

THE NEW RULES SERIES

FOREWORD BY DAVID MEERMAN SCOTT

ADELE REVELLA

BUYER PERSONAS

How to GAIN INSIGHT into
YOUR CUSTOMER'S EXPECTATIONS,
ALIGN YOUR MARKETING STRATEGIES,
and WIN MORE BUSINESS



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Buyer Personas

How to Gain Insight into Your
Customer's Expectations, Align
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Adele Revella

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*This book is dedicated to every marketer who
questions the wisdom of making stuff up.*

Contents

<i>Foreword</i>	David Meerman Scott	xiii
<i>Acknowledgments</i>		xvii
<i>Introduction: Listen First, Then Speak</i>		xix
<i>Why Is Everyone Talking about Buyer Personas?</i>		xx
<i>Will This Approach Work for You?</i>		xxii
PART I	Understanding the Art and Science of Buyer Personas	1
Chapter 1	Understand Buying Decisions and the People Who Make Them	3
	<i>Why the “Know Your Customer” Rule Has Been Redefined</i>	5
	<i>A Clothes Dryer’s Extra Setting Made All the Difference</i>	6
	<i>Will You Understand Your Buyers’ Decisions?</i>	7
	<i>Relying on Buyer Demographics and Psychographics</i>	10
	<i>How Marketers Benefit from Buyer Profiles</i>	11
	<i>Buying Insights Complete Your Persona</i>	12
	<i>High-Consideration Decisions Reveal the Best Insights</i>	13
	<i>Buying Insights from a Quick Trip to London</i>	15

Chapter 2	Focus on the Insights That Guide Marketing Decisions	19
	<i>Listening to Kathy</i>	20
	<i>Frustrated, A Newly Minted Consultant</i>	
	<i>Invents Personas</i>	22
	<i>Buyers Have Distinct Expectations</i>	23
	<i>The 5 Rings of Buying Insight</i>	25
	<i>Give Your Buyer a Seat at the Table</i>	27
	<i>Buying Insight Opens Doors to C-Level Executives</i>	31
Chapter 3	Decide How You Will Discover Buyer Persona Insights	35
	<i>The Most Important Nine Months of My Career</i>	36
	<i>How Interviews Reveal Insight</i>	38
	<i>Is This Another Kind of Qualitative Research?</i>	39
	<i>Crafting The Low-Consideration Buyer's Story</i>	41
	<i>Using B2B Salespeople to Build Buyer Personas</i>	42
	<i>The Pros and Cons of Buyer Surveys</i>	43
	<i>When to Use Focus Groups</i>	44
	<i>Will Big Data Deliver Insights?</i>	45
	<i>How Social Media Contributes to Buyer Personas</i>	48
	<i>SAP Gains High-Value Insights through Web Analytics</i>	49
PART II	Interviewing for Buying Insights	51
Chapter 4	Gain Permission and Schedule Buyer Interviews	55
	<i>Persuade Stakeholders That You Need Buying Insights</i>	56
	<i>Overcome the "We Know Our Buyers" Objection</i>	57
	<i>When You Don't Have Time for Buyer</i>	
	<i>Persona Interviews</i>	59
	<i>Use Your Sales Database to Find Buyers to Interview</i>	60

	<i>Sometimes You Want to Avoid Your Internal Database</i>	61
	<i>Using Professional Recruiters to Set Interview Appointments</i>	62
	<i>Which Buyer Should You Interview?</i>	64
	<i>Interview Buyers Who Chose You as Well as Those Who Did Not</i>	66
	<i>Contacting Buyers to Request an Interview</i>	68
Chapter 5	Conduct Probing Buyer Interviews	73
	<i>Who Should Conduct the Interview?</i>	74
	<i>Prepare for Your Buyer Interview</i>	75
	<i>Getting It on the Record</i>	77
	<i>“Take Me Back to the Day . . .”</i>	78
	<i>Use Your Buyer’s Words to Probe for Insight</i>	80
	<i>Go Slowly to Capture the Whole Story</i>	81
	<i>Questions That Keep the Conversation Flowing</i>	82
	<i>An Example Interview with Tim</i>	84
	<i>Look for Insight When Buyers Use Jargon</i>	86
	<i>Make Your Questions about Your Impact Count</i>	88
	<i>Probing on Who Influences This Decision</i>	90
	<i>Asking about the Perceived Value of Your Differentiators</i>	91
	<i>When Features Affect Decisions, Look for Insight</i>	92
	<i>First and Foremost, Be a Respectful Listener</i>	94
Chapter 6	Mine Your Interviews for Buying Insights	97
	<i>You Need Fewer Interviews Than You Expect</i>	98
	<i>Step 1: Mark Up Your Interview Transcript</i>	99
	<i>Step 2: Organize the Story Based on Buying Insights</i>	103
	<i>Step 3: Write a Headline for Each Key Insight</i>	106

