Buyer Persona Grata – A Tool for Enabling Your Sales Organization

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Marketing shares finding new profitable customers with the sales organization. To attract new customer the sales and delivery teams must be able to articulate the business benefits. These groups often rely on marketing to create the tools to support the sales process. These sales enablement tools help the sales organization improve their effectiveness at generating revenue and earnings by giving salespeople the right information at the right time to increase their rate of success. One tool more and more organizations are leveraging is buyer personas.

What Are Buyer Personas?

Buyer Personas are archetypal users that represent the needs of larger groups of customers, in terms of their goals and personal characteristics. Think of them as "stand-ins" for real customers. A buyer persona seeks to zero-in on customer behavior and characteristics. It is a concise description of a specific customer type.

It's important not to confuse buyer personas with profiles. A profile contains information about the type of user/buyer relevant to product being offered. Profiles contain general characteristics about your groups of users/buyers. Profiles are the foundation for constructing personas. And while these two concepts seem similar, they are different. Profiles describe types of prospects, customers, or users.

Profile Example:

Gender	50% Male / 50% Female
Age	18-34
Education	HS education; most have a college degree
Marital Status	50/50 Married/Single

Buyer Personas describe specific people and sound like people you know; they take on a reality that encourages empathy and facilitates thinking from the customer's perspective. Think of personas as narrative descriptions that bring user profiles to life. Personas present and communicate an alternative representation of user profile data that is easy for the sales team to keep in mind during the buying process. A good persona helps the salesperson recognize and identify with the prospect as people rather than as a collection of facts.

A Persona might begin this way:

Helen is a director of sales growing, mid-sized manufacturing company. She's 32, works long hours often coming in before others and leaving well after the sales team most nights. Helen is single, a competitive

runner, and is partial to 80s rock. She drives a new BMW convertible. She struggles with managing a dozen salespeople, many who are 10 to 15 years older than her. Helen wants the company to invest in a new CRM system to replace the contact management they long ago outgrew, but wonders how she'll convince the company's CEO and CFO to spend the money.

Why Go to Effort to Create Buyer Personas?

Buyer Personas bring customer to life by giving them a name and/or title, personality, and in some instances even a photo. They are an ideal way to help guide decisions about product functionality, design, positioning, messaging, and overall marketing. The purpose of a persona is to identify a customer's motivations, expectations, and goals. Even though personas like the one about Helen, are fictitious, they are based on knowledge of real customers. A well-crafted persona enables you to stand in your customer's shoes and take a more customer-centric view.

Using buyer personas has a number of benefits, they often provide:

- the organization with a common point of view about customers' goals and needs,
- provide valuable insight into the motivations and personalities of specific buyers and users
- serve as a vehicle for helping develop an initial set of market requirements,
- a process for prioritizing development efforts

While they are simple in form and structure, the information they contain is powerful; it can be applied to decisions throughout the sales-enablement process. When well-crafted, personas can help with understanding specific requirements, facilitating alignment, and expediting the sales cycle.

Creating Buyer Personas

It often takes some research to create personas because you want your buyer personas to actually represent the customers rather than reflect internal opinion. Design you research to identify trends or patterns in user behaviors, expectations, and motivations. One of the best ways to

gather this data is to interview real customers. If you decide conducting customer interviews is the route to take, your first step is to decide who to interview. We recommend including current as well as potential customers**. Plan to conduct at least 15-20 one-hour long interviews for each persona type**.

Structure your discussion guide so that you can learn

- basic demographics, job responsibilities and major tasks
- what the person likes best and least about their job
- what a typical day is like and how the person spends their time
- what frustrates the person and what makes for a good vs. a bad day
- what kinds of fires they put out and how often
- their goals, attitudes and beliefs

Once you complete all of the interviews, analyze the data to find patterns and clusters. Give each persona cluster a brief description that captures the persona's goals, needs, behaviors, concerns, experiences, likes, dislikes, etc.

There is no ideal number of buyer personas; however, we suggest keeping the set small—perhaps four or five primary persona clusters. Combine details from the customer interviews in the same cluster. Select and include details in your narrative that will help the sales team understand what motivates this person and how they buy. Then give each persona a name and a photo or graphic representation. Try to keep the person to one page. Develop a messages map that resonates with each persona and customize sales presentations and materials accordingly.

Turning Personas into a Sales-Enablement Tool

Using personas allows you to better focus your sales and marketing training and materials, improving your overall effectiveness. They enable the sales team to identify and communicate customers' needs efficiently and effectively. These "stand in" customers, based on real customer data, help the sales organization connect and engage with prospects.