

THIS IS A SAMPLE CHAPTER FROM  
THE STARTUP GUIDE TO DIFFERENTIATION  
BY COPY HACKERS

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## WHY YOU NEED TO BE DIFFERENT OR BETTER IN AT LEAST ONE FANTASTIC & BELIEVABLE WAY

“There is no such thing as a commodity. All goods and services are differentiable.”

**Theodore Levitt, Harvard Business Review**

IN 2012, BLUE BUFFALO COMPANY launched an advertising campaign for their pet food. In this campaign, they invited people to visit their website to conduct a True Blue Test in which you could compare the ingredients of your current dog food to the ingredients in Blue. When you take the test, no matter which brands you compare, you find that Blue is the only brand where meat is the primary ingredient.

Of course, you can only compare the brands Blue lets you compare – all of which happen to be brands from grocery stores and big box stores. Blue doesn't let you compare their ingredients to those of the better brands you'd find at your vet clinic.

The first paid copywriting assignment I ever got was for Champion Pet Foods, makers of vet-recommended Orijen and Acana. I freelanced for them for nearly a decade. In that time, I learned just about everything you can learn about kibble and the way it's marketed. Two of my biggest takeaways:

1. Fine pet food companies rely on veterinarian recommendations rather than mass advertising

2. Some dog breeds require a diet rich in a balance of select meats, vegetables and grasses – not just a plate full of chicken, lamb or fish

Because fine pet food companies don't advertise to the masses, the masses don't know what a pet's diet *should* consist of. We tend to think of feeding our pets in the same way we think of feeding our children: no high-fructose corn syrup, no corn meal, no by-products, no hormones, easy on the gluten, plenty of protein. We don't think of the fact that our Newfoundland Dog evolved from the indigenous St. John's Dog in the maritime provinces of Canada over thousands of years and, as such, is likely to perform best on a diet of proteins and vegetables native to that area. We think, "That's a big dog, so we should feed it big animals. Where's the beef?"

**Here's why you should care about this example: unless we're educated on or passionate about a topic, we know only as much about that topic as marketers tell us.**

Blue leveraged the world's general cluelessness about pet food to differentiate themselves in the minds of their prospects.

If you're familiar with the AMC television show *Mad Men* – and I hope you are – you might think of this as the *It's Toasted Principle*. The idea behind this principle is that, when you're trying to help people understand why they should choose you, you don't have to be truly original or truly unique; you just have to be the first to loudly claim a benefit, feature or value as yours.

One of the biggest questions we're trying to answer for prospects when we write copy is this:

**"Why should I choose you?"**

Your prospects are always asking that question or variations of it. Why should I stay on your site? Why should I come back to your blog? Why should I trust you? Why should I give you my email address, my tweet or, most of all, my hard-earned money?

It's your copy's job to persuasively answer that question for your prospects. And it's your job as a marketer to step back and strategically develop the best answer for that question. **That is, it's your job to figure out how to position your startup *differently*.**

If people don't know what's different about you, how are they supposed to know why they should choose you?

Suffice it to say, there are countless ways that you could differentiate your business in the minds and hearts of your prospects and customers. Blue Buffalo Company differentiates themselves primarily on features – they claim to have the most of a highly desirable 'feature' in their recipes: meat. In the Mad Men example, the client differentiates based on how their product, a cigarette, is produced: it's toasted.

If a business stands out from its competition, it is usually because they have differentiated themselves in a meaningful way that their market desires. Taco Bell stands apart from other fast food chains – though not necessarily from other Mexican-inspired fast-food – with *Think Outside the Bun*. 7-Up stands apart from colas by simply stating that they're *The Uncola*. And Target, with their increasing focus on great design at mass consumption prices, stands apart from both low-price and high-price departments stores; they are where you go if you *expect more* but want to *pay less*.

