

# Tool: Personas

Before embarking on any project, it is vital to understand the needs of your customers. There are many methods for doing this, but one simple tool is to create an overview of the archetypal customer.



because innovation needs direction

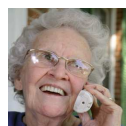
## What are personas?

Personas represent 'typical' customers in terms of demographics, likes, dislikes and needs. They help create a user-centred focus for your product development team. Personas are created from a 'collage' of information gathered from in-depth interviews and observations with real people, and brought to life by giving them a name, a photo and details about their lives (see mini example below).

## Benefits of personas

Incorporating personas into your product development process has a number of benefits:

- Help you understand how your product/service will be used by setting the scene and providing a context. Users become *real people, with real needs and behaviour*. This reduces the likelihood that you will arbitrarily introduce unrealistic or unsuitable features into your product.
- Personas help you *communicate the reasons behind your design decisions to your stakeholders*, e.g. your managers. Combined with scenarios they help you tell the story of your product—who will use it, when and (most importantly) why.
- Using personas can help *reduce the risk of errors*. Concepts and prototypes can be constantly evaluated against personas.



**Name:** Anna  
**Age:** 84  
**Situation:** Lives alone, has never married  
**Health:** Hip replacement, osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis, some memory loss, some hearing loss.  
**Social:** Anna attends church every week and is a regular at her local bingo  
**Goal:** Anna hopes to be able to stay in her home for as long as possible

each cluster a brief description, e.g. 'Independent Elderly' or 'Young Frequent Traveller'. Around 4-5 personas are ideal; more would confuse rather than assist the design process.

## Write your personas

Create your personas with the development team. Choose a photo and agree on a name and age. Decide on the key elements and select the relevant pieces of information from your research. Include goals to help evaluate what is important for each persona. Guardian angels is another option – what wish would your persona like to have granted? Keep your persona to one page to help with communication.

Once they have been created, review personas against the research data to ensure they are realistic. Finally, make sure that you haven't omitted a key customer segment, or that two personas are so similar that they should be merged.

## Using your personas

There are many different ways you can use personas. Below are some ideas:

- Be a constant reminder for the team to stay focused on the user (especially if the personas are always on view)
- Help understand the needs of your target segment

## How to create a persona

There is no firm way to create personas, but the following can be used as a guide:

- Decide on a research method, based on resources available. Options include reviewing existing data (e.g. online), interviews, surveys, observation or any combination.
- Carry out your research. Information you might consider gathering includes age, employment, family, home ownership, disabilities, location, hobbies, goals, attitudes, beliefs, technical expertise, likes and dislikes.
- Analyse the data—review all your information gathered and look for patterns emerging. Is there a 'typical' user, a person of a particular age or habit emerging? Give

- Identify what features and functionality your users would like to see in your product or service
- Understand how your product/service will add value for your customer
- Help when preparing marketing communications or launch material
- Help communicate the value of your product to a wider audience.

## Conclusion

Personas is a simple, effective user-centric tool for product or service development. Combined with other user-centred design tools, such as Quality Function Deployment, they can lead to successful products, delivering high value to your customers.

Contact Rowan Norrie now on **01698 389 456**