

BUYER PERSONAS

MARKETING THROUGH THE VOICE OF YOUR BUYER

SPROUTCONTENT 
The Business of Conversation™





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INTRODUCTION

Just like the best journalists, listening is one of the greatest skills a marketer can have. And, now that every company can and should be a publisher, the crossover between marketing and journalism has never been more blurred. Like publishers, businesses must have a deep understanding of their audience to create the right content for them, at the right time. It's not a fluke when the content that a company publishes feels like it was written just for you! It's like they are in your head and understand exactly what you want and need.

That used to be true mostly for consumer goods companies that exhaustively studied their buyer. But today, the smartest B2B businesses are marketing not just to big corporate companies or industries through boring jargon and "techlish," but to the actual people who are making the decision to buy their products or services. These companies are breaking out of the old habit of talking to themselves, and taking the time to really understand the needs and challenges of their customers and answer their questions through helpful content.

How do they do this? By *developing buyer personas*.

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CHAPTER ONE

What is a buyer persona?

According to HubSpot, Buyer Personas are: “fictional, generalized representations of your ideal customers. They help you understand your customers (and prospective customers) better, and make it easier for you to tailor content to the specific needs, behaviors, and concerns of different groups.”

Buyer personas are not just traditional buyer profiles based on gathered demographics, but hypothetical archetypes of actual customers. They are in essence imaginary, still based on actual insights that are discovered in the interview and investigation process. Their names, images and personal details are the only things that are actually fictionalized.

A buyer persona is not just another marketing buzzword, but a useful and strategic tool that will help you create content that builds trust with your audience and lasting, meaningful relationships. Buyer personas set the foundation for your content marketing and inbound strategy and are essential to successfully developing content for the

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right people you are trying to reach. After all, how can you educate your buyers and lead them on their journey without knowing who they are and what they need?

Once you really get to know your buyers, what their challenges, needs and pain points are, creating content for them will be as easy as talking to a good friend. Taking the time to create researched buyer personas ensures that you're speaking through the voice of your buyer, not your CEO or copywriter.

Today, the buyer is in the driver's seat, and the companies that adapt to a culture of buyer understanding will be empowered to truly meet their customers' needs.

“We put a picture to our buyer personas and print them out before we create content, always referring back to the person behind the scenes, who is actually making a decision.”



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CHAPTER TWO

How do you create personas?

Buyer personas are created through actual research of and interviews with your target audiences. These interviewees can include a mix of current or past customers, internal teams, and researched prospects that might align with your target audience. Here are the essential first steps that will lead you in the right direction to creating buyer personas that are on target:

Step

1

IDENTIFY YOUR KEY PERSONAS

First, you must decide, who are the most important people involved not only in the buying or decision making process, but from the very beginning of the research and prospecting phase. This is your buyer's journey. Many companies make the big mistake of identifying their buyers as only the C-Suite. But is the CEO or CFO

the one identifying the need for a new solution, and the person actually seeking out the right information? Chances are they are not the ones hitting Google to find solutions. The CEO may identify the challenge and be the financial decision maker, but will likely assign the research phase to someone else.

“We always also try to focus on not just peoples’ job titles but their role in the decision. So, it’s not just the Marketing Director or the CFO, it’s the person who is making the buying decision.”

Identifying your true buyer personas upfront will save a lot of time and effort in the long run. We've worked with several companies that were certain who their personas were. As an example, one time a new client was sure that one of their top personas was the CIO of a particular type of company. Once we got into the investigation process, we identified that the CIO was the final decision maker, but not the one vetting companies or seeking the actual solutions.

There was someone in the middle of that process who was the researcher and initial facilitator of the discussion that was the key persona to target with great content. This realization changed their entire marketing approach and our entire content marketing and inbound strategy.

And, according to a study published by Google and Millward Brown Digital in March, 2015, nearly half of all B2B researchers are Millennials. So focusing on the C-Suite or only senior-level executives may not be the best buyer persona strategy.

While 64% of the C-suite have final say in decisions, so do 24% of the non-C-suite, 81% of which have a say in purchase decisions. So, if you're marketing to only the highest level executives, you're not reaching those who are looking for you.

Don't focus on titles. There's often no one-size-fits-all title structure in most industries. The important thing is to identify the different roles and layers in the research and decision making process. The Healthcare Compliance Manager in one company is the Director of Health Information Management in another. It's essential to think through the layers in your buying funnel and all of the decision makers involved.



Once you decide on this overall persona's role, give him/her a name, such as Compliance Catherine or Financial Qualifier Fred. This way they have a name and you know who they are, but you're not trapped by titles.

Start broad. Some companies could feasibly create 10 personas based on all of their industry verticals and the many people involved in their buying process. Starting with 3 key personas to start is a good foundation to build on. You can always get more granular as you embark on your content and inbound marketing strategy.

Pinpoint your interviewees. Think about your current and past customers who are ideal fits for these personas, as well as your internal subject experts, and set up interviews with 2-3 people per persona.

Step

2 DEVELOP STRATEGIC QUESTIONS

"A pain point is something about their job or a task that they are assigned to do that they are having a challenge with."

Your buyer persona interviews should uncover:

Who are they? While persons are not based on demographical data, some essentials help paint a picture of this person such as whether they skew male or female, education background, approximate age and where they are located.

What are their job responsibilities?

