



Practical guide: Define your unique selling proposition

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What a proposition has to do

Your unique selling proposition is one sentence that says what a customer gets from you that they would not get from the alternatives, and why they should believe it.

It is the answer to the only question every buyer asks before they pay: why you? A business that cannot answer in one sentence leaves the customer to decide on price, and on price there is always someone cheaper.

The idea comes from Rosser Reeves, who defined it in *Reality in Advertising* (1961): each advertisement must make a proposition, one the competition cannot or does not offer, strong enough to move people to buy.

What it is not

It is not a slogan. A slogan may be written from it, later, by a copywriter. The proposition is a business decision.

It is not a list. Three benefits in one sentence is three propositions, and a customer remembers none of them.

It is not a claim of quality or service. Every competitor makes both claims, so neither can make you the obvious choice.



What a clear proposition changes

Four commercial reasons, and one caution from the research that most guides on this subject leave out.

It decides the sale before the meeting

Buyers shortlist from websites, directories and recommendations before they speak to anyone. A clear proposition on every page does the qualifying for you, and brings you enquiries from the customers you actually want.

It protects your price

A business chosen for a specific reason is compared on that reason. A business chosen from a list is compared on price. In every market I have worked in, the companies that could complete the sentence "choose us because" gave away the smallest discounts.

It makes every campaign cheaper

One proposition, repeated, compounds. Ten messages, rotated, start from zero each time. The proposition gives every advertisement, post and proposal the same brief.

AI tools repeat what you repeat

McKinsey's State of the Consumer 2026 found that only 1 per cent of the sources AI tools cite about companies come from the company's own website. The tools describe you from what is written everywhere else. A proposition stated the same way on your site, your directories and your reviews is what they find and repeat.

The caution: unique is not enough

Byron Sharp's How Brands Grow (2010) shows most buyers notice brands far more than they compare them, so being recognisable matters as much as being different. Treat the proposition as the message and your distinctive look and name as the memory aid. You need both, and this guide covers the first.



The three tests a proposition must pass

A working proposition passes three tests at the same time. Most fail exactly one, and the worked example on page 8 shows how each failure looks in practice.

Valued

Do enough customers care?

The proposition must answer something the customer is already trying to solve, in their words. You find it in why your best customers say they chose you, in the last twenty lost sales, and in what reviews praise and complain about. A proposition built in a meeting room, without that evidence, usually describes what the business is proud of rather than what the buyer wants.

Provable

Would a sceptic believe it?

The proposition needs proof a stranger can check: a number, a guarantee, a named process, a credential, a review score. Without proof it is a claim, and buyers have heard every claim. If you have no proof yet, the proof is the work to do first.

Unclaimed

Could a competitor say the same?

Read your five nearest competitors' websites and write down every claim they make. Anything on that list is unavailable to you, whether or not you do it better, because a repeated claim makes no one the obvious choice. You are looking for what customers value that nobody in your market credibly owns.



Where the proposition appears

The frame to write it in

For [your priority customer] who [situation or need], [your business] is the [category] that [the one thing you own], because [proof one, two and three].

The bracketed frame is scaffolding. Once the decision survives the three tests, rewrite it as one natural sentence a customer would actually say to a friend, and keep the proofs beside it.

One proposition per audience

A business serving two very different customers may need a proposition for each, on separate pages. What it cannot have is two propositions for the same customer, because the customer will remember whichever is weaker, or neither.

Where the sentence must appear

Website	Home page headline, and the first line of the about page
Sales	Every proposal, quotation and pitch, first page
Listings	Google Business Profile, directories, LinkedIn company page
People	How the phone is answered, how staff describe the business
Advertising	The one message every campaign repeats

If your proposition appears only in your brand guidelines, you do not have one. The customer decides what your proposition is by what they keep meeting.



Actions to define your proposition

01

Collect the customer's own words

Ask ten customers why they chose you and what they nearly chose instead. Read the last fifty reviews and the last twenty lost sales.

Save every phrase that repeats. The proposition is usually already in this list, said better than you would say it.

02

Write down what every competitor claims

Take your five nearest competitors and list the claims on their websites, word for word.

This list is what you cannot use. Expect quality, service, experience and trusted to fill it.

03

List what you do that is true and checkable

Delivery times you actually hit, guarantees you actually honour, numbers you can publish, credentials you hold, processes you follow every time.

If the list is short, that is useful information. The proposition may need building before it can be claimed.

04

Find the overlap

Mark every item on your list that customers mentioned in step one and competitors did not claim in step two.

What remains is the raw material: valued, provable and unclaimed. There is usually less of it than expected, and one item is enough.

Actions to define your proposition

05

Write five versions of the sentence

Use the frame on page 5 and fill every bracket five different ways. Read them aloud and delete any word a competitor could also use.

Sleep on it, then choose one. The best version is usually the plainest.

06

Test it on five customers and five staff

Read the sentence and ask three questions: is it true, is it different from the alternatives you know, and does it matter to you.

Two or more "no" answers to any question sends you back to step five. This test costs nothing and is the step most often skipped.