Chapter 7	Determine How Many Buyer Personas You Need	111
	<i>Segment Buyers Based on Insights, Not Profiles</i>	112
	<i>Conduct More Interviews to Test Segmentation Options</i>	114
	<i>Analyze Insights to Decide How Many Personas</i>	117
	<i>Will Two Buyer Personas Help You Win More Business?</i>	118
	<i>Presenting Your Buyer Persona</i>	123
	<i>Copywriting Your Buying Insights</i>	127
	<i>Building the Buyer Profile</i>	128
	<i>How to Find Buyer Profile Information</i>	129
PART III	Aligning Your Strategies to Win More Business	131
Chapter 8	Decide What to Say to Buyers	135
	<i>Will Your Current Approach Work?</i>	136
	<i>Set the Agenda, and Invite the Right People</i>	138
	<i>Ask for Premeeting Contributions</i>	139
	<i>Develop a Complete List of Capabilities That Matter</i>	140
	<i>The Moderator Is a Proxy for the Buyer</i>	142
	<i>Apply Two Filters for Short Messaging</i>	143
	<i>Evaluate Your Competitive Ranking</i>	144
	<i>Assess Relative Value to Buyers</i>	145
	<i>Bring in the Copywriters and Creative Teams</i>	150
Chapter 9	Design Marketing Activities to Enable Your Buyer's Journey	151
	<i>Understand the Buyer's Journey</i>	153
	<i>Patrick's Journey for an Employee Benefits Decision</i>	154
	<i>Prioritize Assets That Align with the Buyer's Journey</i>	156
	<i>Prepare to Be Surprised</i>	157

	<i>How Buyer Personas Affect Industry or Solution Marketing</i>	158
	<i>A Global Perspective on Buyer Personas and Campaigns</i>	160
	<i>Can You Be Useful to People Who Aren't Buying?</i>	162
	<i>Educate Buyers That Success Is within Reach</i>	163
	<i>Autodesk Helps Buyers Achieve Their Top Priorities</i>	164
Chapter 10	Align Sales and Marketing to Help Buyers Decide	171
	<i>Changing the Conversation with Salespeople</i>	173
	<i>Share Insights, Not Buyer Personas</i>	174
	<i>Deliver Buying Insights through Sales Playbooks</i>	175
	<i>Enabling the Challenger Sale</i>	176
	<i>Helping Salespeople Break into the C-Suite</i>	177
	<i>Insight into the Nurse's Emotions Halts Sales Losses</i>	179
	<i>Sales and Marketing: Vive La Différence!</i>	183
Chapter 11	Start Small, with an Eye to the Future	185
	<i>Where to Begin Your Buyer Persona Initiative</i>	186
	<i>How to Earn Your Stripes as a Strategic Resource</i>	188
	<i>How Buyer Personas Benefit Product Strategy</i>	190
	<i>Building Buyer Personas for New Products</i>	192
	<i>Communicating Insights That Affect Other Teams</i>	193
	<i>Using Buyer Personas to Guide Strategic Planning</i>	194
	<i>Start Small and Make a Big Difference</i>	198
	<i>Bibliography</i>	199
	<i>Index</i>	203

Foreword

Back in 2007, I gushed enthusiastically on my blog about the GoPro digital camera, which I had purchased to take photos and videos while surfing. I was a very early adopter (the digital version had been out only a month).

The clever marketers at GoPro focused on creating cameras that address the specific problems faced by consumers, in my case a camera I could take surfing. Not long after my original post, I interviewed Nick Woodman, Founder and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of GoPro, who told me how his company makes decisions. “Our solutions could never evolve from a boardroom discussion,” he told me. “We go straight to the source. We don’t ask our grandmother what she thinks about our motorsport mounts apparatus; we ask race car drivers.”

Although he didn’t call what he was doing buyer persona research, Nick leads a company that builds product and marketing strategies using the ideas that you’ll read about in these pages.

