Personas: How to create personas with secondary data

(English version)
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How to create *personas* with secondary data

1 What are *personas*?

*Personas* are a useful and fun marketing tool that help better understand one’s target group and assist in decisions to make product features, website navigation and even social-media interactions more user-friendly.

There are several definitions of what “*personas*” are circulating the internet, here is a short definition:

| Personas are fictional characters created to represent a target group or audience with its different user (archetypal types, which are build around observed behavior patterns among real people. Each persona is representative of a segment of the target group. |

The central arguments for using *personas* are firstly, that they make assumptions about one’s target group and audience explicit. Secondly, by creating a character, one is able to engender more interest and empathy in opposition to a faceless crowd. (see: Adlin & Priott, 2010, p.1). Or as Goltz (2014) puts it:

“*It is easier to design for a specific somebody, rather than a generic everybody*”

The traditional way of creating *personas* is by extensive research and and, among other methods, ethnographic interviews, focus groups and expert interviews. This process tends to consume a lot of time and financial resources. However, there is another way to create them, namely, by using secondary data that might already be available to you.

2 Creating *personas*

Since a target group is mostly composed by individuals with different characteristics that cannot be represented by a single person, it will most certainly be necessary to develop more than one *persona* to represent the target group more realistically. Each *persona* should be representative of a segment of the target group. There is no golden rule on how many *personas* are ideal – it really depends on how differentiated one’s target group is. However, there has to be a clear delineation between the *personas* – if they are too similar, it could be a sign that there are too many *personas* and the number of personas representing the target group needs to be reduced. One way of doing this is by merging personas which have proven to be too similar.

In this sense, the first step is to pre-define your **core target group** to obtain an idea of how many *personas* you will need.

2.1 Pre-defining your target group

The first step is to make a quick-list of the core target group and in so, gain an overview. This should be just a rough list based on one’s own experience or one’s expectations in relation to the target group. This should be by no means a complete, extensive and final list of the target group. Like in a brainstorming, simply write down everything that comes to mind.
In the case of the Research in Germany website the quick list was created as follows:

1. Core target group:
   - international graduates
   - international PhDs
   - international Postdocs
   - international senior scientists

2. Personal motivations:
   - international graduates who want to do a PhD abroad i.e. Germany
   - international PhD Students looking for a research stay abroad i.e. Germany
   - international PhDs looking for a job or Postdoc position abroad i.e. Germany
   - senior scientists looking for a job willing to relocate to Germany

3. Motivations for using the website:
   - international graduates who want to do a PhD abroad i.e. Germany and need information on how to apply and requirements
   - international PhD Students looking for a research stay abroad i.e. Germany who need information on scholarships, programmes, life in Germany
   - international PhDs looking for a job or Postdoc position abroad i.e. Germany and need information on where research is being done in his field, where to find vacancies and requirements
   - senior scientists looking for a job willing to relocate to Germany and need information on the research landscape and career advice

Please keep in mind, that this list should not represent the entire target group, but its core.

Once this list is ready, it is time to find data and go more in-depth and back-up your knowledge of the target group.

2.2 Gathering data and going in-depth:

After roughly listing who belongs in the target group and their motivations, it is time to more accurately define and expand this list through secondary data. You will need data on the following topics:

- **demographics**: age, gender, geographical location
- **psychographics**: personality, values, opinions, beliefs, attitudes, activities, interests, social class and lifestyles
- **skills**: level of education, relevant experience (or inexperience), professional background, technical skills, soft skills, language skills
- **motivation**: motivation for using your product or service
- **personal motivation/goals**: personal and career related, short-term and long-term


It will probably be necessary to use a combination of sources to gather all the data needed. Here are a few ideas to help you get started with your research:

2.2.1 Demographics

There are a few options to construct the demographic profile of the target group. One way of doing this is by analysing the demographics of one’s audience:
• **Social media analytics:** If your organisation runs a social media channel, check the analytics and see who is following the channel.

• **Website analytics:** With the use of a tracking tool on your website, it is also possible to collect information on the target group’s demographics, preferences and interests (for certain topics) and, for instance, their usage of mobile devices.

• **Databases:** Institutions usually collect data (e.g., alumni-database), which can also be used to construct the demographics.

One can also set the demographics themselves, if the goal is to target a specific group that does not (yet) belong to the current audience.

### 2.2.2 Psychographics, skills and motivations

If **studies** and **surveys** have already been conducted on the target group, they can be used to fill out the psychographic information and even their motivations (i.e. short-term and long-term goals, motivation for using your product or service, …).