Detailed information about a person's job role and function is crucial for B2B businesses. Understanding your persona's job level, knowledge, goals, responsibilities and experience is essential for getting to know them and creating content that will address their needs and help them do their jobs better.



What are their challenges and needs? The main premise of content and inbound marketing isn't just about selling products or services, but solving a problem or fulfilling a need for someone. How does your offer help solve a problem in your buyer's day?

What are their perceived barriers? Why would they NOT choose a solution like yours? This "bad news" insight reveals what prevents buyers from choosing you over a competitor.

What are their decision criteria? What specifics about your product or service will buyers use to evaluate as they compare options?

Step

3 USE SOCIAL MEDIA FOR INSIGHTS

There are so many options out there when it comes to social media analysis that it can be hard to know where to start. Start with some of the research you have already conducted and look for holes. What kind of information are you lacking details about? Once you know what you are looking for within social media intelligence, the easier it is to navigate. A few tips:

- **Facebook Audience Insights** – A tool designed to help marketers learn more about their target audiences.
- **LinkedIn profile searches** – Search by company, industry, title and user groups. LinkedIn Navigator is a great tool if you want to go more in depth.
- **Twitter Analytics** – Measure engagement and learn how to make your Tweets more successful.
- **Followerwonk for Twitter** – [Followerwonk](#) has so many uses in inbound marketing, including growing your audience and reaching out to influencers. It also has a place in building buyer personas. Similar to how Facebook Audience Insights uncovers Facebook audience characteristics, Followerwonk helps you paint a picture of your Twitter followers.



SOCIAL MEDIA

KNOW WHAT YOU'RE LOOKING FOR

What kind of information are you lacking?



Who are they?



What are their job responsibilities?



What are their challenges and needs?



What are their perceived barriers?



What are their decision criteria?

EASY TO NAVIGATE



Facebook Audience Insights
a tool designed to help marketers learn more about their target audiences

LinkedIn Profile Searches
search by company, industry, title and user groups. LinkedIn Navigator is a great tool if you want to go more in depth



Twitter Analytics
measure engagement and paint a picture of your followers with **Followerwonk for Twitter**

Step

4 CONDUCT INTERVIEWS

Interview customers either in person or over the phone or via Skype or GoToMeeting. If you can, record the calls so you can concentrate on the interview rather than taking notes. Plus, it will give you a record to refer back to when developing the personas.

Step

5 DEVELOP PERSONAS

Following the actual conversations and research, you'll mine your interviews for key insights and organize the story that way. We use a fairly standard template for creating our actual buyer personas, and a handy tool from HubSpot: [Make My Persona](#).

Here's a visual sample of one page from a buyer persona:

Engineer Musheer

GOALS:

- Improve communication between departments
- Increase transparency to keep people on track and build trust between team members
- Optimize processes and shorten release cycle
- Deliver better services/products than competition
- Improve customer relations with faster, more flexible delivery
- Facilitate the move to Agile

CHALLENGES:

- *Logistics*: working with distributed teams in various time zones and environments
- *Education*: Explaining benefits of Agile and getting management's support
- *HR*: Working through fear of change to become a faster organization

COMMON OBJECTIONS:

- Location: "We prefer to work with regional vendors"
- Cost: "We will just work with someone in-house who is Agile Certified"
- Other Training Resources: "We will just take a course and figure it out."



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CHAPTER THREE

How do you put your buyer personas to work?

At SPROUT Content we feel that buyer personas are so important we can't work with a client without them. We've tried in the past, and the content eventually falls flat. Personas are the anchor that grounds the content and inbound strategy and prevents it from drifting into uncharted territory, or worse, sinking.

So, don't do all that work and then leave them hanging on the wall (or worse in your document files) collecting dust.

Here are a few specific ways to implement your buyer persona strategy:

1. Audit your existing website content to ensure you are speaking to each persona,

answering their questions and leading them through their journey effectively.

2. Develop your blog editorial calendar around topics they want to know about (include Persona as a column in your editorial calendar).

3. Connect with similar personas on social media channels.



1. Audit your existing website
2. Develop your blog editorial calendar
3. Connect with similar personas
4. Develop a lead gen campaign
5. Segment your contact lists
6. Create videos
7. Combine personas

4. Develop a lead generation campaign and ebook with a specific persona in mind.
5. Segment your contact lists by buyer persona.
6. Create videos with specific personas in mind.
7. Combine personas with lifecycle stages to map out content ideas.
8. If you're able to, create dynamic content (Smart Content for HubSpot users) so you can display different messages to people based on their persona.

Personas allow you to personalize your marketing for different segments of your audience. For example, instead of sending the same lead nurturing emails to everyone in your database, you can segment by buyer persona and tailor your messaging according to what you know about those different personas. The list goes on...

Next Steps

If you'd like to learn more about how buyer personas can dramatically improve your marketing, feel free to reach out and schedule a call. We'd be happy to talk to you and help start on your own buyer persona journey and create more strategic focused inbound marketing. Your customers will thank you.

Contact SPROUT Content today to get started on your own

BUYER PERSONA JOURNEY





ABOUT SPROUTCONTENT

The Business of Conversation™

SPROUT Content helps businesses grow through effective content marketing. We are passionate about helping businesses understand they have an interesting story to tell and helping them tell it to their audience. We believe that strategic, purposeful and interesting content can make a great impact on a business.

We want to help establish every business we work with as a source of valuable information their customers will trust and want to read, subscribe to and share.

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