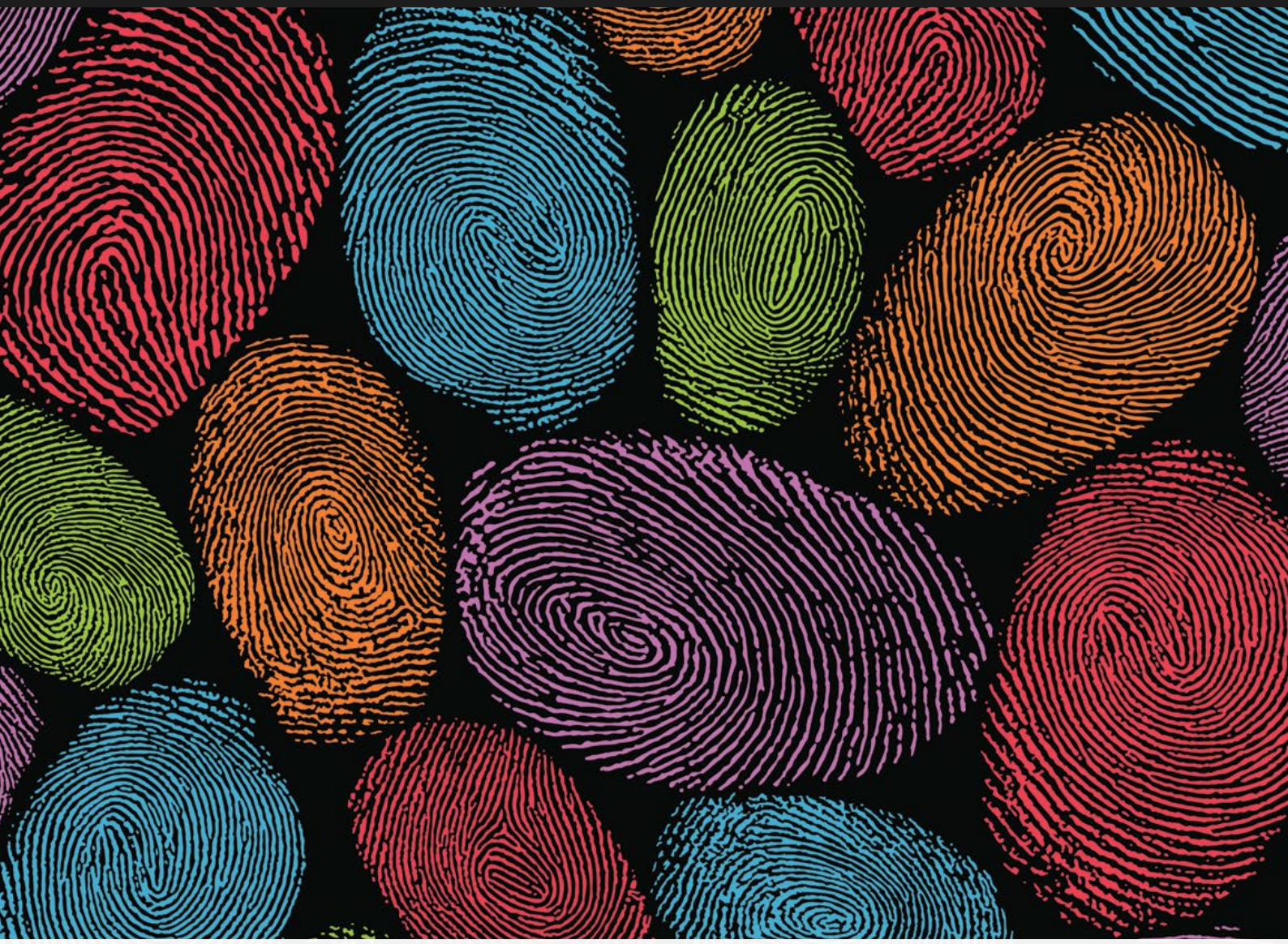
B2B Marketing™



BEGINNER'S GUIDE

Beginner's Guide to Buyer Personas

B2BMARKETING.NET



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Introduction

Most marketers would agree that an in-depth understanding of their audience is key to creating successful marketing campaigns. One way to do this is to create buyer personas, which according to the Buyer Persona Institute: "Tell you what prospective customers are thinking and doing as they weigh their options to address a problem that your company resolves."

While the creation of buyer personas can be extremely effective for B2B marketers, it's a challenging task: the person making a buying decision usually isn't alone, and will often make a decision based on a number of influencing factors.

This guide will help B2B marketers throughout every step of the process, allowing them both understand the role that good buyer personas can play in targeting their marketing campaigns, as well as building personas based on good research.

You will find a detailed plan for creating buyer personas, a list of the key learnings, a template to create a pen portrait and a list of further reading material.

