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How personas lend a human touch to your website

A Guide for SMEs

2023 EDITION

Understand your customers on a deeper level

Creating an accurate, insightful picture of the customers that are visiting your website doesn't need to be a costly, time-consuming or complicated process.

Another piece of good news? You don't need to rely on gathering (and trawling through) complex datasets. This guide is intended to help you get started researching and building effective website personas that can be easily updated and refined over time.

But first, what is a website persona?

In the simplest terms, website personas are fictional (or semi-fictional) characters created to represent the several types of users (and potential customers) visiting and interacting with your website.

Often, these personas can represent different demographics, including age groups, professions, interests and motivations. You may also group personas by certain character traits, like conscientiousness, thriftiness or impulsiveness.

To keep your various personas clear and organised, you can assign them easy-to-remember names, such as "Tech-Savvy Tom", "Working Mom Wendy", or "Bargain Hunter Bill".

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Why are website personas useful?

Personas put a human face to your website's visitors.

Remember: One of the most important things to keep in mind is that no two people are visiting your website for the exact same reasons or navigating it in the same way.

Creating several distinct website personas is an important step away from "flying blind" and making broad assumptions about your customers and their motivations. Instead, personas can help you begin to uncover some truly valuable insights, such as:

▶ Who exactly is visiting your website.

▶ What products or services they're most interested in.

▶ How they prefer to make their purchases.

▶ How they like to receive information, and the type of information that's most valuable.

▶ Where their main points of friction are, and how your business, services or products can help.

By identifying the main personas visiting your website, you can better prioritise the ones that are most important to your business rather than trying to give equal attention to all. As well – a more targeted approach will yield better quality customer leads.

More informed website design and content

From a web design perspective, personas enable you to create the best possible user experience by providing the most relevant customer journey and content for each persona. For example:

▶ Do you have (or can you create) content that answers your customers' most pressing questions?

▶ Is your overall tone or messaging relevant?

▶ By what method(s) should that content be delivered?

In short – you can be confident that you're providing exactly what customers need, to move from browsing to buying and perhaps even advocating to others about your business.

There's even compelling data to support persona-driven website design: According to the experts at Hubspot, well-created personas **can make websites two to five times more effective and easier to use** by your target audience.

Search optimisation benefits

As an additional benefit, personas even help with search engine optimisation and keyword targeting.

For instance, if your website advertises residential plumbing services, and one of your personas is a budget-conscious, first-time homeowner, your possible keywords might include:

Free estimate plumbing

Affordable plumber

Free diagnostic plumbing

Home plumbing repair

For a more detailed guide to SEO and keyword research, be sure to read our **full-length guide**.

Get started creating web personas

Now that we have established the importance of personas for your website and ability to target specific customers, let's explore how you actually go about building good personas.

Start with research

First things first – you need to get a basic understanding of your target audience(s).

Most business owners will have a good idea of their basic customer segments, so start by listing these and then estimate the percentage of your revenue that comes from each. Think of this as the basic foundation of your persona development process.

Next, there are a few basic research approaches you can take. Here, we'll outline four:

Research method 1: Customer interviews

This method involves conducting quick, informal face-to-face interviews with customers, as well as employees or colleagues that may work directly with customers.

▶ The content of your interview questions should focus on understanding your customers' main needs, interests, frustrations and expectations about your products and services.

▶ You may even want to explore how your customers like to receive information and what devices they use to shop or consume information – e.g. mobile phone, desktop computer etc.

Research method 2: Customer intercept surveys

If you don't have the time or ability to conduct in-person interviews, setting up simple intercept surveys on your most-visited webpages (or even your social media channels) can help you uncover information about customer demographics, pain points, interests and more.

▶ The questions you ask should be open-ended – e.g. "what is your main motivation for using our product/service?" or "What are your preferred ways of receiving information?"

▶ From here, you can start to segment out survey responses into common groups.

▶ Your questions should also help you determine how your website serves the customer. For instance, from your customers' perspective, is their experience on your site helpful, or confusing and frustrating? Can they easily find the products they're interested in?

▶ With your customers' feedback in hand, aim to identify ways to minimise clicks and make navigation more straightforward.

Research method 3: Follower analysis and social listening

If your business has a healthy social media following via any of the major platforms, be it Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook, TikTok – and more – there are several sophisticated tools that will help you analyse and track various groups of your followers.

