Customer personas

Overview

We often advise business to create a set of 'user personas' which can be used to ensure written content, design, products (your business!) are all on track and appropriate. The basic idea is to divide your audience into groups with similar characteristics and then create profiles of your archetypal customers from each group.

Audience groups

The first step in developing a set of personas is to work out how many different groups your target customers fit into. These groups should be based on your understanding of your customers and should come from solid data. You may want to ask customers to take part in a questionnaire or even conduct interviews as part of the information gathering process. However, if you deal with your customers first-hand you may already know enough to get on.

Let's say your company makes gadgets of some kind. You may define the audience groups as follows:

Group 1: Teens

Age range: 14 – 17

Not much money of their own but have the power to influence parents' purchasing decisions. Keeping up with their friends is seen as vital.

Group 2: Technology literate 20 somethings

Age range: 21 – 28

Students and graduates in the early stages of their careers. Large amount of disposable income. They keep up with trends and always like to own the latest devices.

Group 3: Parents of younger children

Age range: 30 – 35

Less in touch with technology than they used to be but still interested. Generally perform some research before buying. Less likely to buy premium products and will typically want a purchase to last for at least 3 years.

Personas

After defining your audience groups you can get more specific by writing one or two profiles for members of each group. Using the above examples again you might end up with something like the following:

Name: Amy
Age: 16
Occupation: Student

Amy is highly influenced by her friends and what is deemed to be 'cool'. She is more concerned with a device looking right than having lots of features. Her interests include watching TV and playing sports. Her favourite programmes are X Factor and The Only Way Is Essex (which she and her friends, of course, refer to as TOWIE) Amy has a way of getting what she wants and has been promised a treat if she does well in her exams.

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Name: John
Age: 34
Occupation: Account manager for a recruitment company

John used to spend a lot of money on all the latest gadgets but since getting married and having kids (a two year old daughter and another on the way) he now has to think more carefully about his purchases — even if only to justify them to his wife if she asks! John used to go to the gym three times a week but has let his membership lapse because "he just doesn't have the time". This is partially true but more likely is that he started going when he was single and now just feels less motivation for staying in shape. John is outgoing and popular with his colleagues. He is likely to talk about both positive and negative buying choices.

These are simple examples but you can see how using the above would shape written work or visual design. When you do this for real you may want to include more detailed information about socioeconomic background, career progressions and goals etc. You could even include a suitable photograph from a stock photography library to make the persona that little bit more real. The more detail you include the more useful the personas will be to anyone tasked with creating content for your marketing materials and website. Try to include information based on patterns you see in your customer base. Don't base a persona on a real person that sticks out in your memory, base it on common traits which you see repeated time and again.

The process of creating the personas should help you to see the diversity in your audience. This may lead to you deciding to aim a marketing campaign at one particular group or even to run parallel campaigns aimed at different groups. You could for example aim a print campaign at Group 3 and online advertising at Group 2.

We hope the above is useful to you. You can find out more at www.ablewild.com/resources.
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