

The Intelligent Guide to Buyer Personas

How to **Better Understand Your Buyers** and Create **Customer-Centric Marketing**



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*Excerpts from

Ardath Albee's book, *Digital Relevance: Developing Marketing Content and Strategies that Drive Results*. It's your guide to radical relevance.

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The Rise of Customer-Centricity

Foreword by Katie Martell, CMO and Co-Founder, Cintell

It's never been a more exciting – or challenging - time to be in B2B marketing. No longer is our function solely relegated to left-brain tactics or right-brain creativity; marketing today represents a confluence of art, heart and science.

Along with an increase in responsibility, visibility, and marketing technology, our teams are increasingly looked to as the resident experts on the customer. It's never been more important to remember who it's all for in the first place. Our buyers represent the “heart” of the equation, the empathy we must demonstrate every time we create a strategy meant to help our businesses grow.

Truly effective marketing begins with a deep understanding of our buyers and requires us to learn who they are beyond a job title. Personas aren't enough unless they enable us to dig deep and uncover the insights that make our strategies *radically relevant*. In an increasingly competitive market, your advantage may just be how well you understand your buyers.

That's why I am thrilled to bring you **The Intelligent Guide to Buyer Personas**, including a full excerpt from marketing strategist Ardath Albee's new book, [*Digital Relevance: Developing Marketing Content and Strategies that Drive Results*](#).



I hope you will use this as a compass for developing customer-centric content, messaging, and more.

Let's start a customer-centric marketing revolution.

Best,
Katie Martell
CMO and Co-Founder

[Cintell](#)



Get to Know Ardath



As CEO & B2B marketing strategist for my consulting firm Marketing Interactions, Inc, I've spent over 30 years in business management and marketing operations and use every bit of it to help my clients create persona-driven digital marketing strategy with compelling content platforms that contribute to downstream revenues.

It doesn't hurt that I'm a die-hard writer & storyteller.

My clients include Cisco, Adobe, Autodesk, BMC Software, Teradata, Core Media, Riverbed Technology, Parallels, PR Newswire, Sykes, SEEBURGER, Deluxe, Transunion, Steelwedge & Demandbase, to name a few.

The way customers buy has been irrevocably changed by the power they've won back through technology. By recognizing how buyers' needs are evolving, I help companies to get closer to their customers by escalating their ability to communicate their distinct value with digital marketing, nurturing, and sales enablement initiatives that address the continuum experience.

Marketing needs to be implemented as a strategy that works in concert with business objectives. I teach companies how to use marketing automation and content marketing approaches to full potential to transform the marketing and selling of complex solutions by keeping the customer front and center.

My focus is on connecting the process and the people, but it's also on the creation of buyer-centric content and integrating channels to optimal advantage. With those fundamentals in place the opportunities for marketing and sales to drive business growth are phenomenal.

Ardath Albee



PART 1

The Foundation of an Effective Content Strategy



“I’m a fervent believer...

...that the foundation for relevance in marketing—digital or otherwise—is personas. I’m not talking about the flat one-dimensional one-sheets that skim the surface.

I’m talking about the in-depth, comprehensive inquiry into the characteristics, attributes and interests of the target segments who play a role in deciding whether or not to do business with you.

The reason personas are needed is to put the focus of marketing where it needs to be—squarely on the customer.

The better you know customers, the better this will work out.





There are a variety of different flavors of external personas from buyer personas to customer personas to user personas. Each of them has a different context to be addressed.

The personas for each company are unique—even if in the same industry—due to different business models, demographic and firmographic focuses, and distinct value.





Buyer Personas

Buyer personas are focused on prospects looking to solve a problem or meet an objective that your products, solutions or services help them to achieve. Buyer personas encompass all of the differing roles or stakeholders involved in the purchase decision and are usually represented by decision maker, influencer, champion, and gatekeeper roles. Distinctions can also be made as to economic buyer and functional buyer.



Customer Personas

Customer personas have solved their initial problem by choosing your solution. This means their context must build from this new status quo to what's next. The objective for both customer and user personas is to create higher loyalty and retention, as well as increase account value through renewals, cross and up sell. The roles represented by customer personas can include the person who “owns” the solution within the company, the executive(s) responsible for the department(s) its value impacts and procurement or vendor relations.



User Personas

User personas are designed to address the perspectives of those who work with your products, solutions or services on a daily basis. The goal is to help these “end users” achieve more complete use of the product, gain more value than they initially anticipated, as well as to help them become champions for continued use, new additions, extensions or feature upgrades.

PART 2

How to Design Personas as Active Tools



Personas should not be approached as a checklist item and filed away, once completed.



The purpose for a B2B persona is to serve as a tool that defines and guides the marketing programs developed to engage a specific market segment.