How will you stand apart from your competition? The chapters and worksheets that follow in this book are designed to help you sort out your key differences – and to keep you from just pulling an idea out of a hat and differentiating based on that idea. That said, if you'd like to get a sense for the various ways you could distinguish yourself in the minds of your prospects, voila. You could be:

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Built to last          | <input type="checkbox"/> Most trusted                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Less expensive         | <input type="checkbox"/> Most frequently used           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Better value for money | <input type="checkbox"/> Used by the most people        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Faster                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Used by experts                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Safer                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Used by authorities            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hassle-free            | <input type="checkbox"/> Built with advanced technology |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Friendlier             | <input type="checkbox"/> Brand new                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Most helpful           | <input type="checkbox"/> Damn old                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Always available       | <input type="checkbox"/> The most fun                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Most responsive        | <input type="checkbox"/> Super gorgeous                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Best-selling           | <input type="checkbox"/> The easiest to assemble        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Most loved             | <input type="checkbox"/> Produced differently           |

- Packaged differently
- Smaller than expected
- Larger than expected
- Environmentally conscious
- Socially conscious
- Certified by more groups
- Most ethically run
- Created by a unique group
- Run by a celebrity
- Open longer
- Conveniently located
- The original or the official

In looking at that list, you might start to notice some points of differentiation that apply to you – and some that seem ridiculous. For example, the idea of differentiating based on being ethically run may be odd for your SaaS business, but it could be an excellent way for an oil company to differentiate themselves or for anyone in a traditionally unethical space to stand out.

Now, it's no good to simply pluck an idea from that list – or from any of the chapters in this book – and run with it. **The thing that's different about you needs to be something your prospects want or care about if it's going to resonate and positively impact conversion.**

For example, you may have built the only app on the market that lets people subscribe to get 850 new songs every month. This makes you different in your space, where no other subscription service lets people access quite so much audio content. However, *does your target market give a hoot about getting 1000s of songs on their iPhone?* You would have to be able to market to some insanely passionate audiophiles (with massive available storage) in order for that differentiator to pull.

## Before You Start Pulling Ideas Out of a Hat...

There are two basic starting points when you're considering how to differentiate your startup – and neither lets you throw stuff at the fridge to see what sticks. Each of these two starting points comes with one or more questions that you should answer to help you turn the grey area of differentiation into a sharper shade of black or white.

### STARTING POINT A: ALL ABOUT YOU

Ask yourself:

1. What gets *me* stoked?

## **STARTING POINT B: ALL ABOUT THEM**

Ask yourself, in this order:

1. Who's my target marketing, audience or niche?
2. What do I offer them (in a nutshell)?
3. How is what I offer them different from what others offer them?
4. What would *they* say is the most important thing I help them do or outcome I help them reach?
5. How do I help them do that thing?

Between these two approaches, I favor Starting Point B because it's almost always better to start with your target audience and build from there. In fact, the Differentiation Interview worksheet that accompanies this book is based on Starting Point B.

That said, some of history's most notable game-changers seemed to favor Starting Point A. Ford and Apple are two great examples of companies that are founded on passion by visionaries – leaders who knew what we wanted long before we did.

Whichever approach you take, your answers should help you arrive at what makes you different. Which will help your prospects, first and foremost, because they'll have little doubt as to what they'll get when they work with you. Knowing what makes you different will also help *you* know how to focus as a business – what initiatives to invest in first, what new products or services to launch next and where to focus your efforts from this point on. To say nothing of how it'll help you pitch.

## **Could It Be That You're Totally, 100% *the Same*?**

In the following 9 chapters, I'm going to help you find one solid way to differentiate your business from your competition – even if you don't think your prospects care about your competition, and even if you don't think you have any competition. Your prospects may not care about the other guys now, but the other guys are going to work to make them care. And you may not have any direct competition now, but there's always some form

of competition – whether it’s the old familiar way of doing things or a lack of awareness that the pain you eliminate can be eliminated.

There is always a need to differentiate or distinguish your solution as the one that most desirably does X. You are not the exception to this rule.

Now here’s the thing: What if there’s nothing really special about you?

What if you’ve built a photo-sharing app that’s a total knock-off of Instagram? You built it because you wanted a project to work on. Now you think it could be cool to get some users, so you have to market it. But you have no idea why a person should install your app, which has one 4-star review, over Instagram, which is a household name.

Your product is built. You’ve launched. And you’ve found yourself standing in what appears to be a House of Mirrors but is actually just the space your competition fills. You have to figure out *stat* how to set yourself apart. So how do you make your solution stand out... without changing it?

