

Transcript – GET to YES Podcast

E2: B2B Expos: What's Your USP?

A USP is your brand's Unique Selling Proposition... which is Marketing speak for 'what makes your brand different?' This, at a trade show, is what people need to see, hear and have communicated clearly to them and if they experience that in the right way, they will buy.

Before we go too deep here, I'd like to share a few experiences of the different types of stands that I've visited over the years... because they all have something in common. See if you can spot the similarities.

There are three different types that I want to chat about today:

- The first type is what I call The Positive.

You know the stand, everybody's out and about, smiling and interacting with the delegates, asking questions, listening, and finding out as much as they can about who they're talking to. These stands are warm, inviting and friendly, their design and display are clean and conveys a clear message about their USP and what they're promoting.

Here, you don't get overloaded with unnecessary literature, but rather a natural conversation evolves with them asking questions about you and you asking questions about them. When asked how they compare to another similar brand, they don't state that they are bigger, better or cheaper nor do they denigrate the other brand. They simply reply while offering a gentle smile... we're different. It's clear all the staff on the stand have been briefed and trained well, as they confidently discuss how their product and/or service could fit into your business. How do they do that? By slightly adjusting their top 3-4 USP's, to complement what they perceive your business style to be.

They have some examples and/or a demonstration going on nearby, which clearly shows their USP and it encourages you to linger longer. They also ask you for your feedback and are genuinely interested in your opinion. They listen, ask a few questions and answer your pricing questions clearly and precisely. At the end of the conversation they offer you a business card and request yours, noting on it what days you are not in the salon.

You walk away thinking Hmm... they really knew their stuff, I like that. It all felt so, so Positive. Yes, they were good, and I look forward to talking with them again soon.

- The second type of stand is The Wasteful.

This type of exhibitor generally has gone to a large amount of expense – maybe they've also negotiated what they thought to be the best position – their stand looks amazing, with strong visuals about their USP. Their staff are all in uniforms and yet for some reason their stand isn't super busy and even on occasions when you walk past their stand, it's empty of delegates.

I can recall that exact experience at a previous Hair Expo. I was walking past the large beautiful stand for a well-known and respected brand, and I paused only to observe a huddle. Yep that's right, the staff

all in a huddle – some talking to each other others looking at their mobile devices. They paused, looked up and all either thought that I wasn't their ideal prospect or that somebody else from the huddle would engage me. Then they went back to their previous conversations. Ha, that type of behaviour leaves me feeling cold, very cold.

The piece missing from that brand's expo plan, was that they'd not considered their engagement and communication strategy – what was their plan to engage delegates? They could have done better by having their staff strategically positioned around their large stand, or better still, they could have demonstrations planned on their stand and have their staff work the crowd. There's many, many other ideas that could create varying levels of engagement. Too many times I've seen these large beautiful stands clearly communicating the key USP's of their brand, but they feel cold – cold of interaction and cold of conversation. They're too cold for me ... and sadly there's been so much money, design and thought, yet no interaction... So Wasteful.

- The third type is what I call The Young and Inexperienced.

You know this one, as you approach the staff appear a little reserved and are maybe more within their stand instead of out in the passage way. When you stop to look at their stand and read their message, they'll sheepishly approach you with a sample bag and a wad of information in hand.

You say 'Hi', maybe a courteous question or two is exchanged and you ask 'Tell me a little about your brand. Then off they go... you know talking and talking and talking. Well talking AT YOU, not to you. It's obvious they've been saying this over and over again, as their delivery of their USP's is pumped out in a solid monotone.

But have you noticed what your mind does, when you're the recipient of this barrage of information? Well most of us switch off. We feel we can't get a word in edgewise, and if we dare to ask a question it's met with another 10-minute dissertation. Then, a sample bag and heaps of company brochures are thrust in your hand.

Boy, I don't know about you, but I can't wait to get away from these stands. As I do walk away, I feel a tinge of disappointment, as I didn't really listen, so I unfortunately didn't get to learn much about their brand. But the person I feel for most in this situation is the owner – the one paying for the stand. Having their team communicate like that doesn't really cut it today, because they found out very little about me as a delegate or prospect and didn't really create any rapport.

Unfortunately, that owner's going to experience a very expensive expo. Think how many of those samples and company brochures they're going to burn through especially on a prospect like me, that walked away not interested. Ouch that's going to be expensive!!! So yes, Young and Inexperienced

But there's something you may not have considered... What sort of response is the salon owner going to give when each of these companies, reach out after the expo... which is when most of the business is done?

- To the Positive stand experience, those representatives will probably find it easy to secure a business appointment to visit the prospective client at their place of business. If the representative's behaviour reflects the salon owners experience from the expo, things will probably continue to move along quite positively.