How to create buyer personas

ANDY MCKAY
PLANNER
EARNEST



Business people are people too, they just happen to be at work. This is a really important point to bear in mind when you go about creating your personas and your eventual campaign messaging or content.

There's a noticeable tendency (especially in B2B marketing) to address people like jargon-spouting robots. And what's worse is to structure that jargon around lazy assumptions about what buyers want.

Perpetuating this will help no one.

Time to get personal

Buyer personas can be extremely helpful for marketers and sales teams alike. It's important that, once agreed, the whole team has the opportunity to get to know their personas, to understand their buyers' needs and wants. We've had clients who have gone so far as to make their personas into life-size cardboard cut-outs in the corner of meeting rooms.

Having everyone familiar with the persona identities serves a dual purpose:

- Messaging targeted at genuine issues in human terms will generate better leads.
- Structuring the approach will provide an all-important consistency to your activity.

What is a persona?

A persona is a portrait of a hypothetical customer defined by typical, shared characteristics. They can be developed in a handful of ways, ideally a combination of the following:

- From research interviews with existing customers or a target sample of prospects.
- From your site analytics – where people have visited from, what keywords they used to find you and what they did once they were there.
- From social media research – listening software can provide insights into what potential customers are talking about.
- From experience – collaborative and desk-based research into who has typically bought the product in the past.

The purpose of pulling together these shared characteristics is to create a profile of a typical customer. Having a good idea of their experience, challenges and drivers will allow you to engage them with a message that's relevant and compelling enough to not only get noticed, but to persuade them that yours is the most appealing offer, over that of your competitor. This can be especially effective in a more commoditised market-place in which your USPs are more like SPs (i.e. not very unique).

So, how do you get started?

First things first, when would you need to create a persona? Well, any project that needs to appeal to a target customer with the aim of persuading them to take action, should really involve the creation of a persona. This spans a wide range of activities from targeted DM campaigns to online content and lead nurture programmes.

The best place to start is to look at how your product typically gets bought, and who is involved at the customer's end. Admittedly, in B2B marketing, this is not always such a straightforward answer. B2B purchases tend to represent a sizeable investment, both in company time and funds. Therefore, it's rare that a single individual will be responsible for the whole transaction. More often, more than one stakeholder is involved and each plays a distinct role and should be dealt with accordingly.

A good way to break up stakeholders is to use two groups:

1. Influencers – this could be a c-level or other senior team member who will influence a purchase decision. They could have used your company or product before or have an expertise in the subject matter.
2. Decision-makers – this is the main contact for the purchase, the contact willing to put his or her name to the investment. There is normally

more to this decision than a 'yes' or 'no', so all factors need to be accounted for.

Example: Imagine you're selling a piece of project management software for professional services firms, chances are that the decision-maker will come from the finance team or from operations. These teams would benefit from seeing how their resource is utilised and how projects are running. However, an influencer could be from the IT team who have a vested interest in how the system will integrate with existing tech systems. If the influencer doesn't approve of the proposed provider, the purchase could be blocked.

Target influencers and decision-makers using personas

Both influencers and decision-makers will need convincing that this is the right investment to make and now is the right time. In order to target them with the right message, it's important to put yourself in their shoes. Through your research you can approach them in one of two ways:

1. Work out what roles they occupy in your target business and think about what is most important to them in their role.

2. If you know what roles they play, apply general groupings to them governed by their interests and attitudes.

N.B. Your approach should also be tailored to the objectives of your activity.

Example: Again, using our software example from earlier, if you're sure the decision will be made by a committee and your objective is quickly getting to a decision or positive response then you may need to build a persona for a number of roles.
If your task is more around increased awareness and brand/product positioning (eg a lead nurture programme) then you should have a specific role you are targeting (i.e. CFO). However, not all CFOs are the same so you'll need to build personas based on different characteristics. In your campaign you could be talking to two types of CFO; one could be a tech-lover constantly on the lookout for new apps and systems, the other could be a complete technophobe. Using the same message to both would be a mistake as both are looking for different benefits and reassurances.

N.B. This is where it's important to apply an element of restraint. It could be tempting to build a persona for everybody in the organisation.

As a rule of thumb, try to keep it to around three to five personas.

Building a persona

We use a number of components to create a pen portrait of our personas. This is usually accompanied with an image of a business person to add a little bit of personality.

Components of a pen portrait:

- Profile: name, age, gender, professional experience, overview of attitudes and interests.

- Goals: what are their key priorities?

- Challenges: what are their pains? What issues do they face? What keeps them up at night?

- Emotional drivers: at a personal level, what are their motives?

- Common objectives: what's stopping them? What are their barriers to proceeding?

- How we can help: how are we going to solve problems and help achieve their goals? What should our messaging include?

