

How to

Create Personas

For Your B2B Content Marketing Strategy

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MARKETING CLOUD

Introduction

Content marketers are never short on things to do. Whether it's determining the best time to promote to your social media accounts, what your next piece of content should be about, or how to track and optimize all that content you produce, we know that marketers have a lot to do. **However, everything you're doing will be fundamentally flawed if you don't know the audience for your content.** As a business with a content marketing strategy (blogs, white papers, screencasts, and more), it's crucial to understand your target audience and the types of content they want to consume. Whether you've been creating content for years or are just getting started, it's important to take a step back and think about where your content will be most effective, and how that plays a role in your brand development or sales pipeline. So, with that background, let's get started.

What Is a Persona?

In the broadest sense, a *persona* is simply a description of someone who's interested in your company, products, and services. A persona provides a detailed description of a fictional person who would buy your product or use your service. A persona describes their behaviors, job role, responsibilities, priorities, and personality traits; it puts human attributes to an abstract marketing description.



Our Company Sells B2B, Why Should I Care About Personas?

No matter whom you sell to or what industry you're in, a persona will give you a much better sense of what content is appropriate. For instance, if you know your sales team is selling primarily to CMOs at companies with 2,000 people or more, you want to develop much different content than if your team is selling to a marketing coordinator at a local 15-person software development company. By developing personas, you'll be able to get more value for the content you're creating, and you'll be able to test different types of content for the various personas you develop in your market. By creating an actual description and character for your marketing materials, you'll be far more capable of creating content that's compelling and meaningful to your target audience.

Beyond the core benefits described above, it's also highly beneficial to create content for *someone*, not everyone, as you'll get far more benefit per piece of content. For instance, by taking the time to understand the persona you're creating for, your team and your brand will be far more likely to make an impact. If that same person read a white paper or blog post targeted at everyone, it's less likely that content will be effective and push the person along in the sales funnel or give them a lasting impression of the brand. Creating content for someone rather than everyone also makes your content development efforts far easier. The idea of being everything to everyone and creating content that covers that spectrum is daunting. The idea of sitting down and writing a white paper targeted at a director level in a 500-person B2B software company is clearly more targeted, and also, easier.

What to Ask When Developing Personas

So, you're sold on the idea of creating personas; now, you actually need to sit down and develop a plan. It's important to think about the various aspects of this persona's life and what they consider important. Consider asking the following questions (if you haven't yet peeked ahead yet to the end of this guide, we've provided a Persona Builder using the questions below, which you can take and use to build your own):



Demographics

Demographic questions help you understand the commonly understood characteristics of your buyer. These cut-and-dry questions should help you understand high-level information about your buyer.

1. What is the person's age?
2. What is the person's level of education?
3. Does this person require a specific skill set, degree, certification, or other continuing education?
4. What is their title and where do they stand on the organizational chart?
    a. Do they report to someone or are they responsible for a team?
    b. How are they measured?
    c. Are they capable of making purchase decisions or do they require additional input?