So how is GoPro doing now, seven years after the first digital camera was launched and I first wrote about the company? Sales have doubled every year, with the company reporting \$279 million in revenue for the three months ending September 30, 2014. This rapid growth allowed GoPro to go public on the stock market in 2014. From zero revenue to a billion dollars a year in less than a decade! As I write this, the company has a market capitalization of \$10 billion,

making Nick a billionaire. GoPro has left its competitors in the dust through an intense focus on understanding their buyers' expectations!

In this book you will learn how to gain insights into your buyer's mind-set so that you can create and market what your buyers are seeking. You'll see how to differentiate the needs of distinct groups of buyers—in the case of GoPro not just digital camera buyers but surfers, race car drivers, and skydivers—in buyer personas that guide your company to breakthrough success.

This approach is utterly different from most companies. Either they fail to differentiate their markets and create nonspecific marketing for everyone, or they create approaches to segments based on their own product-centric view of the world.

Think about the websites you've visited. Have you noticed that sometimes you can glance at a site (or product page) and instantly know that it will not be helpful? I experience that feeling nearly every day. I might be shopping for something—say, a hotel for a family vacation in Tobago. So I go to Google and just search. Because I'm in the research phase of my decision, I'm looking for a site that will educate and inform me, not one that is chock-full of jargon and hype. I'm browsing and not ready to buy, so I'm not interested in a sales come-on. I'm expecting that the people who built the site have anticipated my need for helpful information. Yes, I am interested in booking a room at some point, but not until someone educates me about my options. What should I look for in Tobago? Should I be on the beach? Which beach? What's the trade-off between an all-inclusive versus *à la carte* experience? What's the price range? What are the advantages of a big resort compared with a small, intimate inn?

Usually I sample a few sites that are just terrible, filled with gobbledygook and corporate drivel. When that happens, I'm gone in a split second, clicking away, never to return. You know what I'm talking about, right? You make a decision immediately. It's a gut feeling, isn't it?

In contrast, a few sites have valuable and useful information. In fact, sometimes I feel that a site has been developed especially for me! It's as if someone read my mind and built a site based on my needs. The information I wanted was right there when I wanted to find it, telling me everything I needed to know.

It's not a coincidence when it feels like a company's marketing message and content was created especially for you. It means a marketer somewhere did his or her job well. It means that they took the time to understand their buyers' goals, needs, and objections. This isn't one of those egotistical companies that doesn't care about its customers. When the company takes the time to understand my questions and answer them through a video, a few blog posts, or a Q&A, I trust that company. And guess where I am inclined to buy? Yes, the place that was helpful, even if their price is higher than their competition's.

Adele Revella taught me about buyer personas nearly a decade ago, and it was one of the most important revelations I've had as a marketer. If you've read any of my recent bestselling books or seen one of my live presentations, you know I talk a lot about buyer personas. The concept of buyer personas is so essential to good marketing and sales that I've been bugging Adele to write this book for years. And I'm glad she did. Once you dig into the concept of buyer personas, you too will learn how to transform your marketing and your business.

You'll learn that buyer persona research ensures that you market using the voice of your buyer, not of your founder, CEO, product manager, or public relations (PR) agency staffer. This builds a bond of trust with your buyers that leads them into the buying process, making your salespeople's work easier and quicker.

Organizations that take the time to understand their buyer personas escape the trap of selling to the wrong people at the wrong time. You will see that by being helpful and informative rather than hyping, your marketing will come alive. Your buyer will be eager

to do business with you and excited to share your ideas with others. The sale will be made more quickly, and your buyers may even be willing to pay a premium to work with you.

Gaining insight into your buyer personas will transform your business!

—David Meerman Scott

International bestselling author of *The New Rules of Marketing & PR*
and *The New Rules of Sales and Service*

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Acknowledgments

First, I want to thank the thousands of marketers who attended my product marketing workshops between 2001 and 2010. If you were among that audience, your plea for practical guidance about buyer personas was the inspiration for the training and research company that I founded in 2010 and ultimately, the reason that I wrote this book. I have faithfully attempted to answer your questions and trust that you will let me know if I have missed anything.

I am also deeply indebted to David Meerman Scott, whose best-selling books and frequent conference appearances are among the reasons that marketers around the world are clamoring for buyer personas. You were right, David; I needed to get these words out of my head and onto paper. I only wish it had been as easy as you described.