Road testing our process

Taking the example used throughout, below is a grid plotting how personas could look for the two CFOs we're targeting with our hypothetical lead nurture campaign.

The objective of this campaign is to create content about the benefits of the software. We know our target job role, but we need to differentiate our message according to what we know about our audience from the research we've carried out.

Important to remember

A final point to bear in mind is that personas are hypothetical and as such not a definitive answer. They are, however, a really good guide to structure your activity and messaging. And the more research you can apply to their creation, the more accurate they can become.

	John, CFO (innovator)	Linda, CFO (ROI obsessed)
Profile	39 years old. Innovator. Loves technology and IT.	42 years old. All about ROI. Innovation needs to pay for itself.
Goals	Better insights into how the company runs. Streamline processes – save admin time.	Save the business money. Gain better insights into how the company runs and streamline processes.
Challenges	Reporting takes a long time and is almost immediately out of date.	Proving profitability of projects. Reporting is slow and frustrating. The process involves too many people.
Emotional drivers	Ambition to succeed: deliver a change to look good to the rest of the executives. Fear of failure: doesn't want to back a system which is overly complex.	Ambition to succeed: solve an issue and save the company money. Fear of failure: doesn't want to implement an inefficient process.
Common objections	Fear of complication: legacy system has data all over the place. Risk of buying from an unknown supplier.	Cost and time span of purchase. Fear of complication: legacy system has data all over the place.
How can we help?	Provide evidence (demos and trials) that this is the easiest to use. Show that key, real-time information can be analysed and reported quickly and easily – without specific training.	Show how implementing tech can cut time and save companies money. Show examples of how other companies have achieved ROI and cost savings on similar projects.

Persona pen portrait

Preliminary questions

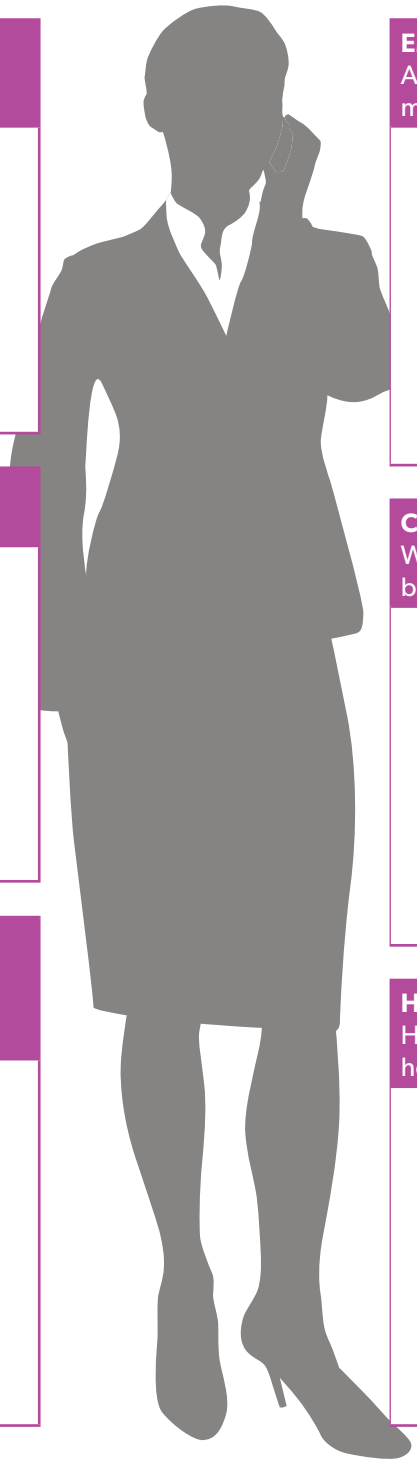
What's the objective of your campaign?

Who are you targeting? (What industries? What job roles within the target companies?)

What do you want them to do?

PROFILE
Age, professional experience, attitudes and interests.

EMOTIONAL DRIVERS
At a personal level, what are their motives?



GOALS
What are their key priorities?

COMMON OBJECTIONS
What's stopping them? What are the barriers to proceeding?

CHALLENGES
What are their pains?
What are the issues they face?
What keeps them up at night?

HOW CAN WE HELP?
How can we solve their problems and help achieve their goal?

Key learnings

1. Personas will allow you to **generate better leads** and provide a **consistency to your approach**
2. Creating personas applies to a **wide range of marketing activity**, from traditional **DM** to **online content**.
3. Do some **research** to inform your personas: **speak to existing customers**, interrogate your **site analytics**, your **social channels** and your **sales history**.
4. Think about your product or solution's **buying cycle – who influences it, and who makes the final decision.**
5. Always **bear in mind your campaign objectives**. These often affect how you create your personas.
6. Don't create too many personas. **Stick to three to five for starters.**
7. Ask the right questions. **Put yourself in their shoes**. Think about how you can **solve a problem**.
8. Allow everyone to get familiar with your personas. **They represent your customers**, after all.