- For the Wasteful group, their response when they reach out is a little less certain. The salon owner may think that the company is a little more aloof, they may feel they may get treated like a number, the relationship may be a little less warm. A lot will hinge on how their representative conducts themselves and if they can establish trust and rapport early in their visit. If not, it could be a short visit for that representative.
- For the Young and Inexperienced, this group is starting from a low base and are going to have an uphill battle as they ring around after the expo trying to talk up their brand and push and chase follow-up appointments.

Most salon owners deal with reps every day and through experience, they've learnt the type of reps they like to deal with. They know what they like, look for, trust and respect early in building a relationship.

What did those three examples have in common?

1. They all endeavoured to communicate their USP's:
 - The Positive stand by balancing communication and tailoring each USP to the client situation.
 - The Wasteful Stand by communicating their USP's in the design and stand message. Shame it wasn't carried through by the staff.
 - The Young and Inexperienced stand bombarded us with USP's amongst many other things and unfortunately the impact of them got lost in the clutter of their conversation.
2. Their communication was another factor they had in common:
 - The Positive stand got most of their communication style right and the result was a great experience and probably a sale.
 - The Wasteful stand got their stand communication right but lacked in the areas of team training and expectations.
 - The Young and Inexperienced stand have a lot of work to do on their communication skills.
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So, what can I do to help you have the best expo ever?

From my experience, I'd like to suggest that you need to focus on two things. Firstly, let's go back to talking about your USP:

- Have you managed to get a clear list of 3-5 aspects of your product or service that are different, that are your USP's? What can you do to really clarify those USP's and how can you animate them on your stand, because they need to be featured and/or demonstrated throughout the expo.
- Have you considered having a team training session to revisit and focus on simple yet concise ways for your team to discuss and explain your USPs? Google Hangouts and Zoom are great video conferencing tools for bringing together your national team, for exercises like this.
- Getting clear on your USP (and I mean really clear) helps the team to come together as one, focusing on the same message and delivering it confidentially. To test if you feel this is necessary, call 2-3 of your sales team and ask them to share with you your top 3 USP's. If they're all different, your team needs some training!

The second suggestion is to have a discussion with your team about how to engage:

- To offer an example of different types of engagement, let's step away from expos for the moment. Let's take a scenario where after a busy day at the expo, you pop over to the bar for a cool drink to wind down. You see a person of interest, and you think WOW.... I'd love to have a chat with them, so over you go.
- You open up the conversation by saying "Hi, I am..." to be greeted by a warm smile. Feeling a little uneasy, you push on, sharing with them that you're here for the expo. You've come from interstate and that you enjoy your job and the travelling it offers you. Again, that warm smile is offered, so you still feeling uneasy. You launch into your continued conversation about you and on and on you go. Unfortunately, things peter out, you lose interest and you decide to retreat.
- After another drink or so you notice somebody else. You think I'm away from home why not, so over you go. This time, things unfold a little differently. You introduce yourself, they respond, you chat about the expo, they are attending a different one. You ask a few more questions only to find out a few other interesting facts. You find a little common ground, so you relax a bit, the conversation builds, you enjoy a few laughs and you continue to chat and laugh along the way. Next your new BFF realises the time and needs to excuse themselves, they offer you their number and agree to catch up again soon.
- You also decide to call it a night and start to head back to your room. On your way back, you reflect on the two different conversations. Hmm. When I'm selling, which one am I? If I was a salon owner, which conversation would I prefer?

Now, let's get back to the Expo. Yes, you need to teach your team how to engage with the people attending the expo – but engage in a manner that's inviting, yet professional. To engage comfortably is to unfold your story, not blurt it out. My suggestion is that you unfold it in three layers. In your mind draw a pyramid, then draw two horizontal lines cutting your pyramid into three sections. You have a section at the top, a section in the middle and the third section at the bottom – forming three layers.

Layer 1 (the top layer), this the Introduction Layer.

- During the introduction layer, you share your top 3-5 points or USP's.
- You pause and wait for acknowledgement, which generally will come in the form of a question. (And by doing so they are asking for more information, so in turn they are asking you to continue)

This allows you to move to Layer 2, or the Information Layer.

- In this layer of conversation, you discuss the features and benefits of your product and/or service in greater detail, relating it to their situation wherever possible.
- This layer is also where you get to ask questions and again use the features and benefits to answer, respond and persuade.

Layer 3 is the Detail Layer.

- This is where all the details, specifications and every ingredient lives, along with all their features and benefits and all of the different buying and pricing options. OMG... generally, when we go into this much detail you turn most people off, because at this early stage they don't want to do the deep dive.

You need to remember, not everybody needs to know everything to buy!

Instead, ask good questions, listen well and only respond with related features and benefits that make your conversation lighter. And more importantly, make it easier for your prospect to buy.
Until next time... ENJOY YOUR DAY

