The Beginner's Guide to

Buyer Personas
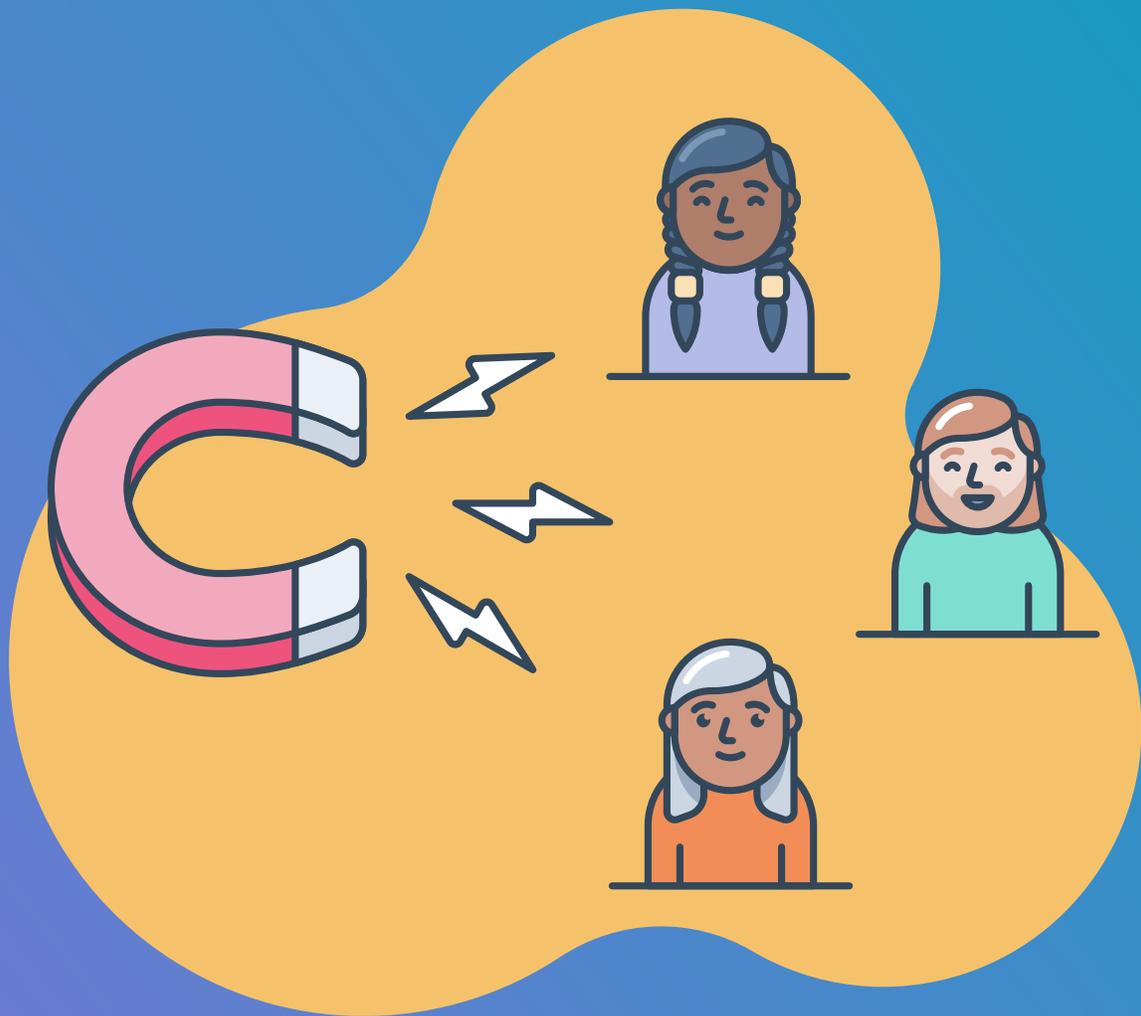
HubSpot

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Introduction

Introduction

How well do you really know your ideal customers?

You won't be able to position what you're selling to meet customers' (and potential customers') needs without knowing who they are.

