Know your Audience.

CUSTOMER PERSONAS

Before you dig into understanding how customers interact with your service, it's important to know who you're designing for. Developing a clear picture of your target audience's needs, behaviours, attitudes, contexts, and history will help ensure that you start your research by asking smart questions. It will also ensure you stay user-centric – an important principle in Service Design.

Clearly the profile of your customers will vary, depending on whether you are delivering B2B or B2C services. That said, you shouldn't limit your thinking – even B2B services involve people as buyers.

Let's have a look at some of the tools you can use to develop a clearer picture of your customers and wider stakeholders.

Developing Customer Personas

Whilst you can use more traditional research techniques to feed your understanding of your customer needs, developing customer personas can also be a useful process in profiling your audiences, ahead of a service design/redesign process.

Customer personas (sometimes referred to as buyer or marketing personas) are fictional, generalized representations of your ideal customers. Personas help a variety of departments -- in marketing, sales, product, and services -- internalise the ideal customer you are trying to attract, and relate to your customers as real humans. Having a deep understanding of your customer personas is critical to driving content creation, product development, sales follow up, and really anything that relates to customer acquisition and retention.

Customer Personas are also important because they can help you understand the new buying behaviours of today; how to keep up with how fast they are changing; provide insight into new types of buyer; how they have changed, and most important – what goals they are attempting to accomplish. In addition, they help you develop a common language about buyers across different organisational silos.

Customer Personas can also Inform market and customer strategies. Good service design is about developing a qualitative understanding of buyers as well as quantitative. Personas are ideally suited to address design issues helping you to ensure you give sufficient weight to the user-friendliness of the delivery. According to several studies, B2B companies who have implemented strategies to get more customer and buyer focused have consistently outperformed their competitors. In several of these studies, respondents cited that the development of buyer personas was a crucial component of their overall plan to guide their business towards greater customer centricity.

In simple terms, customer insights research and customer personas help to break down the complexity of services into insightful understanding, thereby enabling improved decision-making.

At the most basic level, developing personas allows you to create content and messaging that appeals to your target audience. It also enables you to target or personalize your marketing for different segments of your audience. Furthermore, when combined with lifecycle analysis (for example Customer Journey Mapping), customer personas also allow you to map out and create highly targeted content.

The good news is, customer personas aren't that difficult to create. You just need to ask the right questions to the right people, and present that information in a helpful way so the people in your business can get to know your personas better than the backs of their hands.

Buyer personas can be created through research, surveys, and interviews of your target audience. That includes a mix of customers, prospects, and those outside your current customer base who might be your prospective customers.

Here are some practical tips for gathering the information you need to develop personas:

STEP 1: With your team, write down the people or groups that are directly involved in or reached by your service. Look through your customer database to uncover trends about how certain leads or customers find and consume your service. What generalizations can they make about the different types of customers you serve best?

STEP 2: Write all the groups down on Post-IT Notes and put them on a wall so you can visualize your audiences. Include negative customer personas - people who you don't want as a customer. Now add the wider stakeholders – the people or groups who are peripherally relevant, or are associated with your direct audience. Think about the connections these people have with your service and your customers. Think about who might be favourably and unfavourably disposed towards your services. Add them to the wall.

STEP 3: Design your questionnaire. There are several different types of question you might want to ask to create a comprehensive customer persona. The following sample questions are organized into themes, and largely focus on a B2B service, but feel free to customize this list and remove or add more questions that may be appropriate for your target customers.

Role	Company	Goals	Challenges	Social Habits	Personal Stuff	Shopping Preferences
What is your job role and title?	What industry do you work in?	What are you responsible for?	What are your biggest challenges?	How do you learn about new information for your job?	Describe your personal demographics (if appropriate, ask their age, marital status, children).	How do you prefer to shop (e.g. email, phone, in person)?
Describe your typical working day	What is the size of your company?	What does it mean to be successful in your role?	What frustrates you?	What publications do you read?	What level of education did you complete, which schools did you attend, and what did you study?	Do you use the internet to undertake shopping research?
What skills do you need to do your job?	Who owns your company?	How is your job measured?	What frustrates your managers?	What social networks do you belong to?	Describe your career path. How did you end up where you are today?	Describe a recent purchase from us.
What knowledge and tools do you use in your job?	What does your company consider to be important?	What motivates you?	What's the hardest task to complete?	Are you a member of any associations of clubs?	What part of your job do you enjoy the most?	What was the evaluation process, and how did you decide to purchase that product or service?
Who do you report to and who reports to you?	What are the key business drivers in your industry?	What goals are important to your company?	What purchases are the hardest to make?	What do you use your professional networks for?	What hobbies do you have outside work?	What procurement processes do you operate?

STEP 4: Interview customers and prospects, either in person or over the phone, to discover what they like about your product or service. One of the most important steps to establishing your customer personas is finding some people to talk to about what drives them. Your existing customer base is the ideal place to start. Reach out to 'happy' and 'unhappy' customers. Be sure to also involve people who haven't purchased your service yet and don't know much about you. Use your prospects database. Reach out to your wider network – distributors, suppliers, co-workers, social media contacts -- to find other people you'd like to interview. Try searching on LinkedIn for people who may fit into your target personas and see what contacts have any connections in common with you. Start with at least 3-5 interviews for each persona you're creating.

STEP 5: Create your personas. Once you've gone through the research process, you'll have a lot of data about your potential and current customers. 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 the template below to organize the information you've gathered about your personas. Then share these slides with the rest of your company so everyone can benefit from the research you've done and develop an in-depth understanding of the people you are targeting day-in, day-out at work. It's helpful to include some descriptive characteristics of your persona that you may have identified during your conversations to make it easier for your staff to identify certain personas when they're talking to prospects. Include some real quotes from your interviews that exemplify what your personas are concerned about, who they are, and what they want. Create the list of reasons they would use your service and the barriers they might raise for not buying your service (together with the tactics for overcoming these barriers). Tell people how to talk about your products/services with your persona. Finally, make sure you give your persona a name and include a real-life image of your persona so everyone can truly envision what he or she looks like.

DRAFT PERSONA NAME:		CUSTOMER SEGMENT:		
	Who I am:	3 reasons to buy and use your product/service:	3 barriers I might say I have to using your service and how to overcome them:	
My interests:	My personality:	My skills:	My dreams:	My relationship with technology: