing advantages to focus on.
- Things they are doing in their marketing might be things you could also be doing.
- New product and/or service opportunities you could be offering to your clients.
- You may even discover new target markets you've never considered before!

Your Action

Print off the SWOT form at Appendix A and conduct a Strengths and Weaknesses analysis for your top 3 or 4 competitors. Only choose those that you actively compete against for work, not every similar business in your area.

Then take 15 minutes to summarise the main weaknesses and develop your list of opportunities.

This is a very important foundation exercise that could (and probably will) change your whole business!

By the end of this exercise you should have a very clear picture of how you differ from your competitors and what you're going to do about that, in terms of exploiting opportunities and improving your marketing and sales presentations and techniques.

Determine How You Will Be Different

By the time you've finished your competitive research, you will no doubt have identified 3 or 4 ways you differ from your competitors and several opportunities that are crying out for you to seize and run with.

Case Study: *One of our Victorian based trade contractor clients had his wife ring 4 of his main competitors. She left a message with each company and waited 3 days before the first one got back to her. So we crafted an ad for him with the offer - I Solemnly Promise to Call You Back and Provide a Detailed Quote within 24 Hours. He reported receiving a 300% increase in phone calls, every week he ran that ad in the local paper!*

Once you're clear about why and how you're different, it will be much easier to target the right type of prospects and create a slogan and marketing collateral that helps you to stand out.

What Do Your Customers Like About You?

Have you asked your current customers why they chose your service and what is most important to them? Here's the thing. There are hundreds of little things that make up 'customer service' that matter greatly to your customers, and they have nothing to do with the quality of the work you deliver. They also may be things that you would never guess as being important.

In the USA, Nashville-based Hiller Plumbing guarantees that his plumber technicians won't smoke, cuss, stink up your house, smell like a goat, or leave a mess. He also guarantees that they will show up on time or he will pay you cash.

Why not ask a couple of your regular customers why they keep coming back to you. Tell them that you are working on improving your service and you would like to know what it is that you are doing right so far and what areas you could improve. As everyone is different, you may get a variety of answers, but you'll also find a few common needs.

The next thing to do is to come up with your USP.



Define Your USP

Your USP or 'Unique Selling Proposition' is the thing that differentiates you from the Sea of Sameness. Having a strong USP will dramatically improve how you marketing and sell your services. It can be short, or a little longer and descriptive.


A great way to get your head around this is to look at what other companies are offering - even if they aren't in your niche market.

World famous marketing guru Dan Kennedy says **“Your USP should answer this question: *Why should I choose to do business with you over all the other choices I have, which includes the choice of doing nothing at all?*”**

Here's some examples of famous USPs -

BMW - The ultimate driving machine
Porsche – there is no substitute
British Airways - The World's Favourite Airline
3M – Innovation
PlayStation – Live in your world. Play in ours
Ajax – Stronger than dirt

Disneyland – the happiest place on earth
Nike – just do it
Kentucky Fried – finger lickin good
Ebay – buy it, sell it, love it
Woolworths - The fresh food people
Castrol – oils ain't oils



Whatever USP you develop, you have to make sure that you can deliver on it.

Not being able to fulfil a promise is a fast path to failure. Your reputation could be ruined. Ensure that all systems are in place for your business to achieve whatever it is that you are promising and that you regularly review performance.

***Quality in a service or product is not what you put into it.
It is what the client or customer gets out of it.***

Peter Drucker

What a USP is not...

- A mission statement
- A meaningless slogan
- A sales pitch
- We're the biggest
- We're the best
- We've been in business the longest
- We care the most



USPs with benefits

Here are some real examples, others are suggestions

- Landscaping: “We turn your tired old garden into paradise”
- Builder: “My Philosophy Is Simple, Each Job Is Treated Like I Would Be Working On My Own Home”
- Flooring: “Quality carpets and vinyls, supplied and laid with the utmost care by a fussy craftsman”
- Fencing: “Beautiful fences, built to regulation, from any material you desire”
- Plastering: “Walls smoother than a baby’s bottom, guaranteed”
- Electrician: “Power and Customer Service delivered cheerfully!”
- Plumber: “Your House Trained Plumber”

USPs from Niching

Another way to differentiate yourself from everyone else in the marketplace is go down the route of specialising in a niche. So instead of struggling to compete with everyone else in your marketplace and be a little fish in a big pond, you become the dominant expert of a small pond.

Your USP can then reflect your niche

- Mobility Modifications – home enhancements to make life easier when mobility is limited
- The Drain Plumbers – The Experts in Blocked Drains



Summary

To be noticed in the Sea of Sameness you need to stand out.

The best way to do this is to focus on a market need, differentiate your business and develop your marketing around a carefully crafted Unique Selling Proposition. A good USP is not a vague statement, but a promise of the benefit(s) you will deliver to your customers. The best USPs contain service related benefits that your customers really want, or a succinct description of your niche, or both.

Your Action

Write down your competitors USPs, the benefits you bring to your customers, and your specialist niche if you have one. Then do the fun bit. Craft 5 alternative USP tag lines or headings and then put them to the test with your family and friends and see which one wins! If you already have a USP, review it and see if you can improve it.



about annette welsford & commonsense marketing

Annette Welsford is the CEO of Commonsense Marketing Pty Ltd, author of a range of books, holds an MBA in Marketing, is a sought after marketing coach and founder of several online businesses.

Commonsense Marketing provides marketing training and mentoring to small business owners, and a wide range of Done For You marketing services for business owners who are skill or time poor.

Services include:

- ▶ Marketing Mentoring
- ▶ Marketing Strategy Planning
- ▶ Website design and development
- ▶ Customer relationship campaigns
- ▶ Social Media marketing

If you want more marketing tips or to have a chat about marketing your business – then connect in your favourite way.

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