Behavior

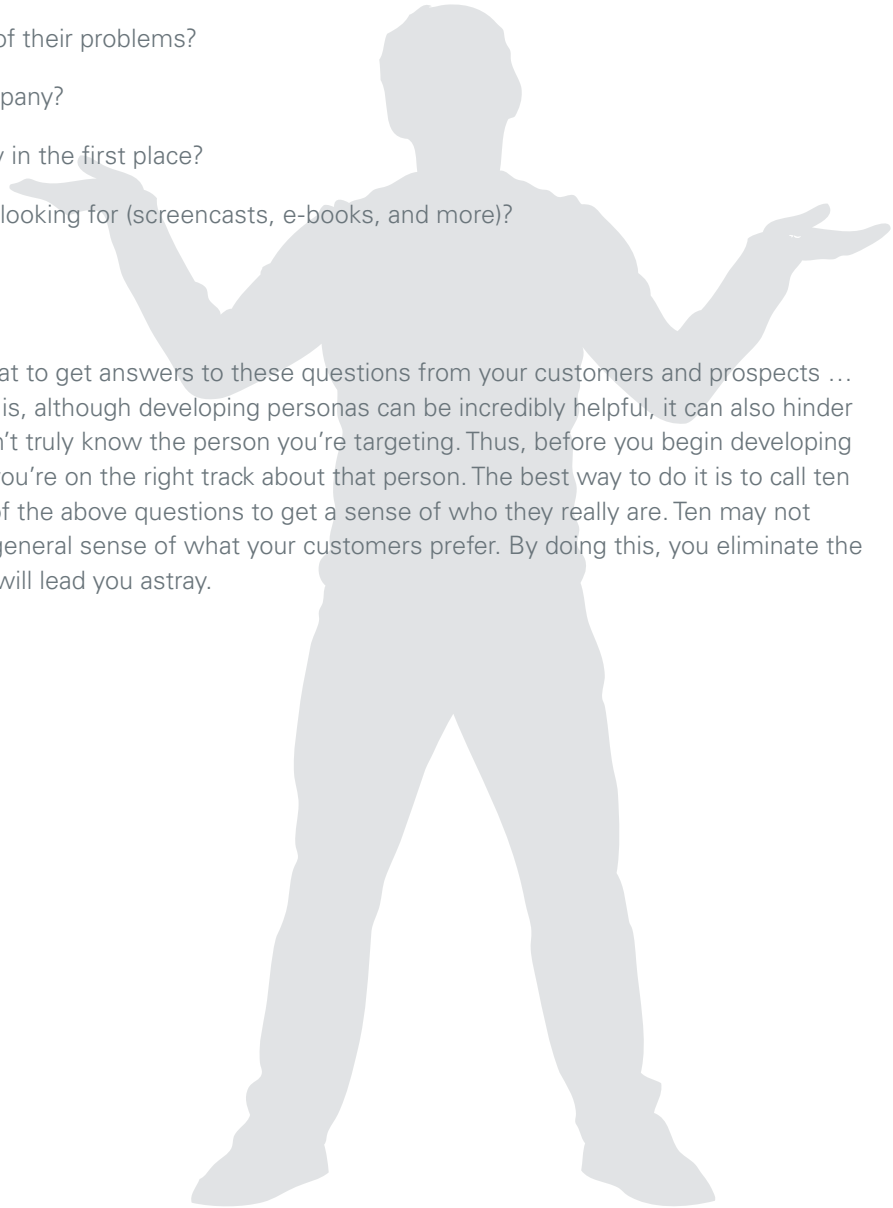
Behavior questions go beyond standard demographics to help you better understand the persona. These questions should help reveal your persona's likes, dislikes, problems, and responsibilities.

1. What are this person's most important daily responsibilities?
2. What is their routine when they get to the office?
3. What daily obstacles make this person's work life more difficult?
4. What would make life easier?
5. What does the person read on a daily basis?
6. Where do they get the information that helps them do their jobs that much better?

Company Interaction

This section is meant to help you understand how and why your prospects and customers interact with your company. This helps you understand what types of content to produce and in what format.

1. How would your product solve any of their problems?
2. How do they interact with your company?
3. Why do they come to your company in the first place?
4. What type of content is this person looking for (screencasts, e-books, and more)?



Figuring It All Out

You may be thinking that it would be great to get answers to these questions from your customers and prospects … if you actually knew them. And the truth is, although developing personas can be incredibly helpful, it can also hinder your content marketing efforts if you don't truly know the person you're targeting. Thus, before you begin developing personas for your company, make sure you're on the right track about that person. The best way to do it is to call ten of your customers and ask them some of the above questions to get a sense of who they really are. Ten may not seem like a lot, but it's enough to get a general sense of what your customers prefer. By doing this, you eliminate the potential for incorrect assumptions that will lead you astray.

Practical Examples

Now that you have some basic questions covered and you know how to go about getting the answers to those questions, let's take a look at some practical examples of how you can develop different types of personas.

For the example personas, the company that is using them is a software company that sells a product support management solution.



Persona One

Cindy—Product Support Manager

Cindy is a 35-year-old product support manager at a 100- to 500-employee software company. Cindy has an undergrad degree in computer science and ten years of technical experience in on-the-job environments. Cindy has advanced knowledge of the skills necessary to succeed at her job. In charge of the product support team, Cindy is the decision maker on the product support budget and interacts with other management team members to improve the entire customer experience.