How well do you know your ideal customers' backgrounds, their goals, and their challenges? How well do you understand their interests and needs? Do you know how old they are? Where they went to school? Whether they have kids? What a day-in-the-life looks like?

These questions may sound specific, but here's the thing ...

Creating very specific buyer personas can dramatically improve your business results.

Without knowing the answers to questions like these, it's difficult for a business to create an effective strategy to attract, sell to, and delight more of those types of people. In order to grow, you need to understand your ideal customers inside and out and integrate that research across your entire business.

Here, you'll learn all about personas in more detail: what they are, how you can use them, and how to create them.

What Is a Buyer Persona?

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Finance Manager Melonie.

Landscaper Larry.

Caregiver Cassy.

These names refer to personas: fictional, generalized representations of real people. By grouping people into persona categories, it's much easier for marketers, product designers, salespeople, and services people to tailor their content, messaging, product development, and services to different groups of people.

You might have heard personas referred to more specifically as "buyer personas" or "marketing personas" by marketers, or even "customer personas" or "user personas" by product designers. Regardless who in your business is using them, it's important to remember that personas aren't just for marketing. They're not one of those one-off exercises your marketing team does, only to promptly forget about them several weeks later. Implement your personas across your entire funnel strategy, and let everyone in the organization know who they are -- from Marketing to Product to Sales to Services.

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 types of buyers.

What Is a Buyer Persona?

The strongest buyer personas are based on market research as well as on insights you gather from your actual customer base -- through surveys, interviews, and so on. We'll get more into how to create personas later.

Depending on your business, you could have as few as one or two personas, or as many as 10 or 20. You can use them to inform everything from writing more effective copy to developing better products.

Why Personas Matter to Marketing

At the most basic level, personas allow you to personalize or target 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.

If you take the time to create negative personas -- the people that aren't a great fit for your business -- you'll have the added advantage of being able to segment out the "bad apples" from the rest of your contacts, which can help you achieve a lower cost-per-lead and cost-per-customer (and see higher sales productivity).

When combined with lifecycle stage (i.e. how far along someone is in your sales cycle), buyer personas also allow you to map out and create highly targeted content.

How to Research Buyer Personas

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Buyer personas are created through research, surveys, and interviews of your target audience. That includes a mix of customers, prospects, and those outside of your contact database who might align with your target audience. Here are some practical methods for gathering the information you need to develop personas:

★ <u>Interview customers.</u> Interview customers -- and potential customers -- either in person or over the phone, to discover what they like about your product or service. Ask questions about their job role and title, what a typical day-in-the-life looks like (both at work and outside of work), what tools they use in their job, what their challenges are, how they learn new information or acquire new skills, where they're from, how they search for information on the internet, and so on. Here's a list of 20 questions to ask during a persona interview to help guide you.

★ <u>Look for behavioral trends.</u> Look through your contacts database to uncover trends about how certain leads or customers find and consume your content.

★ <u>Optimize forms for your persona.</u> 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.

★ <u>Talk to your sales team.</u> Consider your sales team's feedback on the leads they are interacting with most. What types of sales cycles does your sales team work with? What generalizations can they make about the different types of customers you serve best?

How to Research Buyer Personas

How to Find Interviewees for Researching Buyer Personas

One of the most critical steps to establishing your buyer persona(s) is finding some people to speak with to suss out, well, who your buyer persona is. That means you'll have to conduct some interviews to get to know what drives your target audience.

But how do you find those interviewees? There are a few sources you should tap into:

Customers

Your existing customer base is the perfect place to start with your interviews, because they've already purchased your product and engaged with your company. At least some of them are likely to exemplify your target persona(s).

Reach out to both "good" and "bad" customers. You don't just want to talk to people who love your product and want to spend an hour gushing about you (as good as that feels). Customers who are unhappy with your product will show other patterns that will help you form a solid understanding of your personas. For example, you might find that some of these "bad" customers have bigger teams and thus need a collaboration element to the product. Or you may find that "bad" customers find your product too technical and difficult to use. In both cases, you learn something about your product and what your customers' challenges are.

How to Research Buyer Personas

Customers (cont.)

