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MINUTE MARKETER

Customer Personas

7 tactics for using personas to
connect with your target buyers

30-Minute Marketer

Customer Personas: 7 tactics for using personas to connect with your target buyers

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Customer Personas: 7 tactics for using personas to connect with your target buyers

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TACTICS YOU CAN LEARN OVER LUNCH

Welcome to *30-Minute Marketer* – a resource from MarketingSherpa featuring bite-sized tips for busy marketers.

In this report, we show you how to use customer personas to tailor your marketing efforts.

Researching and profiling the triggers and behaviors of prospects who become customers is critical for attracting and retaining future customers. If you want to connect and engage with customers and potential customers, you must target your message to their interests and needs throughout the customer engagement cycle. How? You need a roadmap to help plan your advertising, business development, lead generation, and nurturing buyer personas.

In this report, we'll show you:

- The difference between personas and demographics
- Questions you must ask in creating personas
- Tools that can help you gather insight
- Why interviews can be a valuable resource

We know you're in a hurry, so let's get started. We're eager to share these tips on how you can create helpful customer personas!

Bobbi Dempsey
Editor, *30-Minute Marketer*

About *30-Minute Marketer*

MarketingSherpa's *30-Minute Marketer* is designed with you, the busy marketer, in mind. We provide quick, simple tips that you can put into action right away.

For each *30-Minute Marketer*, we scour the vast MECLABS library of marketing research, from MarketingSherpa case studies and benchmark reports, to MarketingExperiments optimization tests and analysis. We highlight tips to help improve your marketing performance right now ... or, at least, by the time you're done with lunch.

As noted in the [MarketingSherpa 2012 Inbound Marketing Handbook](#), a buyer persona is a detailed profile representing an actual, real-life group of your target audience. This group's common interests, motivations, expectations, demographic and other behavioral characteristics all go into filling these profiles with enough depth and breadth to make them useful for marketing purposes.

You create a profile of a key segment of your customers as if they were one person. For instance: "Steve" might be a white, 41-year-old male with a college degree and an income between \$75,000 and \$90,000. He might also be a sports fan who buys your product each month.

Buyer personas help you identify the key traits of your best, most valuable customers, so you can then identify and attract more of the same. In short, understanding your current customers is what will help you sell to new customers. This is what it means to build a customer-centric business.

Buyer personas go beyond simply using demographics to develop a target market. Where a target market would help you define list parameters for an email marketing campaign, buyer personas would dictate what content you deliver to that particular group.

By identifying customer traits and behaviors, you will become well-equipped to deliver meaningful content and experiences. The more specific you can be with your personas, the better equipped you will be to develop marketing programs.

"In today's market, it is essential for all marketing communications to be focused on the buyer, not the organization," said Jen Doyle, Senior Research Manager, MECLABS, in the MarketingSherpa article, ["Content Marketing: 21 Ideas for Planning, Creating and Leveraging Content from Your Webinars."](#)

Buyers do not want to be addressed as a mass audience, but as individuals with unique needs, concerns, interests and values. A traditional, 'one-size-fits-all' approach will not be effective."

"By establishing buyer personas, organizations are enabled to deliver unique content to various personas that will attract and nurture new and existing leads."

Tactic #1: Follow a basic plan

This plan, outlined in the [MarketingSherpa 2012 Inbound Marketing Handbook](#), provides a basic plan that can help you get started.

Step 1: Identify Your Audience Segments

The first step is to identify your audience segments. Segmenting groups will help you determine content types, and topics that are most relevant to these targeted segments.

- Who are your customers?
- Who are they as individuals? What are the common denominators among them?
- What are the demographics for these audience segments?
- What are the behavioral attributes for these segments?
- What assumptions are shared by your audience?

Step 2: Define Their Needs

Identifying needs is another way of understanding the underlying pain points.

- What problems, struggles or challenges do they have?
- What tasks are they trying to accomplish?
- What do they need?
- What do they want?
- What are the trends within their industries?
- What motivates them?

Step 3: Define Their Online Behaviors

The third step gets into their online behaviors.

Search behavior

- What does each segment search for online?
- What are the volumes for these queries and query clusters?
- What are some related queries to the keywords I've considered?

Social behavior

- Which social media sites do your prospects and customers prefer to use?
- What are they talking about on social networks?
- How are they using social media?
- When and how do they make recommendations to others?

Content behavior

- How do they discover, consume and share content?
- What are their content preferences?

- What content is downloaded the most? Shared the most?

Step 4: Define Their Interests

Internal analytics plays a part in this step. You want to figure out tipping points for moving customers through the buying process. Do this by studying what has already worked.

- What would most strongly influence this audience to accept my message, my content?
- What influences them to move ahead to the next stage in the customer engagement cycle?