The creation of the **personas** for the campaign “Research in Germany”, was largely based on the study: “Internationale Nachwuchswissenschaftler in Deutschland: Motivation - Integration - Förderung” (Wegner 2016), a.k.a. “MIND” (in English: International junior scientists in Germany: motivation - integration – support). This study allowed for a good insight on the types of motivations for academic mobility as well as showing specific psychographic characteristics pertaining to each type. A short compilation of studies on student and academic mobility will be presented on section 3, which can be used as a first orientation.

Another useful source of data is the so called “usability study”. Depending on the questionnaire used on the study, one is able to gain a very good insight on the target group’s behaviour and skills, such as technical abilities and, in the case of Research in Germany, what the motivation for using the website were.

However, these studies and other surveys are just one of many sources. **First-hand experience** interacting with the target group (through e-mail, social media or face-to-face) can also be an excellent source of information on your audience. This knowledge can help not only to understand the target group’s goals, demographics and psychographics, but also their different skill sets, such as language skills and professional background.

### 2.2.3 Create a story to go with your persona

Here comes in the creative part. It is time to put your research into the demographics, psychographics and skills together with a compelling story about your fictional character. The aim is to construct a scenario with a plausible story about this fictional person, adding specific qualities and a personality type.

**Personality type**

Place the **persona** on a spectrum between being an/a e.g.:

- introvert – extrovert
- conservative – liberal
- creative - analytical
- passive – active

**Qualities**

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1 See pages 12-14 for a summary of motives and motivation-types
Use adjectives to describe the persona, e.g. studious, friendly, talkative, forgetful, impatient, hard-working, curious, ambitious, risk-taker, adaptable, stressed, competent, multitasker, caring, accessible, serious, …

**Personify**

In order to really bring the persona to life, give him or her a **name** and a **face**. If pictures are not available, check image databases like iStock. It is also nice to give the persona a **quote**, which summarizes their expectation while using one’s product or service. Ask yourself: what is this person looking for? It is possible to even use a real quote from an interview or questionnaire.

Keep in mind, however, that a persona is not supposed to represent the average user accurately, but a user that has specific set of qualities. As Cooper (1999, p. 128) points out, “it is more important to define the persona in great and specific detail than that the persona be the precisely correct one”. So be creative!

**TIPP:** Let your friends inspire you and apply some of their characteristics to your personas. In the example provided on section 3, was based on a real person, namely an individual from Taiwan who is a foodie and likes to travel around Europe and taste local Taiwanese cuisine. This person would then compare it to the original cuisine of her home country. This story is quite amusing and unique, so that by incorporating it into the persona’s story, he became a much more tangible character, it made him likable and relatable. (The persona is, however, not entirely based on the real person.)

3  **Example & Template**

**Here** is an example of a persona created for the campaign “Research in Germany”. The first image presents a more graphic approach; the second image shows more of a story telling approach. One can produce both and have them presented together. Reading the story makes it easier to connect with the persona. However, the graphic version gives a more rapid overview.

**Here** is a template to download for your own creations. It was made using PowerPoint, as it is a software that is readily available in most workplaces. There are, however, many templates on the internet which can be downloaded, some for free, others for a small fee. You can use the template as it is, or as inspiration for your own template.

4  **Summary**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Personas</strong></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>What</strong></td>
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</tr>
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<td><strong>Why</strong></td>
<td>“It is easier to design for “a specific somebody, rather than a generic everybody”</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Create</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **How** | • social media & website analytics, databases  
• studies & surveys  
• usability studies  
• first-hand experience |
| **Data** | • **demographics:** age, gender, geographical location |
| **psychographics**: personality, values, opinions, beliefs, attitudes, activities, interests, social class and lifestyles |
| **skills**: level of education, relevant experience (or inexperience), professional background, technical skills, soft skills, language skills |
| **motivation**: motivation for using your product or service |
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**Story**

- **name**: give your persona a name
- **picture**: give your persona a face
- **quote**: what are your persona’s expectations (while using your product/service)
- **qualities and personality type**: “studious”, “friendly”, “talkative”, “introvert” …

5 Compilation of resources on student, academic and international mobility

This list was largely based on the bibliography compiled by Nicolai Netz, (DZHW).


6 References


Cooper, A. (1999). The Inmates are Running the Asylum: Why High-tech Products Drive Us Crazy and How to Restore the Sanity (First Printing). Sams. doi: 10.1007/978-3-322-99786-9_1


“Jahresstatistik 2015” from the Research in Germany Website (Webtrekk)
About

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