This is a classic marketing challenge.

**This book and the Differentiation Interview worksheet will help you find the story that distinguishes your solution without changing it.** Of course, if you’re able to make tweaks to your product or service here and there, you may be better able to land on a meaningful differentiator you can shape your company around.

Now, you could be in the *other* camp – the luckier camp. You could be in an idea validation stage, and you could have plenty of time to build a key differentiator (or two) into your product or service. Consider yourself blessed. Know that you’re envied.

In each of the following chapters, you’ll find examples of how startups and growing businesses in these 4 worlds are differentiating themselves today:

1. Software as a service (SaaS)
2. Downloads & installs
3. Hard goods
4. Other (e.g., offline business)

If you're already knee-deep in your business and you're finding it hard to communicate why someone should choose you – you're working on your pitch deck or you just want to draft a few compelling USPs to test on your site – then you'll find that here.

In fact, you may find a half-dozen ways to differentiate yourself. Yes, you can differentiate in more ways than one. That said, I recommend you choose a key differentiator and roll with that. So people have a firm grip on what you do differently and better. But don't feel the need to limit yourself too much. The final worksheet, titled *What Makes Us Different & Better*, will help you prioritize the ways you're different.

Let's be very clear: you should probably not try to differentiate in a half-dozen ways. One way is great. Two ways is perfectly wonderful. Three is starting to push it.

**Remember the goal of differentiation: to help your prospects know why to choose you. The enemy of decision-making is too many options. So *try* to stick to no more than three differentiators grand total for your startup, okay?—unless you have reason to do otherwise.**

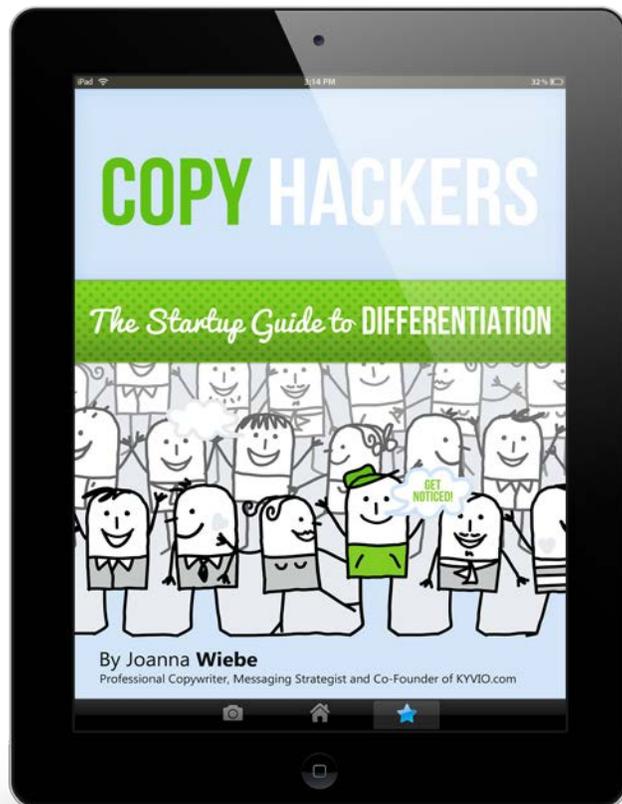
WITHOUT FURTHER ADO, let's see how you can be desirably different – even if you're exactly the same as the next guy. Remember, I've included specific examples for startups in SaaS as well as ecommerce, downloads, installs and services. By the time you finish all 70 pages that follow, you should have arrived at one solid way to differentiate your startup... as well as a few supporting differentiators. The final chapter will help you make sense of writing copy that effectively highlights your differentiator.

## YOUR FIRST ACTION ITEM

PRINT OFF THE FOLLOWING WORKSHEET, titled Differentiation Interview, or have it open on your computer so you can type directly into it.

Throughout the following chapters, you'll need to refer to the worksheet and complete sections of it. Why? So you can arrive at a shortlist of ways to differentiate yourself – and, with a little work, even find the best possible key differentiator for your startup.

**NOTE:** *This worksheet is also available as a separate Word document among your file downloads for this ebook. Check your receipt link to find it.*



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