Step 5: Define their Turn-offs

Again, internal analytics plays a part in this step. Where are you losing them online? How are you failing to get them to respond?

- What are their five most predictable points of resistance?
- What are three major reasons my audience would not want to do what I want them to do?
- What is preventing them from moving ahead to the next stage in the customer engagement cycle?

Step 6: Create Your Composite Inbound Buyer Personas

You should have enough data to create between three and seven personas. Three is the bare minimum. If there are fewer, you risk polarizing your research and making it too one-sided; any more, and you risk duplication and diminishing returns.

To verify that you have, in fact, created composite inbound buyer personas, you should be able to complete (in detail) these sentences below for each of your personas:

- My persona's name is:
- Her age bracket is:
- Her level of education is:
- Her title is:
- She wants to address these problems or accomplish these tasks:
- Her motivations are:
- Her biggest areas of resistance are:
- The words she uses to describe her pain points are:
- In terms of social media usage, she:
- She prefers this type of content:
- Other decision makers involved in her buying process are:

Tactic #2: Choose the right tools for the job

It isn't easy to work through these persona questions. But doing so becomes more manageable if you know where to obtain the information. Here are some examples of free and paid tools to collect, aggregate and analyze this information. (These are not necessarily recommendations, just examples of the types of tools available.)

Web analytics tools

- Google Analytics, Yahoo! Web Analytics
- Google Webmaster Tools, Bing Webmaster Tools
- Alexa

Search and keyword research tools

- Google Insights, Google AdWords Keyword Tool
- SEMRush, Keyword Discovery, Wordtracker, Wordstream, Keyword Discovery, TrafficEstimate.com

Demographic tools

- Quantcast
- Compete
- Facebook Ads

One-to-one interviews

- Customer service reps
- Sales people
- Customers (phone interviews) – mix of old and new, best and worst, satisfied and dissatisfied
- Prospects

Social media tools

- Klout
- SocialMention
- Kontagent
- Kissmetrics
- Mixpanel

- PeerIndex
- CrowdBooster
- Twitalyzer
- RapLeaf
- Simplify360
- Social CRM

Tactic #3: Align personas to the engagement cycle

Remember, the purpose of these personas is to aid you in crafting engagement strategies for your SEO and social media programs, including content creation efforts for webpages, blogs and social media.

So, once you have developed your personas, you need to determine how you could use marketing channels to interact with these personas during each stage of the customer engagement cycle.

As an example, the chart below, from the [MarketingSherpa 2012 Inbound Marketing Handbook](#), may help give you some ideas for inbound marketing channels.

EXAMPLE: WORKSHEET TO ALIGN PERSONAS TO THE CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT CYCLE

Persona:					
Task Objective/problem to address:					
	Awareness	Consideration	Inquiry	Purchase	Retention
<i>What she'll do</i>					
<i>What we'll do (at present and in future)</i>					

Tactic #4: Tie objectives to personas

You should have some detailed objectives as to what you want to accomplish with your marketing efforts. These should be measurable metrics, such as the number of visitors to your website, search engine ranking positions or conversion rate.

You can then filter these objectives through your personas, paying particular attention to the persona's task objective or problem. Working through the objective in light of your inbound buyer personas often sparks specific actions you need to take and resources you need to assign.

More importantly, taking this step acts as a safety measure, guarding you against insufficient consideration and planning. The worksheet below from the *2012 Inbound Marketing Handbook*, provides some examples.