Another benefit to interviewing customers is that you may not need to offer them an incentive like a gift card (a typical incentive for participating in surveys or interviews). Customers usually like being heard, and interviewing them gives them a chance to tell you about their world, their challenges, and what they think of your product. Customers also like to have an impact on the products they use, so you may find that, as you involve them in interviews like this, they become even more loyal to your company. When you reach out to customers, be clear that your goal is to get their feedback and that it's highly valued by your team.

Prospects

Be sure to balance out your interviews with people who have not purchased your product or know much about your company. Your current prospects and leads are a great option here because you already have their contact information. Use the data you do have about them (i.e. anything you've collected through lead generation forms or website analytics) to figure out who might fit into your target personas.

How to Research Buyer Personas

Referrals

You'll probably also need to rely on some referrals to talk to people who may fit into your target personas, particularly if you're heading into new markets or don't have any leads or customers yet. Reach out to your network -- co-workers, existing customers, social media contacts -- to find people you'd like to interview and get introduced to. It may be tough to get a large volume of people this way, but you'll likely get some very high-quality interviews out of it. If you don't know where to start, try searching on LinkedIn for people who may fit into your target personas and see which results have any connections in common with you. Then reach out to your common connections for introductions.

Third-Party Networks

For interviewees who are completely removed from your company, there are a few third-party networks you can recruit from. Craigslist allows you to post ads for people interested in any kind of job, and UserTesting.com allows you to run remote user testing (with some follow-up questions). You'll have less control over sessions run through UserTesting.com, but it's a great resource for quick user testing recruiting.

How to Research Buyer Personas

3 Tips for Recruiting Interviewees

As you reach out to potential interviewees, here are a few tips for getting a better response rate:

★ <u>Use incentives.</u> While you may not need them in all scenarios (e.g. customers who already want to talk to you), incentives give people a reason to participate in an interview if they don't have a relationship with you. A simple gift card (like an Amazon or Visa credit card) is an easy option.

★ <u>Be clear this isn't a sales call.</u> This is especially important when dealing with non-customers. Be clear that you're doing research and that you just want to learn from them. You are not getting them to commit to a one-hour sales call; you're getting them to commit to telling you about their lives, jobs, and challenges.

★ <u>Make it easy to say yes.</u> Take care of everything for your potential interviewee. Suggest times, but be flexible; allow them to pick a time right off the bat; and send a calendar invitation with a reminder to block off their time.

How to Research Buyer Personas

20 Questions to Ask in a Buyer Persona Interview

It's time to conduct the interview! After the normal small talk and thank-yous, it's time to jump into your questions. There are several different categories of questions you'll want to ask in order to create a complete persona profile.

The following questions are organized into those categories, but feel free to customize this list and remove or add more questions that may be appropriate for your target customers.

Role

1) What is your job role? Your title?

2) How is your job measured?

3) What does a typical day look like?

4) What skills are required to do your job?

5) What knowledge and tools do you use in your job?

6) Who do you report to? Who reports to you?

Company

7) In which industry or industries does your company work?

8) What is the size of your company (revenue, employees)?

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Goals

9) What are you responsible for?

10) What does it mean to be successful in your role?

Objectives

11) What are your biggest challenges?

Watering Holes

12) How do you learn about new information for your job?

13) What publications or blogs do you read?

14) What associations and social networks do you participate in?

Personal Background

15) Describe your personal demographics (if appropriate, ask their age, whether they're married, if they have children).

16) Describe your educational background. What level of education did you complete, which schools did you attend, and what did you study?

17) Describe your career path. How did you end up where you are today?

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Shopping Preferences

18) How do you prefer to interact with vendors (e.g. email, phone, in person)?

19) Do you use the internet to research vendors or products? If yes, how do you search for information?

20) 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?

The #1 Tip for a Successful Persona Interview

The follow up question to pretty much every question in the above list should be "why?"

Through these interviews, you're trying to understand your customers' or potential customers' goals, behaviors, and what drives them. But keep in mind that people are not always great at reflecting on their own behaviors to tell you what drives them at their core. You don't care that they measure the number of visits to their website, for example. What you care about is that they measure that because they need a number they control to show their boss they're doing a good job.