▶ **Followerwonk** allows you to segment Twitter followers by location, highlight who else they follow (e.g. competitor businesses) and even group together like-minded individuals based on the information provided in their Twitter bios.

▶ **Meltwater** provides a suite of social listening tools that allow you to segment out your target audiences, anticipate new consumer trends and even see where your business (or brand) is being mentioned across all social platforms as well as review sites.

Of course, these tools all come with a price, so be sure to factor that into your monthly expenses.

Research method 4: Website analysis

Free website analytics tools, like Google Analytics, can also provide you with good insights into which web pages on your site are most popular, as well as the journeys your customers are taking when navigating through your content or entering your site.

Google Analytics can also help illustrate what sources are driving the most traffic to your site.

Apply your research to the persona-building process

Once you've completed your research, it's time to take the information you've gleaned and create a web persona. Here is a basic process you can follow and adapt to suit your needs.

First – get together with a small group of employees so you can start brainstorming and identifying your core personas. A good approach is to include people from different parts of the business.

As part of your brainstorming, start with one persona, then begin to flesh it out. Your finished persona should include:

Remember: Powerful insights often come from cross-team collaboration, not just the marketing or sales team!

Demographic information

Think in terms of gender, age group, job title, profession etc. Also – be sure to pick a name for the persona.

Backstory

What unique traits or characteristics set this persona apart from the rest? Briefly describe your persona's values, interests, lifestyles and pain points that may drive this individual towards your products.

Behaviour and motivations

Based on what we know about the persona, what are they trying to accomplish or achieve by visiting your website or shopping for your products?

Frustrations

What are the main challenges or barriers facing this persona? What might prevent them from following through with purchasing your product or service?

Content preferences

How does this persona like to receive information? Do they prefer print advertising or do they operate strictly online? It may also be worth establishing the persona's level of technical expertise.

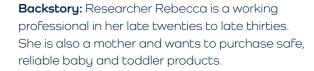# Put your persona research and brainstorming into practice

Now, we'll create two example personas for an e-commerce retail site that sells a range of products – such as bottles, soothers, toys and clothing – for babies and small children.

Helpful hint: While there is no "magic number" of web personas for your site, you should aim to create between two to five to ensure you're representing your most important audiences.
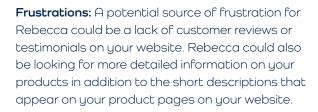
E-commerce website persona #1

Researcher Rebecca

Backstory: Researcher Rebecca is a working professional in her late twenties to late thirties. She is also a mother and wants to purchase safe, reliable baby and toddler products.

Note: Again, your backstory doesn't need to be elaborate. Usually, a short description of the person and their occupation with a few key traits is more than enough.

Behaviour and motivations: Rebecca is technically savvy and will take the time to thoroughly research and compare products via other websites and her social media feeds rather than making quick, impulsive purchases. She is very conscientious and wants products that are proven to be high quality.

Note: Based on the information gathered from your research, you can start to add a few key details about this persona's behaviour. This section is a key piece in what sets someone like Rebecca apart from other visitors to your site. Be as specific as possible when creating this description.

Frustrations: A potential source of frustration for Rebecca could be a lack of customer reviews or testimonials on your website. Rebecca could also be looking for more detailed information on your products in addition to the short descriptions that appear on your product pages on your website.

Content preferences: Rebecca prefers to receive information on upcoming sales, promotions or new product introductions via social media posts and email. She will typically use Google searches for reviews and will seek user experiences and validation via the mum-centric Facebook groups she belongs to.

Marketing to this persona: For a thorough researcher and conscientious purchaser like Rebecca, you'd be wise to include (and leverage) unbiased customer reviews and testimonials on your website to help build up your product's credibility.

You should also showcase in your content how your products can provide value/solve pain points in your customers' lives. Tutorial or setup videos could also prove valuable for more complicated products, like toddler play pens or strollers.

E-commerce website persona #2

Bargain Hunter Bill

Backstory: Bill is 55 – 65 years old, with an established, long-standing career and a mature family. He has also just recently become a grandfather. Bill would like to purchase gifts for his grandchild that are of good quality, but not too expensive.

Personality and behaviour: Bill is practical-minded. In addition, he is no stranger to making purchases online and prides himself on having always been able to find the best deals and prices on products of reasonable quality.

