

relative differentiation



Rob Estreito • Following
Founder of Salmon Labs, a strategy studio helping marketers gener...
1d • 🗨️

I've been on a recent rabbit hole around relative differentiation. Yes, *relative* differentiation, as [Mark Ritson](#) defines it, not USP type stuff.

It's increasingly clear to me that USPs may offer temporary advantage, or may give you something that you can patent and therefore create defensibility, but they're rarely a sustainable strategy because it's so easy for others to copy you. One of my last projects at [VCCP](#) was working with [Samsung Electronics](#) who had a high end vacuum cleaner which was born out of a USP (self cleaning dustbins), which was very quickly copied by everyone else in the category.

So USPs are not that sustainable. But being seen as different *relative to competitors* is, provided you invest in it long enough in a series of associations that it becomes very hard for competitors to be linked with them as well.

Examples include:

- "Should have gone to [Specsavers](#)" and all the resulting work, which as [James Hurman](#) wisely posted a few days ago, could have easily been used by any other brand in the category (it's literally a category benefit), but wasn't. So Specsavers, wisely investing in it for the long run, is now synonymous with it.
- "Every little helps", which any supermarket could have gone for but didn't, except [Tesco](#) did and kept investing in it, and so how it's their thing.
- KitKat with "Have a break", which as [Mark Ritson](#) recently pointed out wins at 'double D marketing', a modern classic of an expression if I've ever seen one.
- Even [Liquid Death](#) don't have a differentiated product, but they have a brand that is seen as relatively differentiated from any other water in a can out there. And because they keep reinforcing their associations with "water with attitude" (my words, not theirs), it's very hard to de-throne their position.

The point is simple: it's very hard to have a unique thing, certainly at a product level, that lasts long. So the real game to play is to invest enough and consistently in something specific that, over time, people are more likely to associate with your brand. And then to dramatise and refresh it over and over, and over time. Simplify and dramatise. It ain't more complicated than that.

Which brings me to this series of classic ads by Araldite. They're not telling you its glue is superior, though they're implying it. But because they dramatise it so beautifully, it stands out. And they did it year after year after year.

It seems to me that sometimes we over-cook the strategy when all you need is to pick a clear category entry point that you think you can win in, dramatise the shit out of it, put your bored ego aside, and play the long game.

I was once told the role of strategy isn't always to unlock a brilliant insight or write a brilliant proposition or fundamentally change the question. Sometimes it's to convince a client to focus on, and keep refreshing, what's already there because it works and it's sticky and yes that's a glue pun.





[Newer](#)

[Older](#)

25th April 2024

Assets

28th March 2024

Ruthlessly to the point

Daniel Camprubi Douglas © 2022-2025

[Archive](#) [RSS feed](#) [QR Code](#)

Made with [Montaigne](#) and [bigmission](#) 