Buyer Persona

What is a buyer persona and why are they important?

How well do you truly know your customers?

If you don't know who your customers are; what their needs are; what motivates them; where they're from and where they can be found, how can you expect your sales and marketing messages to reach them?

To take that a step further, if you don't know and understand your customers, much of your sales and marketing budget is destined to go to waste, because your campaigns will be unfocused and inefficient. The better you can get to know your customers, the better you can target your marketing so that it's on point and highly relevant.

It's impossible and impractical to get to know each customer individually, so instead you'll have to settle for getting a feel for the main customer types your business attracts. Whether you're focused on selling products, solutions or a service there will be certain customer types who consistently buy from you. You've probably got a broad idea of who these are already, but we want more than just a broad idea. We want a detailed insight into who's buying your products, solutions or services and why they are buying them; understanding this is the key to becoming a more effective seller and marketer. It's in your customers' interests for you to understand their needs and it's certainly in yours if you're to sell to these segments consistently and repeatedly. Hence it's important to create what's known as a buyer persona.

A buyer persona (or persona given that you'll be targeting more than one type of individual) is a semi-fictional representation of your ideal customer based on market research and real data about your existing customers. Developing strong buyer personas will enable you to tailor your language as well as your sales and marketing messages to attract these individuals. It will also reduce waste, by saving you from the time and effort of advertising to groups that either aren't interested in your brand or at the very least aren't interested in purchasing from your brand. Suffice to say that HR professionals working in the retail sector hang out in different places on the web compared to IT pros working in Financial Services. It's unlikely that your products and services will appeal to both of these groups, which is why it's so important that you get a detailed understanding of the behaviors of your target audience.

When creating your buyer persona(s), you should consider including customer demographics, behavior patterns, motivations, and goals. The more detailed you are, the better.

Buyer personas provide tremendous structure and insight for your company. A detailed buyer persona will help you determine where to focus your time, guide product development, and allow for alignment across the organization. As a result, you will be able to attract the most valuable visitors, leads, and customers to your business.

Whereas a buyer persona is a representation of your ideal customer, it's also a good idea to map out a negative -- or “exclusionary” -- persona or in other words a representation of who you don't want as a customer.

Steps to developing a buyer persona

If you're to put a name and a face to your various buyer personas – and you might literally choose to add a name to each of the personas you draw up to help bring them to life – you need some information to go on. This all starts by assembling demographic details regarding their occupation, income, gender, education, location and so on. There's more to developing a buyer persona than demographic information alone, but it's a key component and so it makes sense to start here.

Once you've gotten a good feel for who your customers are using demographic data you'll then want to glean more insights and the best way to obtain this information is by talking to them. Analytical data will help you to create broad-brush strokes about who your customers are, but for the finer details, you need to speak to them, because no analytical tool can do that.

Interviewing previous customers is a great way to find out more about their goals, problems and frustrations. Through talking with your customers, you can learn what they were looking for at the time,
why they chose to buy from you and whether the experience fulfilled their needs and met their expectations. You can also gain valuable feedback on how your products, services and marketing could be better adjusted to address their needs.

Although nothing can beat a face-to-face interview for the sort of detailed and honest responses it elicits, there's a good possibility that you don't have the time or resources to conduct extensive interviews with existing customers.

A shortcut that will enable you to gather a large number of customer responses with minimal outlay is to use a questionnaire. Online surveys are commonplace across all industries, and they're very easy to send out in a newsletter, perhaps with an incentive for customers to complete it such as a discount off their next purchase or entry into a prize draw. Services such as SurveyMonkey and SurveyMoz enable you to conduct detailed questionnaires that will give you a wealth of data about your customers and their preferences.

Prior to carrying out any interview you should search for the individual on LinkedIn to glean some insights as this will help accelerate the process and make the interview more meaning and contextual. When carrying out the interviews you should be looking to ask questions such as:

**Role**
- What is your job role/title? (if not fully ascertainable on social)
- How is your job measured?
- What does a typical day look like?
- What skills are required to do your job?
- What knowledge and tools do you use in your job?
- Who do you report to? Who reports to you?

**Company**
- In which industry or industries does your company work? (if not fully ascertainable on social)
- What is the size of your company (revenue, employees)?

**Goals**
- What are you responsible for?
- What does it mean to be successful in your role?

**Challenges**
- What are your biggest challenges?
- What keeps you awake at night?

**Watering Holes**
- How do you learn about new information for your job?
- What publications or blogs do you read?
- What associations are you a member of?
- What social networks do you use?
- What events do you look to attend?

**Personal Background**
- Describe your personal demographics (if appropriate, ask their age, whether they're married, if they have children).
- Describe your educational background. What level of education did you complete, which schools did you attend, and what did you study?
- Describe your career path. How did you end up where you are today?