Start with a simple question -- one of our favorites is, "What is your biggest challenge?" Then spend a good amount of time diving deeper into that one question to learn more about that person. You learn more by asking "why?" than by asking more superficial questions.

How to Create a Buyer Persona
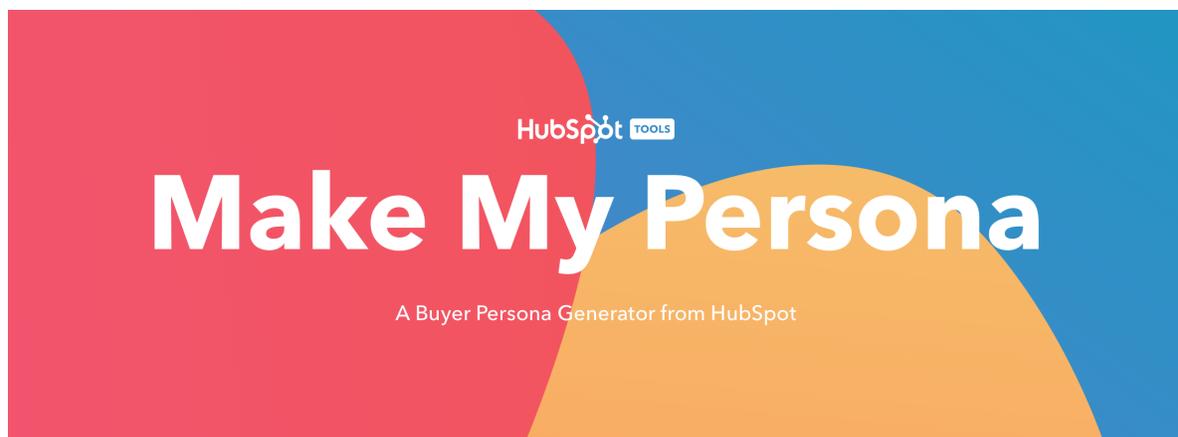
How to Create a Buyer Persona

Buyer persona research? Check.

Buyer persona creation? …

Once you've gone through the research process, you'll have a lot of meaty, raw data about your potential and current customers. But what do you do with it? How do you distill all of that so it's easy for everyone to understand all the information you've gathered?

The next step is to use your research to identify patterns and commonalities from the answers to your interview questions, develop at least one primary persona, and share that persona with the rest of the company.

Use our free Make My Persona tool to organize the information you've gathered about your persona(s) into a clean, actionable PDF that you can easily share with you team for collaboration.

HubSpot TOOLS

Make My Persona

A Buyer Persona Generator from HubSpot

How to Create a Buyer Persona

The Make My Persona tool will walk you through a series of questions to answer about your persona, alongside reasoning behind why each piece of data is important to your overall strategy.
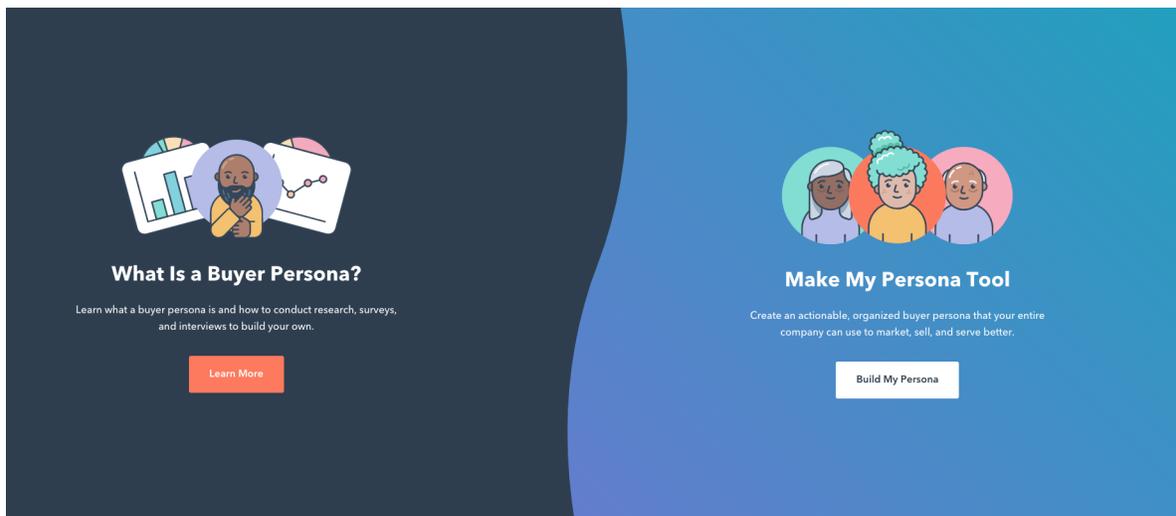
You can skip any questions you're not ready to answer and edit both your responses and persona layout in the final editor view. From there, you can download your persona as a PDF or generate a shareable link for internal collaboration.