Many thanks to my clients, friends, and colleagues for sharing your stories about working with buyer personas. I had hoped to include everything you said and apologize to those whose tales are not included here. Sadly, there was space for only some of your hard-won wisdom.

This brings me to Lana Bradford. You were an incredible coach throughout this effort, and especially in those final weeks, as my ability to construct legible sentences was obscured by a rapidly approaching deadline. I could not have written this book without your skillful coaxing, extensive research, and clarifying edits.

Thank you to Shannon Vargo and Elizabeth Gildea at John Wiley & Sons for believing in this book and entrusting me with its writing. I am honored to be one of your authors.

I also want to acknowledge my fantastic team at Buyer Persona Institute, especially John Fox, Gordana Stok, Dave Barnhart, Frank Della Rosa, and Bonnie Wooding. It was through your commitment and hard work that the research kept flowing and the clients remained delighted in spite of my “book brain.” You are amazing and I am privileged to work with you.

Finally, I want to thank my friends and family, whose faith in my ability to complete this work never flagged. In particular, I owe a debt of gratitude to Betsy Ruth Dayton for the gentle touch that kept my stress at a manageable level, and to our beloved dogs, Arie and Charlie, for insisting that it was time to stop writing and take a walk.

Most of all, I am grateful to my husband, Steve, for your partnership throughout this particular journey and all those that are yet to come. You are my rock.

Introduction

Listen First, Then Speak

“So what brings you in here to see me?”

That question is spoken countless times every day in doctors’ offices, car repair shops, bank loan offices, law firms, and hundreds of other professional establishments. What usually follows that question is the customer’s narrative describing their problem.

“My daughter is entering college next year, and I want to explore loan options for her education.”

“It’s probably nothing, doctor, but I’ve been wondering about a small change I’ve noticed recently . . .”

“The engine has been making the strangest sound when I drive downhill. It all started right after I loaned the car to my brother-in-law, who said he used it to move his large collection of Civil War cannon balls.”

“I’m concerned that my cat has been pacing back and forth at night and making very loud howls.”

Listening is an essential part of any first meeting. It’s how professionals learn about their customers’ concerns, goals, and expectations so that they can present a relevant solution.

Yet in many organizations this one-to-one communication between marketing professionals and their customers is infrequent—if it happens at all.

How often do you have an opportunity to listen to your customers describe their problems? Do you know how to ask the questions that will make this conversation valuable for you and your customer? And

most important, do you know how to apply what you've heard to become a more effective marketer?

The art and science of asking probing questions and carefully listening to your customers' responses lie at the core of the buyer persona concept. It's the key to discovering their mind-set and the motivation that prompts them to purchase a solution like yours.

One marketing professional confessed to me after conducting her first buyer interview, "This is almost like cheating; like getting the exam paper weeks before the final. Instead of trying to guess what matters, I now know not only what the customer wants—I realize how she goes about it."

This is the power of the buyer persona. Built around a story about your customers' buying decision, the buyer persona reveals insight into your buyer's expectations and concerns as they decide whether to do business with you, choose your competitor, or simply opt to do nothing at all.

This book will show you how you can listen to your buyers' stories to gain insight into the factors that trigger their search, how they define success, and what affects their final decision that a particular approach is the best one for them. We'll show you how the buyer's personal narrative reveals language and phrases that will resonate with other buyers with similar concerns, and how to define and focus on the activities that compel buyers to take action. You will see how giving buyers the clearly articulated information they seek, in the language they understand, when and where they need it, is the essence of effective marketing.

Why Is Everyone Talking about Buyer Personas?

In the simplest terms, buyer personas are examples or archetypes of real buyers that allow marketers to craft strategies to promote products and services to the people who might buy them. During the past decade the term has almost become a marketing mantra.

But as this book will show, the growing interest in buyer personas has resulted in confusion about how they are created, how they are used, and their ultimate effectiveness.

It's the intention of this book to provide some much needed clarity.

The marketer's need to understand the market is hardly new. But the depth of insight required is increasing exponentially as technological advances demand that organizations rethink how they sell everything from music and books to bulldozers and information technology. Michael Gottlieb, a senior director of marketing and business strategy at one of the world's leading software firms, described it this way: "*What* we are selling is changing; *who* we are selling to is changing (some are people we've never sold to before); and *how* these customers want to be engaged, marketed, and sold to is changing, too."