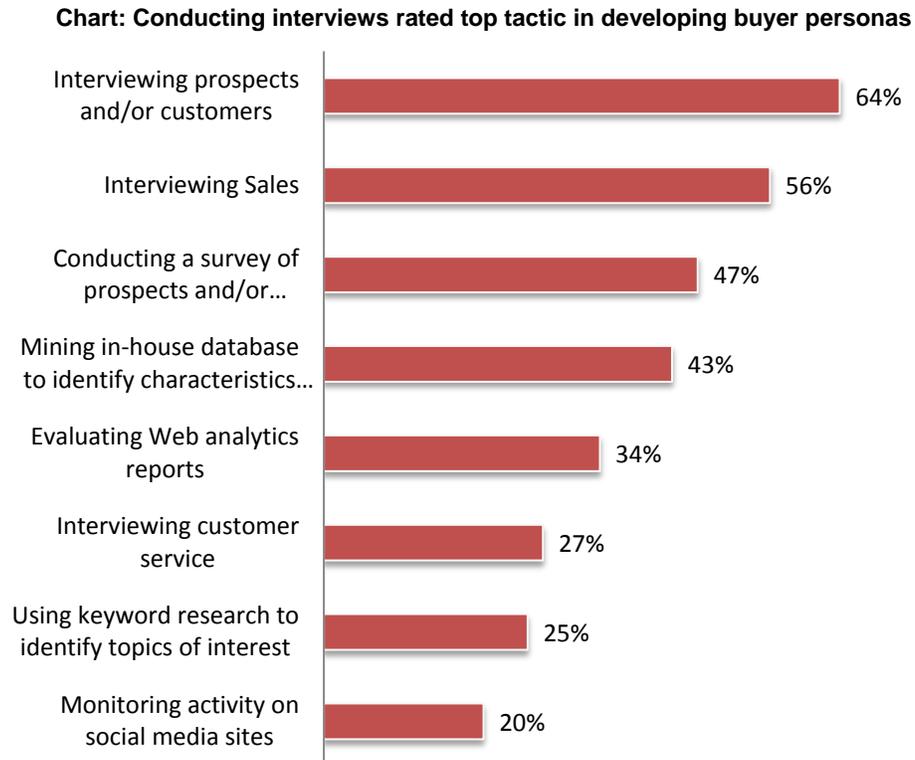
EXAMPLE: WORKSHEET TO TIE OBJECTIVES TO PERSONAS

Persona: Becky Beginner	
Becky's objective	I want to take piano lessons
Her objective framed as a question	Where can I take piano lessons in Boston?
Our objective	Increase traffic by 25% in 6 months
What we need Becky to do	Find us in SERPs Click through to us from a link
Sample search queries she'll use	Piano lessons near Boston Where to take piano lessons in Boston Need piano teacher in Boston
Why she'll do it	Our meta description is clear, compelling and keyword-rich. When she reads this snippet in search results, her underlying question is answered. This compels her to click through on our search listing. Our webpage is optimized (title tag, code components) with the keywords she uses in her search queries. Moreover, we have been adding new content every week via blog posts that address her secondary questions and concerns. Our webpage has been linked by quite a few authoritative domains, which has increased the importance of this page on search engines.
Success metrics	# of unique visitors Keyword performance and ranking Unique search terms driving traffic

Tactic 5: Conduct interviews to gather insight

Interviews are a valuable tool in helping you develop your buyer personas. As the chart below from the [MarketingSherpa 2011 B2B Marketing Benchmark Report](#) shows, 64% of B2B marketers rated it as the most effective tactic in developing personas. You should get feedback from your key customer-facing employees as well as your direct prospects and customers.

CHART: MOST EFFECTIVE TACTICS IN DEVELOPING BUYER PERSONAS



Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa B2B Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded June 2011, N=1,745

Interview with Sales

1. What have you found to be the top reasons why prospects seek our products/services?
2. What barriers exist in their decision-making process?
3. What objections do you commonly have to overcome?
4. What are their most important job responsibilities and challenges?
5. How do they measure success?
6. Who are our best and worst customers? Why? (Be sure to get names and contact information.)

7. What are the common traits shared by the best customers? By the worst customers?
8. Is there anything else I should have asked?

Interview with Customer Service

1. Describe the most common expectations of new and existing customers.
2. What problems do our customers commonly encounter with our products/services?
3. What primary concerns do they most frequently voice?
4. What are their most important job responsibilities and challenges?
5. Who are our best and worst customers? Why? (Be sure to get names and contact information.)
6. What are the common traits shared by the best customers? By the worst customers?
7. Is there anything else I should have asked?

Interview with Customers (Best and Worst)

1. What are your most important job responsibilities and challenges?
2. How do you measure success?
3. What originally motivated you to look at our service or solution?
4. What causes delays in your purchasing decisions, if anything?
5. What are your typical key concerns during the decision-making process?
6. Why did you choose us over another company?
7. Is there anything else I should have asked?

Interview with Prospect

1. What are your most important job responsibilities and challenges?
2. How do you measure success?
3. What has motivated you to consider our service or solution?
4. What (if anything) has prevented you from purchasing our product in the past?
5. What are your key concerns for your purchase decision?
6. What are your expectations for our product/service?
7. Is there anything else I should have asked?

In the MarketingSherpa blog post, "[B2B Marketing: Embracing customer centricity](#)," Jen Doyle, Senior Research Manager, MECLABS, recommends getting your prospects and customers on the phone. "Ask them directly about their interests, motivations, challenges, etc.

Ask them what types of content they want, and what format. Be sure to be in contact with best and worst prospects. You will want to be able to distinguish the differences that exist between these two groups."

Tactic #6: Use testing to learn about your customers

When trying to better understand your customers, testing the best approach is an important part of the process. Asking site visitors or contacts to choose their own personas from among several very detailed, specific options can be an effective strategy, as indicated in the MarketingExperiments blog post, "[The pitfalls of personas? They're no substitute for a clear value proposition.](#)"

The key is to engage the visitor with a powerful headline that communicates the value proposition and highlights key benefits to the user.