Frustrations: A lack of enticing promotions or communication regarding price reductions or special offers. There also might not be enough enticing information about the products on your website to help communicate their value.

Content preferences: Bill tends to receive information about sales and promotions via email newsletters and YouTube ads.

Marketing to this persona: For a bargain hunter like Bill, you would be wise to drive sales by offering limited-time coupons or promotions. Perhaps a loyalty club might be helpful in terms of providing exclusive deals for returning customers. Make sure as well to clearly and concisely communicate the value and benefits of your products to help justify making a purchase.

Note: Some personas may only be interested in specific products from your range. Bill, in this case, is going to be more focused on children's books, toys and clothing rather than bottles, blankets and soothers. With this in mind, you could target Bill with special promotions or offers, such as a clearance end-of-season toy sale or a summer reading event.

Next, let's look at a website persona example for a professional services website. In this case, we have an accounting firm that specialises in bookkeeping and tax preparation services.

Professional services website persona example

Small Business Susan

Backstory: Susan owns a small but thriving bookstore that specialises in unusual, quirky literary works. She has three employees and spends much of her time overseeing all aspects of her store – from managing new inventory, to interacting with customers.

However, Susan needs additional help completing time consuming, but critical financial management tasks.

Personality and behaviour: Susan is a proud entrepreneur who creates a warm, friendly environment for her customers. However, because of the sheer effort she puts into her business, Susan is often time-poor and struggles to delegate other tasks.

Frustrations: For Susan, her main frustrations stem from not having enough time in the day to complete the more administrative duties, like payroll, invoicing, taxes etc. Given her desire to closely manage her affairs, she may also struggle with finding a reliable partner or organisation that she can trust with offloading work.

Marketing to this persona: Emphasise your accounting firm's reliability and trustworthiness by showcasing testimonials and/or reviews from a range of clients. Provide a clear, concise overview of the services offered and pricing/rates. For time-crunched small business owners, there should also be an easy (and obvious) way to get in touch or schedule an appointment.

Find an accountant!

Website navigation and experience by persona

As we said at the start of this guide, no two people are visiting your website for the same reason. The same holds true for how different people navigate and experience your website.

This is where creating personas can prove useful in helping identify which web pages are most important and meet your various personas' needs. Anyone visiting your site should be able to get what they came for via a quick and streamlined path. Here are a couple of examples:

▶ For our Bargain Hunter Bill persona, having dedicated "clearance" or "sale items" home page links and web pages should be a priority.

▶ For a persona like Researcher Rebecca, you would want to prioritise customer reviews or testimonials and arrange your page content so that more detailed product information, such as specifications, tutorials and other resources, is within easy reach.

Keep your personas fresh, relevant and alive

Once they're created, website personas aren't meant to remain static and unchanging for all time!

Keep doing your research and expanding upon (and even challenging) what you think you already know about your customers.

Having more data to hand via customer and product reviews, web surveys and even customer transactions, can serve to further validate or even force you to tweak or revise a persona.

Maintaining a semi-regular research and update cycle will ensure your personas become more useful and believable over time.

Unlock the power of the internet with a trusted Irish .ie online identity

It's trusted

Every **.ie** applicant's identity is checked and validated at the point of registration. Consumers will have confidence in your business as **.ie** is a well-established and trusted domain. 77% of Irish consumers prefer a **.ie** website when buying online, instead of a .com.[1]

It's unique to Ireland

The official Internet country code for Ireland is **.ie** and is the only online address that is Irish. A **.ie** tells the global community that you are Irish and tells the Irish community that you are local. You can even register an Irish language name if required, fadas and all.

It's more likely to be available

There is a wider choice of available **.ie** domain names compared to .com, as significantly more of those names are already registered.

It lets your customers find you online

.ie addresses rank higher than .com addresses on Irish based search engines like Google.ie. Irish consumers are more likely to click on local website addresses.

It's the preferred online address for business in Ireland

91% of Irish consumers associate **.ie** websites with Irish businesses over other websites like .com.[1] The **.ie** domain accounts for the majority of hosted domains in Ireland.[2]

It protects your brand

Securing your **.ie** online address strengthens your brand and protects your online identity. All **.ie** domains are registered on a first-come, first-served basis.

[1] .IE Consumer Trust 2020

[2] HosterStats

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