Buyer personas have a lot to do with attaining that kind of alignment, but not in the way that marketers often use them, which is basically to build a profile of the people who are their intended customers. Rather, the contention of this book is that when buyer personas evolve from authentic stories related by actual buyers—in the form of one-on-one interviews—the methodology and presentation allows you to capture the buyer's expectations and the factors that influence them. Then, and only then, can you truly stand in your buyer's shoes and consider the buying decision from the buyer's point of view. This goes way beyond buyer profiling—but most marketers don't realize that.

As a veteran sales and marketing executive, trainer, and researcher, I've worked with thousands of marketers in hundreds of companies. Not long ago, I met with executives from a large corporation who had spent hundreds of thousands of dollars for research on "buyer personas" that was essentially worthless. The company had purchased profiles about the people who buy from it, but these failed to capture the crucially important stories revealing how buyers make this type of

decision. I've also seen companies purchase oversegmented research that defined dozens of buyer personas, a number that would be feasibly impossible for them to market to with any effectiveness.

In both of these cases, the company had lost its way by focusing on the goal to build buyer personas without a clear plan to ensure that they contain useful findings.

Naturally, it's far easier to make educated guesses and assumptions about what buyers may be thinking based on extrapolations of your own knowledge or intuition. That's certainly how large aspects of the marketing community have functioned for decades. But the climate of social and technological change favors companies that embrace a culture of buyer understanding that allows them to adapt to customer needs. Just consider the major technology players that have receded or disappeared: AOL, Digital, Polaroid, Wang, AltaVista, Netscape, Fairchild Semiconductor, Palm, Sun Microsystems. The list could run for pages. Each of these companies was outrun by competitors who possessed greater clarity about their buyers' expectations.

Will This Approach Work for You?

This book is for marketing executives who wish to avoid that kind of dire scenario, whether they work in the business-to-business (B2B) or the business-to-consumer (B2C) arena. It is specifically aimed at marketers of "medium- and high-consideration" products, services, and solutions—buying decisions that require a considerable investment of your buyers' thought and time. Examples of high-consideration decisions range from selecting the right vendor of capital equipment or picking which college to attend to carefully choosing a new car or the most appropriate location for office space. This decision-making process differs markedly from impulse purchases made in a grocery store or at the checkout register.

When you consider that we want to interview buyers to capture their story, it is easy to understand why a detailed narrative about a choice between exotic vacation destinations would be immensely useful. In contrast, little insight would be gained as a result of asking a buyer to explain why she decided to purchase a particular pack of gum.

Although the Internet has given us instant access to immense knowledge, even the most sophisticated applications of Big Data won't reveal what you can learn by listening to your buyers' stories. Just as there is nothing to acquaint you with a foreign culture as intimately as staying with a native family in their home, the best way to gain deep insight into the mind-set of your buyers is to spend quality time with them.

The buyer persona methodology outlined in this book will help companies avoid the consequences that inevitably engulf organizations that fail to listen intensely to their buyers. In the pages to come I will explain how you can use buyer personas to craft successful marketing strategies based on insight that would otherwise be nearly impossible to acquire. I will show how this can be done without exorbitant investments in money, time, or labor. It just requires adhering to a well-defined process, mastering a few skills, and honing your analytical thinking. This is a craft and a set of skills that can be learned, and this book will serve as your primer for how you or your organization can achieve this.

We've organized this book into three parts. In the first three chapters, you'll learn what a buyer persona is and what it is not. You'll find out why so many buyer personas are not as useful as they should be and what you need to do to ensure the success of your buyer persona initiative.

In Part II, we'll help you decide whether you want to build your own buyer personas or use a third party to do this work for you. You'll learn about every aspect of the methodology that you or your contractor needs to employ to interview buyers about their decisions,

collect and analyze your findings, and use these to build insightful buyer personas.

Finally, in Part III, we'll share step-by-step guidance about how to use buyer personas to define your marketing strategies. You'll learn how to rely on buyer persona insights to develop your messaging and marketing activities and align with your sales organization, and in the final chapter, we'll recommend a place to begin and explain our vision for the future role of buyer personas.

We are excited that you share our interest in buyer personas and hope that this book will help you join the growing ranks of buyer expert marketers.

PART

I

Understanding the Art and Science of Buyer Personas