Cindy usually starts her day at 8 a.m. by reviewing the product support queue and seeing if the level of open cases is reasonable. She also checks to see whether there are any cases that have been escalated up to her and require her immediate attention. She then goes about resolving advanced cases and working with her product support team to make sure they're staying up to date and hitting team goals. She also participates in management meetings throughout the week aimed at improving the customer experience. She also interacts frequently with other departments to make sure they're on track. Her biggest worries are trying to keep case times reasonable and her support team lean while serving an ever-growing customer base. She also struggles at times to keep her team on the same page in their approach and response to cases. In her spare time she reads generic industry articles from sites like TechCrunch, Mashable, and CNET.

Cindy interacts with our company by trying to learn and implement best practices on how to effectively run a product support team. She is also looking for tools that could help make her and her team's jobs easier. Cindy originally came to you because she was seeking these kinds of tips and is always on the lookout for solutions that are affordable and make sense for her team. This type of person is looking for guides, screencasts, and other strategic information on product support management. When she starts to consider us for her team, she is looking for product overview guides/ videos, ROI calculators, and other content that will show it is worth the investment.



Persona Two

Bill—Product Support Specialist

Bill is a 25-year-old product support specialist at a 100- to 500-employee software company. Bill majored in computer science as an undergraduate and since then has done online training to refine his skills to be the best he can at his job. Bill reports to a product support manager (Cindy) who monitors his performance and helps him grow his professional skill set.

Bill starts his day by coming in to the office around 8 a.m. and reviewing the previous night's submitted cases that were assigned to him. He figures out if any of them are high priority and tackles those first, then works through the rest of the cases in his queue. Throughout the day, Bill interacts with account managers for clients to gain a better understanding of the cases. He also reviews more technical resources if the case is above their knowledge level. Bill also meets with his team throughout the week to learn about their product and to perform team checkups. Most of Bill's obstacles to job success revolve around a lack of communication—whether it's between he and account managers, customers, or someone else. Such communication failures can really hurt Bill's performance. In his spare time he reads general tech articles on sites like Techcrunch and Mashable as well as industry-related articles.

Bill interacts with our company by looking to us for best practices on communicating with clients, building interoffice communication, and task management. He initially came to our company to learn how to do his job better and values us as a resource in that regard. This person is looking for blog posts, how-to, and other tactical advice on how to do his job better and advance his career.

Editor's note: *The above examples each follow the same general model of information and description but are clearly meant for different types of content development. By having these two basic personas, it would be possible to develop two unique sets of content (blog posts, videos, guides, and so on) that targets each.*

Summary

Personas are important for your entire company to understand your buyer. However, they are critically important for your content marketing team. By creating unique characters for the various marketing efforts you have in place, the effectiveness of your content will increase dramatically. Further, if you find that a persona isn't necessarily working, you can easily revise, rewrite content, and test different messages for each group. By understanding your target audience and creating content for someone, the effectiveness of your marketing efforts should increase substantially.

Can Content Marketing Help Me Get Started?

You bet! Oracle Marketing Cloud Content Marketing helps organizations capture and create original content in a branded hub for distribution to any marketing channel. If you're ready to kick-start your content marketing strategy and would like to see a demo of our software, visit **eloqua.com**.

Appendix A: B2B Persona Builder

Use this handy template to answer the important questions surrounding your personas. After you're done, you can write a one or two paragraph description of your persona using your answers, or simply keep it in this format! Either way, print this document and put it in a prominent place that you can reference when creating content.

Demographics

Name:_____ Age:_____ Title:_____

Education Level:_____

Skills, Certifications, Education Received: _____

_____

_____

Decision Maker? Y / N

Behavior

What are their daily responsibilities? _____

_____

_____

_____

What does their routine look like when they get to work?_____

_____

_____

_____

What daily obstacles make their life more difficult at work?_____

_____

_____

_____

What would make life easier?_____

_____

Appendix A: B2B Persona Builder (Continued)

What type of content do they like to read?

Where do they go for information that helps them do their job better?

Company Interaction

How would your product solve any of their problems?

How do they interact with your company?

Why did they come to your company in the first place?

What type of content is this person looking for?

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