



SHARK PITCH

**How To Sell Anything
In Three Easy Steps
Even if...
You Hate Selling**

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products with sales exceeding \$120 million

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[Shark Pitch: How to Sell Anything in Three Easy Steps](#)
[...Even if You Hate Selling](#)*

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Is it Smarter to Claim Your Product is... Unique, Rare or Different?

The famous Hansom cab was a horse-drawn carriage designed and patented in 1834 by Joseph Hansom, an architect from York, England. Originally called the “Hansom Safety Cab,” it was designed to combine speed with safety, featuring a low center of gravity for safe cornering. What made the Hansom cab unique was its light weight making it possible to be pulled by a single horse allowing it to maneuver more easily on crowded London streets. It also made rides cheaper than hiring a larger four-wheeled coach.

The Hansom cab had other unique qualities. It could hold two passengers comfortably, three in a pinch, and the driver was seated in the back of the vehicle above the passengers. From there he could communicate with his passengers through a trapdoor in the roof.

The front of the cabin was open, giving passengers a better view, and a leather

curtain could be drawn across for privacy or shelter from the elements. Hansom Safety Cab's secret sauce was its focus on safety at high speed. Other cabs of the time had stability problems which made them prone to overturning. Hansom overcame this and resolved the safety issue without compromising on speed. In fact its speed and maneuverability made it the vehicle of choice for Arthur Conan Doyle's famous detective, Sherlock Holmes, helping him to arrive quickly at crime scenes.

Being Unique Depends on Context

What's the point of the Hansom Cab story? It's about the power of *context*. The Hansom Cab became the most popular mode of personal transport in the nineteenth century because it solved a number of problems common to other carriages of the day. Was it unique as a mode of transportation? No. Carriages had been used for centuries to transport people and goods. Was it unique as a type of carriage? It was granted a patent in 1834 because there was no other personal transport like it. What made it stand out, however, was not its patent.

Competitors care about patents, but consumers are rarely aware of them. What makes a product unique in the marketplace is how you frame its context. Joseph Hansom framed his cab in context as the fastest and cheapest way for people to get around 19th century London and many other major cities including New York.

Context can also make something that's below average appear to be above average. The average height of white males living in the United States is 5 feet 10 inches. Nothing unique about that. But what if this average height person was a basketball player in the National Basketball Association (NBA)? Then would he be unique? No, he would be *rare* but not *unique*. Why?

At the time of this writing, 23 players in the NBA have measured under 5 feet 10 inches tall. That makes all of them rare in that context. Only one of

those 23 players was unique. His name is Tyrone Curtis “Muggsy” Bogues, who stood only 5 feet 3 inches tall. He is the shortest man ever to play in the NBA. In that context he is unique. Outside of the NBA, he is below average in height.

Bogues played point guard for four teams during his 15 years in the NBA. He is best known for his ten seasons with the Charlotte Hornets. In the 1993-94 season he averaged double figures in assists and points per game. There was something else unique about Muggsy. In his rookie year, Bogues was a teammate of Manute Bol who stood 7 feet 7 inches. They were the tallest and shortest players in NBA history at the time, with 28 inches difference between them.

Your product is unique when consumers perceive it as an “-EST” as opposed to an “-ER.” What does that mean? It means being the bEST at something, or the fastEST, smartEST, talleEST, shortEST, longEST, thinnEST, kindEST, or happiEST, as in Disney’s so-called happiEST place on earth. You can be great at something and you can be rare, but EST makes you unique. Unique is the peak. Be the first, the only or one of a kind and you are unique. You can stand out in a crowd, even at 5 feet 3 inches.

How to Create Useful Context

A plastic ball is not unique, but fill it with lip balm and brand it with the name Ballmania® (a product we invented) and it becomes unique among lip balms—unique enough to be granted a configuration trademark by the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office.

Here is the difference between being *unique*, *rare* and *different*. Black swans aren’t unique; they are *rare*. Place one black swan in a pond with three white swans and the context makes the black swan *unique*. Three black swans in a lake with three white swans makes none of them either unique or rare. Now they are merely *different*.

Why is this important? When marketing a product, different is not as powerful as unique, but different can still make your product stand out among the norm if you place it in the right context. For example, a red umbrella is not unique, but place it in a sea of black umbrellas to advertise it and the context makes it stand out.

Likewise, in a sea of red umbrellas a yellow or decorated one is different. Adding an image to the surface of anything can make it feel unique, rare or different.

Set your product in a context that makes it stand out and people will see it the way *you* want them to.

The Patagonian Toothfish, known to American diners as Chilean Sea Bass, was just an ugly deep-water catch until Lee Lantz, an American fish merchant, gave it an exotic name. He believed it would appeal to New York chefs looking for something bland and buttery, a blank canvas for creating their food artistry.

As fishermen were forced to drop their lines ever deeper in search of a catch, they pulled up all sorts of unusual fare to be reframed in a new context. Seafood dealers renamed the slimehead, a fish named for its distinctive mucus canals, Orange Roughy. Goosefish—once thrown back by fishermen—became Monkfish.

Overmarketing and overfishing have made this once plentiful seafood bounty rare and ever more special. This may be hard to believe, but in colonial times, lobsters were so abundant they washed up in piles on New England shores. They had to become rare to be perceived as valuable.

Not everything is more valuable because it is rare. Every painting is one of a kind and therefore it is unique. That doesn't make it desirable. Giving it a memorable context gives it a better chance.

Paintings of your mother probably aren't worth much to anyone but you.

What made James McNeill Whistler's work valuable is open to speculation. What made it well known is somewhat clearer.