It's that simple. To get started, visit:

hubspot.com/make-my-persona

How to Use a Buyer Persona

How to Use a Buyer Persona

There are a lot of ways you can use your buyer personas to fuel better marketing, sales, and service initiatives.

The interviews, the surveys, the extensive research … the fancy PDF you put together to properly unveil your personas in all their glory. It's all behind you now. But once you've taken the time to create buyer personas for your business, don't let them go to waste.

There are a number of different ways to rework your strategy with your personas in mind. To help you better understand the value of the resource you've just created, check out the game-changing ideas below:

1) Reallocate your ad spend. After creating your personas, you'll have a better understanding of where your personas spend their time online. And -- ideally -- you'll also know what their favorite online publications and news sources are. Armed with this knowledge, you can audit where you're currently spending resources (e.g. on Facebook ads, retargeting, etc.) and reallocate those resources based on your persona research.

2) Reallocate your human resources. The same principle can be applied to personnel: If you know the majority of your audience is on Instagram, you'll want to make sure you -- or someone on your team -- is regularly monitoring that network and engaging with people who belong to your target persona. The goal here isn't to hunt people down -- instead, you just want to make sure you're hanging out where you're personas are hanging out.

How to Use a Buyer Persona

3) Use language that your persona is familiar with. Once you know how the people in your different persona groups communicate, start speaking their language. Use the buzzwords they use. Use the slang they use. This will help to ensure your message resonates.

4) Segment your list of contacts by buyer persona. List segmentation is the key to delivering more personalized experiences to your leads and customers. Once you've segmented your list by buyer persona, you'll be able to do all sorts of fun stuff.

5) Create a piece of content with a specific persona in mind. Creating buying personas gives you an enhanced knowledge of what your ideal customers like and respond to, as well as what they struggle with. Using those insights, you can create a targeted ebook or blog post that solves a common problem -- or answers a common question -- that a particular persona has. And if you've segmented your contacts list by buyer persona, guess what? You can easily share that piece of content with just the group of contacts who you know will be interested in it.

6) Audit your existing content for persona alignment. Perform an audit of all your content and try to figure out which persona each piece aligns with. If you discover content that doesn't align with any of your personas, you might to consider updating it or -- if it's had zero success in generating leads -- just get rid of it. At the end of the day, to attract the right people, you need to create the right content.

How to Use a Buyer Persona

7) Combine personas with lifecycle stages to map out content ideas. In addition to targeting content according to personas, you can target content according to another dimension: lifecycle stage. Lifecycle stage refers to how far along someone is in your sales cycle (and how close they are to making a purchase). By adding this dimension to the mix, you can ensure that you're not only creating the right content for the right people, but that you're also creating it for them at the right time.

8) Optimize landing pages for personas. When you offer up a new piece of targeted content, make sure that the accompanying landing page conveys to your persona -- in their language -- how that content can help them solve a problem or add value to their lives.

9) Use dynamic content to tailor your website to different personas. Say goodbye to the one-size-fits-all website. With dynamic content, you can display different messaging to different people based on what persona you have them assigned to.

10) Do some co-marketing with companies that your personas follow. Whether it's a webinar, a co-written ebook, or simply a guest blog post, working with other businesses that you know a particular persona likes and respects can score you some serious street cred.

Thanks for Reading