07

Build the proof behind it

Turn the proposition into something checkable: publish the number, write the guarantee, name the process, show the reviews beside the claim.

If keeping the promise costs you nothing, customers will sense it. Proof that carries a cost is what makes it believed.

08

Put it everywhere and leave it alone

Place the sentence at every point on the page 5 table, brief the team, and record the measures on page 10 with today's figures.

Then repeat it for at least a year before you judge it. Propositions work by repetition, and most are changed just before they would have started to.

A worked example

A made-up Dubai accountancy practice, six staff, serving free zone small businesses. The names and figures are invented; the shape of the problem is common to most service firms.

What the evidence said

Customers repeated three things: "they answer the same day", "the fee never changes", and "they warned us about the deadline before we knew it existed". Lost sales went to cheaper firms; several of those customers returned within a year after fines. The competitor list claimed experienced, trusted, professional and personal service, all of them, word for word.

The failures on the way

Failed the valued test: "the region's widest range of accounting software integrations". True and unclaimed, and no customer had ever mentioned it.

Failed the provable test: "Dubai's most responsive accountants". Valued, but a superlative no stranger can check.

Failed the unclaimed test: "personal service from qualified accountants". Every competitor said it.

The sentence that passed

For free zone small businesses that cannot afford a missed filing, Hartley Accounts is the accountancy firm that answers the same working day and puts every deadline in writing, because the fee is fixed for the year, the deadline calendar is issued at sign-up, and if a filing is ever late through our fault we pay the penalty.

The proof built: the fixed fee published on the website, the deadline calendar shown as a sample, the penalty promise written into the engagement letter.

What changed

The home page headline became the promise. Proposals opened with it. Reviews began repeating "they pay the penalty", which is the proposition doing its own advertising. Measures chosen: share of enquiries mentioning deadlines or the promise, win rate against the two cheaper firms, and average discount given, which was the number that fell first.



The one-page proposition worksheet

Print this page or copy the headings into a document. Work top to bottom; the sentence comes last.

1 · WHAT CUSTOMERS SAY WHEN THEY CHOOSE US, IN THEIR WORDS

2 · WHAT EVERY COMPETITOR CLAIMS

3 · WHAT WE DO THAT IS TRUE AND CHECKABLE

4 · THE OVERLAP: VALUED, PROVABLE AND UNCLAIMED

5 · THE PROPOSITION, ONE SENTENCE

THREE PROOFS A STRANGER CAN CHECK

6 · WHERE IT WILL APPEAR, AND BY WHEN

MEASURES, TODAY'S FIGURE, REVIEW DATE

Mistakes to avoid and measures to keep

Six mistakes I see most often

- ☐ Claiming quality or service, which every competitor also claims.

- ☐ A proposition the business is proud of and no customer mentioned.

- ☐ A claim with no proof a stranger can check.

- ☐ Three benefits packed into one sentence.

- ☐ Changing it every quarter. Propositions work by repetition.

- ☐ Writing it, then leaving it out of proposals, listings and the phone greeting.

Measures, chosen from these

Record a baseline, then track quarterly. Give the proposition a year of repetition before you judge it.

Enquiries using your words	Enquiry form and call notes
Win rate against named competitors	Sales records
Average discount to close	Sales records
Branded search volume	Google Search Console, monthly
How AI tools describe you	Ten questions, three tools, monthly

Sources

Rosser Reeves, Reality in Advertising, Alfred A. Knopf, 1961.
Byron Sharp, How Brands Grow, Oxford University Press, 2010. McKinsey, State of the Consumer 2026, June 2026.
Related guide in this series: Create a brand strategy, at ataylorcmo.com/guides.



Conclusion

A unique selling proposition costs two weeks of listening and an afternoon of writing, and it changes the economics of every campaign that follows, because each one starts from a decision already made.

Gather the evidence, apply the three tests, build the proof, and then repeat the sentence everywhere for a year before you judge it.

Next step

If you would like a second opinion on your proposition before it goes on the website, I offer a 30 minute discovery call at no charge. Bring the worksheet and the evidence behind it.

Book at ataylorcmo.com, or write to adam@ataylorcmo.com.



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I work as a fractional chief marketing officer for owners, executives and boards in the UAE, the UK and internationally. My career includes Group Head of Marketing at Emaar, Director of Events and Entertainment at Expo 2020 Dubai, and marketing leadership of a UAE free zone, with more than 5,000 events and activations delivered for premium brands.

Credentials

MSc Marketing. Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Marketing. Certified Digital Marketing Professional.

Experience

More than 20 years across the UAE, the wider Middle East, the UK and global markets.

Specialisms

Marketing strategy, brand positioning, UAE market entry, growth and marketing return on investment, events and experiential, and board governance.

Brands and organisations

Emaar · Expo 2020 Dubai · The Dubai Mall · IFZA · Al Tayer Motors · Ferrari · Gucci · Harvey Nichols · Bloomingdale's · Dolce and Gabbana

Contact

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UK appointments by arrangement

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