Whistler painted a work he titled, "Arrangement in Grey and Black," and submitted it to the 104th Exhibition of the Royal Academy of Art in London (1872). "Arrangement" was the last painting he submitted for the Academy's approval. They didn't like the title so in the official program they appended it.

The painting didn't capture the public imagination until years later in 1891, after Whistler pawned it to raise money and after it was acquired by Paris' Musée du Luxembourg. Is the painting unique? Every original painting is one of a kind, but that didn't make it special to art buyers. What about the painting's title? There's nothing unique about "Arrangement in Grey and Black." What makes it memorable is the title, "Whistler's Mother."

What role did the title play in making it one of the most famous paintings of all time? It was the same painting before and after he pawned it. What made it suddenly valuable? Did context in the form of a marketable title make it worth millions? Did the art world suddenly recognize something special in Whistler's brush stroke, or did retitling the painting help it by creating a new context?

Whistler understood the importance of context in his artwork, but not in the context of how to make it unique in the public mind. He couldn't grasp why anyone could care who was the subject of the painting or even that it should be labeled a portrait.

To Whistler, it was a study in color, "an arrangement in grey and black." In his 1890 book *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies*, he wrote that he couldn't imagine why anyone would care about the identity of the woman in the picture—even if it was his mother.

Whistler couldn't fathom why people would care about the private lives of

artists. The title, “Whistler’s Mother,” gave his work context and mystery, not unlike the Mona Lisa. Now we wondered about the person in the painting more than the color of paint. Who is she? Creating mystery is a prime example of how to make unique feel special, and why branding is powerful. Whistler’s original title, “Arrangement in Grey and Black,” is not a brand. “Whistlers Mother,” is a brand that has lived well more than hundred years.

You have a variety of elements, including context, at your disposal to distinguish yourself from competitors. Uniqueness can be achieved by how something is named, how it looks, works, how long it lasts or how quickly it disappears—like photos sent from Snapchat.

The Advantage of Multilevel Uniqueness

There is no such thing as *very* unique. Unique is absolute, and it is a powerful advantage for any product. Products can possess unique qualities, dimensions or levels of uniqueness that you can use to make them stand out. The more unique levels the better because it makes your product harder for a competitor to copy and knock you down a peg to being merely different or rare, as in the 22 other NBA players besides Muggsy Bouges. Can anyone name more than a handful of other players under 5 feet 10 inches?

Uniqueness gives you first-mover advantage. When Apple launched the iPhone it was unique. When other smart phones entered the market, the iPhone was no longer unique *as a phone*. But it still possessed unique dimensions to keep it uppermost in consumers’ minds.

The Apple logo and brand remain unique and powerful. Its retail stores remain unique. Its iTunes brand is unique even though others now sell music downloads. No matter how many competitors sell music, iTunes will never lose its brand identity as being first—a unique part of Apple’s personality that can’t be copied.

Ballmania lip balm was launched in 2005; four years later a competitor, EOS,[®] entered the market with a lower-priced product intended for the mass market. Their product emulated the ball shape but had a flattened base so it wasn't a complete ball. Still, it resembled a ball, causing Ballmania to lose its unique market position based on shape. EOS came in a plain plastic container with no designs printed on the surface. Ballmania's unique prints gave it a second level of uniqueness in addition to its brand name.

Sneaker Balls (another one of our products) is the only sport shoe air freshener, first on the market in 1988. Do we have balls, or what? Although others tried to copy its function using different shapes, Sneaker Balls and the brand name used first mover advantage to stake out a unique, permanent place in consumers' minds. It is also patented, trademarked and copyrighted, which adds proof of uniqueness and makes it harder to copy.

Think about the great music groups whose brands have spanned generations. The Rolling Stones[®] and The Eagles[®] both performed for four decades selling out stadiums around the world. Their unique aura, their sound and their original material couldn't be duplicated.

The Beatles, Frank Sinatra, Sting, Willie Nelson, Adele and Taylor Swift have unique voices. Their original styles and their unique music and lyrics are multilevel dimensions that set them apart.

Imagine all the singers you've heard that have beautiful voices but lack original music or lyrics. Talented singer/songwriters—Taylor Swift and Adele for example—have a unique advantage writing and performing their own material. And nothing is more unique than an artist's face.

- Name something about your product that people find unique.
- What is the context or category that your product fits in?
- What would happen if you changed the context, including renaming your product, to fit a different context?

Takeaways

- Create something unique and useful that saves money for people and it will be easy to sell. The Hansom Safety Cab was unique because it was pulled by a single horse, was light weight and maneuverability in crowded London streets. It made the trip cheaper than travelling in a larger four-wheel coach.
- Patents make products unique, and while competitors care about patents, consumers are rarely even aware of them.
- What makes a product unique in the marketplace is how you frame its *context*. The Hansom cab was like a sports car compared to other carriages of the day.
- Tyrone Curtis “Muggsy” Bogues, at 5 feet 3 inches tall, is the shortest man ever to play in the NBA. In that context, he is unique. Outside the NBA, his height is below average.
- You are rare when consumers perceive you as an “-EST” as opposed to an “-ER.” Think smartEST, happiEST, fastEST.
- When marketing a product, different is not as powerful as unique, but different can still make your product stand out among the norm if you place it in the right context.
- Whistler couldn’t fathom why people would care about the title of his paintings or the private lives of artists. The title of the painting, “Whistler’s Mother,” gave his work context and mystery. It raised a question that engaged fans.
- Unique is a powerful advantage for any product. Products can possess several unique qualities, dimensions or levels of uniqueness that you can use to make them stand out. The more unique levels the better because it makes your product harder for a competitor to copy.