**Buying Preferences**
- How do you prefer to interact with vendors (e.g. email, phone, in person)?
- Do you use the internet to research vendors or products? If yes, how do you search for information?
• Do you use social media networks to carry out research?
• Do you ask your social contact for recommendations on products, solutions, services?
• Describe a recent purchase. Why did you consider a purchase, what was the evaluation process, and how did you decide to purchase that product or service?

Other practical methods for gathering information

Look through your contacts database to uncover trends about how certain leads or customers find and consume your content.

When creating forms to use on your website, use form fields that capture important persona information. For example, if all of your personas vary based on company size, ask each lead for information about company size on your forms.

Take into consideration your sales team’s feedback on the leads they’re interacting with most. What generalizations can they make about the different types of customers you serve best?

Review the social media profiles of your customers to see what kind of content they are posting or engaging with, what LinkedIn groups they belong to.

Look at your website analytics to see who is visiting your site, how they found your site and what they were looking at.

Buyer persona framework

Based upon the data you capture on your customers and prospects, look to gain a common understanding of their needs to drive best-in-class messaging, content and campaigns.

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<td>Job title</td>
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<th>Decision Process Attributes</th>
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<td>Buyer role</td>
<td>Engagement level</td>
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The five common roles in the buying process
Champion  
Business value
- Will the product/solution/service meet our needs?
- Does it help with our key initiatives?

Influencer  
Performance
- Is it stable, reliable, efficient and scalable?
- How will it perform and how can we measure its success?

Decision maker  
Return on Investment
- What is the business value?
- Why should we spend money on this?

User  
Experience
- Will it help me do my job better and be more productive?
- Will it enable me to meet my goals?

Approver  
Total Cost of Ownership
- What are the alternatives?
- Can we get this cheaper?
The B2B buying decision process

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<th>Awareness</th>
<th>Consideration</th>
<th>Evaluate</th>
<th>Decision</th>
<th>Purchase</th>
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<td>The buyer becomes aware of their problem</td>
<td>The buyer begins to carry out research to look for solutions.</td>
<td>The buyer now analyses the various solutions and vendors to find a fit.</td>
<td>The buyer now narrows down their options and draws up a short list of vendor solutions.</td>
<td>The buyer becomes a customer.</td>
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The B2B journey map

Who | Why | Where | What
---|---|---|---
Who are you selling to? | Why would a buyer want your product / solution / service? | Where can your target audience be found? | What content should you be posting at each stage of the buyers journey?
Mapping out a buyer persona

Using your buyer personas

It might sound like a tall order to go through this entire process with every type of buyer your company encounters; it's highly likely that you've got a lot more than just one type of customer. To begin, simply prioritize and focus on your best, key customers. Remember that the journey a customer takes is just as important, and the easier you make that journey, the more receptive the buyer will be to taking the action you want them to take.

As discussed, buyer personas are research-based profiles that represent your target audience and can help you adapt key aspects of your sales and marketing for greater success. Clarifying the types of people who benefit from your solutions and the challenges you help them solve, is critical to your efforts to attract and retain customers.

The value of creating buyer "personas" for marketing and sales has been well documented. Research has shown that websites which have been created with the help of buyer personas are two to five times more effective than others given the fact that they are highly aligned to the target audience. Personas sharpen the picture you have of your customers so you can better understand their needs and act as a value-added partner to them.

You should continually look to refer to the buyer personas you have created around every marketing and sales campaign you look to run. It's a good idea to print out the buyer personas and pin them on the wall. It should be noted that buyer personas will continue to evolve based on changing market conditions, new technologies and business transformation; you're never truly finished in building these out.

The primary way to use your personas are around content creation and sales messaging. Your personas are designed to give you an idea of what kinds of things your ideal buyer will respond to, it makes perfect sense to use this information in order to developing pieces that are more valuable for the intended audience. Not only will the personas help you to craft highly relevant and appealing content and sales messaging but it will help generate more responses and leads.

You can and should use this strategy when you are creating email campaigns, blog posts, video content, ebooks, listicles, infographics and other items. Even web and landing pages can be crafted to speak specifically to individuals who fit into a persona category. Your buyer personas will influence the way your content is structured, the questions your pieces attempt to answer and the type of language you use.

Let's take an email campaign, rather than send out a lead nurturing email to all your contacts, why not divide your database into persona types and then send a tailored message or piece of content to each
segment. With negative personas you can also remove leads not worth pursuing from your contacts, saving your team time and money that can be used more effectively.

From an advertising standpoint, if you've ascertained where your personas prefer to spend their time online – their favourite news sources, blogs, and social media – you will be able to focus your advertising efforts where they will be most effective. Retargeting your approach using personas has shown to improve your advertising ROI.

**Conclusion**

You can't just create your buyer personas and expect them to transform your business on their own. You have to employ dynamic strategies for using them in ways that will inform your marketing and sales techniques and help you engage with your customers on a deeper level.

A buyer persona is an essential starting point for any successful sales and marketing campaign. It places your customer at the centre and ensures you're targeting the right consumers to maximize purchases and see a return on your investment. Without buyer personas, you're doing business in the dark!