Tactic #7: Tailor your efforts with your personas in mind

Once you have developed buyer personas, you must use them to your advantage by using that information to guide your marketing efforts. In the MarketingSherpa article, "[How to Use Personas to Lift Revenue 500% in 7 Easy Steps](#)," the team at H2O+, a skin-care products retailer, identified three buyer personas and then came up with ways to sell to those three target groups.

- Persona #1: Amenity referral, aka 'Julie'

H2O+ had developed hotel-amenity relationships which put H2O+ branded amenities like shampoo, lotions, conditioners and soaps into bathrooms in each hotel room. The relationships encourage product trials by hotel customers who may then order online.

"Interesting for us, the consumer that we found most often to be doing that definitely had a different profile than an existing consumer," said Jim McLaughlin, Director Business Development, H2O+, "In the case of an amenity referral, her objective is to buy shampoo. While we didn't have a hair-care section [of our website], it was sort of a sub-category of our spa brand, we created a unique section for hair care, and gave it primary navigation."

- Persona #2: Mandarin Chinese consumer, aka 'Soo'

H2O+ is popular in East Asia, particularly mainland China and Hong Kong, says McLaughlin.

"[Soo's] preferences are very different from a traditional domestic customer or an amenity referral. She buys [premium-priced] facial skin-care products, and maybe will venture every once in a while into a bath and body category," says McLaughlin. "What we've learned, though, from some various surveys, interviews, is that a large percentage of them are college students, Chinese college students."

The facial skin-care products that interest Soo are not typically sold by H2O+ in the United States. To this, she says, “But understanding we had that consumer, we really augmented our assortment online to include those things. This is a merchandising decision we’ve made based on a persona, and that certainly paid off for us because we do very well in those products that are very niche ethnic products.”

- Persona #3: Legacy customer, aka ‘Cathy’

Cathy is more likely to have discovered H2O+ in a retail store. She has been a customer for 10 years and comes to the website to get more of all of her favorite products.

“75% of her purchases are in the bath and body category and 25% of her products are in facial skin care,” says McLaughlin. “A lot of times, there are two or three products on her list that she always buys, and eventually she could find another product and go away, just by boredom. What you try to do is get her to try new things. So, in terms of retention for that consumer is to try to cross-sell her, ideally into facial skin care. That gives us a higher average ticket.”

After developing these personas, H2O+ redesigned its website, completely changing the aesthetic feel and navigation based on the three personas McLaughlin and his team had developed.

“It’s a tough balance because you’ve identified three consumers -- one of them buys 75% skin care, one of them buys no skin care, yet the other one buys 75% bath. These are very different categories in the way they’re marketed,” says McLaughlin. “We try and balance the communications such that at any given time we are presenting a mix of skin and bath, not that we don’t ever do one or the other. We try to cross-merchandise to the extent we can.”

For example, they might try a bath promotion on their main ad, and their best-selling facial moisturizer is featured in a kicker ad. “When we do an email, we will try and do -- if we’re doing an email promotion around bath, we’ll do skin-care sampling, maybe it’s a free sample. We’ll try to cross-promote that customer by sampling as well,” McLaughlin adds.

Useful Links and Resources:

[MarketingSherpa: My Shoe Fetish and Why Personas are Invaluable for Marketing](#)

[MarketingExperiments Blog: How to Predict, with 90% Accuracy, Who Your Best Customers Will Be](#)

[B2B Lead Roundtable Blog: Lead Nurturing: Market to Personality and Behavior, Not Job Title](#)

[MarketingExperiments Webinar: What Your Customers Want – How to Predict Customer Behavior for Maximum ROI](#)

About MarketingSherpa LLC

MarketingSherpa is a primary research facility, wholly-owned by MECLABS, dedicated to determining **what works in marketing** via exclusive case studies, surveys, and results data analysis. Then we publish what we learn so our community of marketers and weekly readers can improve their results and train their teams.

Praised by *The Economist*, Harvard Business School's Working Knowledge Site and Entrepreneur.com, MarketingSherpa is distinguished by offering **practical, results-based marketing** information researched and written by a staff of in-house reporters.

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About MECLABS

MECLABS is a science lab that uses real-world research and training to **help business leaders get better use out of sales and marketing technology and resources**, including Internet marketing, website optimization, and lead management. We have been involved in direct research partnerships with companies throughout Europe and North America since 2001.

MECLABS deploys a rigorous methodology to conduct research. This research is compiled from:

- More than **10 years** of research partnership with our clients
- **1,300** experiments
- Over **1 billion** emails
- **10,000** landing pages tested
- **5 million** telephone calls
- **500,000** decision maker conversations

MECLABS has consulted with companies like Cisco, Johnson & Johnson, *The New York Times*, 1-800-Flowers, and NetSuite to optimize sales and marketing processes and achieve triple-digit ROI gains.

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