



BUILDING BUYER PERSONAS – HOW TO LEVERAGE THE BUYER'S JOURNEY TO ACCELERATE YOUR CONTENT MARKETING PROGRAM

ABSTRACT »

In order to develop an effective content marketing program you need to fully understand your buyer's journey and create buyer personas to help you be effective.

The Buyer's Journey

Make sure your content can reach your audience in all stages of their buying process.

As you build your content marketing plan, you will quickly realize that the content you need for a buyer who is early in the buying process is very different than the content you need for buyers who are about to make a purchase. If you want to create content that matters, you'll need to create content for your customers and prospects throughout the entire buyer's journey. In most complex purchasing decisions, buyers often go through an awareness phase, an evaluation phase, and a purchase phase.



To understand your buyer's journey, look at your own marketplace and ask yourself how your buyers make decisions. In every market and in every industry, this is going to be a little bit different. In general, a buyer starts his or her journey by identifying an issue or problem that they're having. Then they start researching potential solutions to the problem. From there, they start evaluating products and then potential vendors. Finally they study alternative products and vendors so that they can finally make a decision. Along the way, they come up with a list of decision criteria that will help them make a decision.

Let me give you two examples of how this works in different situations. One type of client we often work with is universities. When high school students and their parents make a buying decision for a 4-year college, they start by going through a process to try to figure out where they want to go to school and what are they interested in studying. Then they start reviewing schools and reading material from specific schools. They might also look at U.S. News & World Report or other articles that show school rankings. From there, they might look at potential schools in their area, talk to friends, and explore social media. They may also start looking at school websites and start talking to people at certain schools before they start narrowing down their list.

During this time they will develop decision criteria that will help them sort out their options as they visit different schools. Finally,

the student actually applies to a school, and then they make a decision once they get accepted. It's a very long, complicated process and the buyers consume a lot of information along the way.

Let's contrast this with a business to business example in a large company. If you're an IT buyer, let's say you're a director of IT, you might identify a problem where you don't have the right disaster recovery capabilities within your organization, and so you go through a very different process.

You start by identifying the problem: "What if there is a fire in my data center? What do I do?" Then you start researching solutions. You might look at what analysts are saying. You might read white papers. You might read examples of how other people solved this problem by asking questions on social media. In addition, you might also go to an event or conference to learn more.



While you are learning about options, studying alternatives, and talking to vendors, you will also be building a set of decision criteria to help you choose the best solution. Once you finish your research, you will start evaluating vendors and products and finally make a purchase decision.

These are just two examples, and for your industry, there may be a totally different type of buying process. You must consider what your buyers are actually doing to make buying decisions in order to create the content they need across the entire buying process.

From these two examples, I'm sure you can see the importance of having content early in the buying cycle. If your content can influence the buyer's key purchase criteria in your favor early in the process, then you will have a much stronger chance of winning them later. Also, if you are not part of the consideration set early in the process, you may never be considered for the purchase.

Align Content to the Buying Process

In B2B organizations, content like white papers, articles, and webinars fit well in the awareness phase. They help people understand the problem, come up with potential solutions, and think about how to address the situation.

Awareness	Evaluation	Purchase
White paper	Case study	Live Demo
Article	Product Info	Free Trial
Webinar	Company Info	Assessment

In the evaluation phase, people are more interested in case studies and social media content to help them understand how other people actually solve their problems with a particular product. They also look at product information and company information to understand who makes the best products or delivers the best services.

In the purchase phase, they might be interested in a live demo or trial, or even an assessment to get some experience with the product before they make a final purchase decision.

Once you have a solid understanding of the buying process, you can plan your content more specifically. For each piece of content, you should ask yourself which stage of the buying process it addresses. Is it of the quality and timeliness that you really need? By aligning your content with the way people actually buy, you will be able to ensure you have all of the right content you need to win new customers.

Buyer Personas

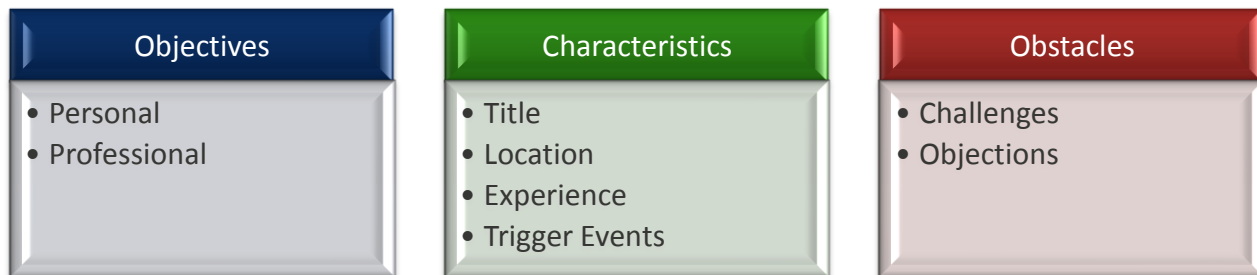
Now that you have a good assessment of your content, and a good understanding of the buying process and how your content fits, you're ready to create buyer personas. This step is where you get in touch with your customers in order to understand who they are, what they like, and what they are ultimately thinking. Here are a few things to consider when you create buyer personas.

First, consider your customer's goals, their characteristics, and their obstacles or challenges. When you think about their objectives, remember to consider both their personal and professional goals. What are their personal objectives? What do they really want to get out of this product or solution personally? What are their professional objectives? What business goals do they want to accomplish?

In terms of their personal characteristics, what's their title? Where are they located? What experience do they have? What are some trigger events that might be moving them to look for a solution to their problem?

Take the time to understand all of the personas of your target customers.

Once you understand their goals and characteristics, you can start to understand their obstacles and the challenges they face. This step is where you put all your research and analytics together and start to think about who your ideal customer is. When you create personas, it's best to give each one a name and actually create a picture of your ideal customer.



Let me share an example that we developed for one of our clients. In this example, Chloe is a U.S.-based marketing director in the healthcare industry with about 5 years' experience in Digital Advertising, but she's struggling with how

to use mobile advertising effectively in order to achieve her company's marketing goals so that she can get a promotion.

In this example, you can see how we've included her objectives, characteristics and obstacles in order to describe a persona that seems real. By using personas you can be more specific about the kind of content that's going to be helpful, not just to the general market, but to Chloe, a person you can actually visualize. This will help you make your content more tangible and more useful.

When you first start developing personas, I would encourage you to start with no more than 3 to 5, so that you can focus on a few of the most important personas who are going to make a difference to your organization. By focusing on a few, you'll avoid getting bogged down and creating too many that you won't be able to adequately address. It will also be a much easier to develop great content for the most important personas rather than mediocre content or just a thin layer of content for all the personas you might imagine.

If you want to learn more about how Newspeed can help you develop buyer personas or create an effective content marketing program, please contact us at www.newspeak.com.

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