Further reading

- *Email marketing: Designing for different personas*, Earnest
- *How to get inside your buyer's mind*, Earnest
- *Personas – The Beginner's Guide*, The UX Review
- *Why marketers are keeping B2B buyer personas in the closet*, The Content Marketing Institute
- *Buyer Personas: How to Gain Insight into Your Customer's Expectations, Align Your Marketing Strategies, and Win More Business*, Adele Revella (March 2015)
- *How to: Create buyer personas*, Axxon Media and B2B Marketing

About Earnest

Earnest was started in 2009 with a single purpose; to chase the humdrum out of B2B marketing.

Too long seen as the ugly cousin of B2C marketing, B2B doesn't need to be grey and boring. Business people respond to messages and creative ideas the same way consumers do. Why? Because business people are people too, they just happen to be at work.

We believe that with the right levels of emotion, relevant insight and eye-catching creative, your brand can have all the impact it needs to persuade buyers to choose you.

After all, that's why we all got into this, right?

earnest-agency.com
@earnestagency

About B2B Marketing

B2B Marketing is the comprehensive information resource for B2B marketers. Its mission is to provide practitioners with the information they need to perform better and achieve more, whatever sector of the B2B space they are operating in.

Launched in 2004 as B2B Marketing magazine, it has since evolved into a multi-faceted resource, delivering a broad range of content in a variety of different forms and formats.

Its key products are:

- Online community
- Magazine
- Awards
- Research and reports
- Training
- Events
- Membership

For more information on any of these products or services go to b2bmarketing.net or call +44(0)20 7014 4920

STAY ON TOP OF THE MARKETING EVOLUTION

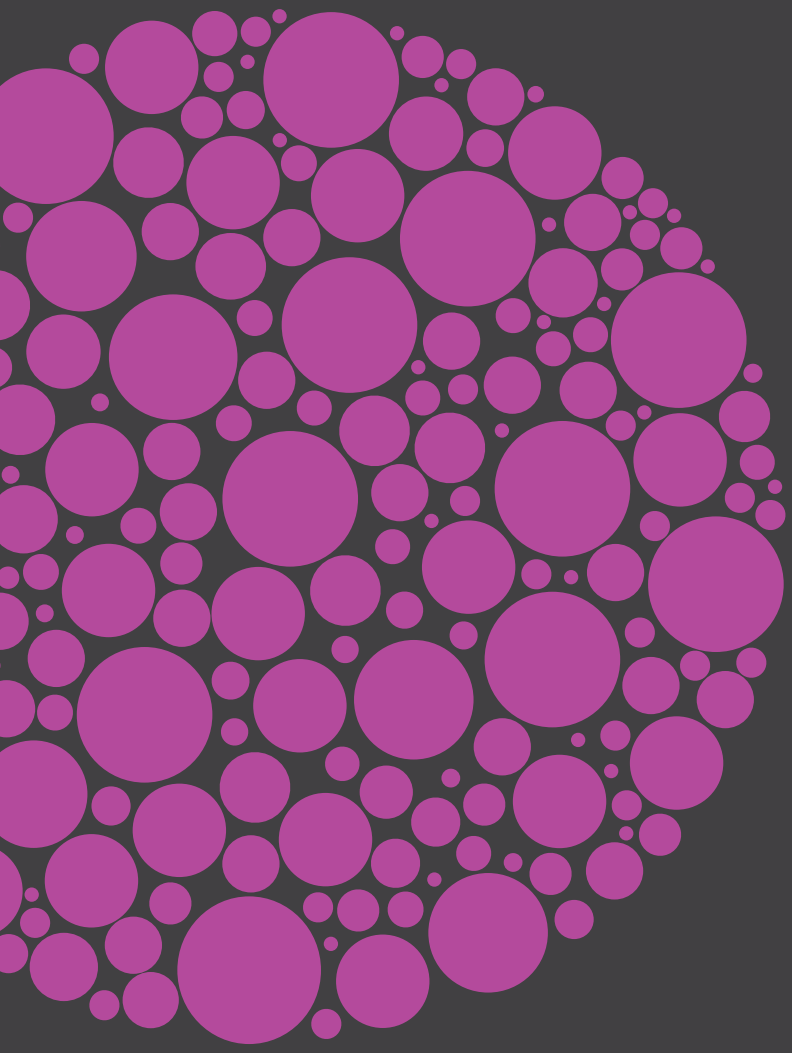
Corporate membership

B2B marketers have never had to be so multi-skilled, multi-tasked, and accountable to business objectives. Marketers need up-to-the-minute research, knowledge and insight to ensure they are not left behind.



Join us today

To find out more, contact our membership team:
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