Never forget that a persona is similar to a composite sketch.

It must help you to get close enough to the business interests of the actual humans involved in the process to create the opportunity for marketing programs to reach the goals set for them.



Personas should:

Serve as a tool that can be referenced easily to help guide the development of relevant marketing programs for the market segment represented by that persona



Point to specific topics of content as related to priorities defined as important to the persona

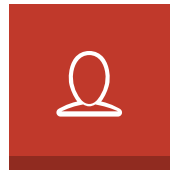
Reveal the circumstances of what could derail the deal (or the championing of the deal)



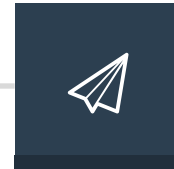
Be unique from all other personas to indicate a truly definable market segment



Identify a market segment that your marketing programs can reach and engage, as well as the means (channels, messages, formats) for doing so



Build a storyline across the continuum of the buying process that enables mapping content to needs and priorities at different points of decision making



Help marketers understand how emotions and empathy play in solving the specific problem or for reaching a key objective

Ideally, personas developed with this level of depth will serve as the foundation for the content strategy developed to engage, create purposeful intent, and motivate them to buy.

(A one-page profile with a few demographic details and descriptive adjectives won't do the job.)



PART 3



KEEP THE BIAS AT BAY

It's often hard for marketers to take an impartial view on the development of personas.

Keeping Bias at Bay

Difficult – but **critical**.

There are always those customers who stay top of mind—either because they are ideal for your solution, or because they're the squeaky wheels.

Marketers have strong opinions about what works and what doesn't in the marketplace. Unfortunately, they also tend to think that if they like a concept, so will their prospects and customers.

The depth of research and voice of customer and prospect interviews conducted to create personas will often uncover factors previously unknown or unconsidered.

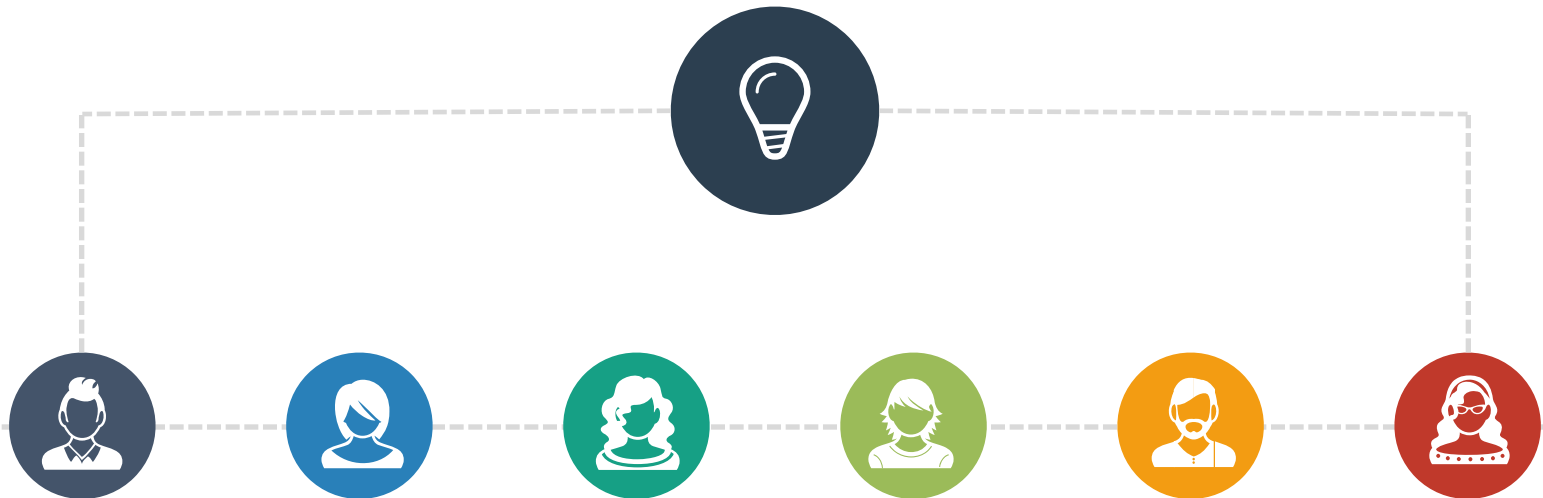
If these conflict with what marketers “know” they tend to discount them. This can result in allowing our biases to invalidate the research and data collected from the interviews.

It may make marketers feel back in control as they make personas line up to their perspectives, but it won't help the personas serve as the foundation for a truly effective content strategy.

Continually remind yourself that a persona is a composite sketch based on the commonalities of the role the persona represents—not representative of an individual person.

PART 4

Consider the Buying Committee



B2B buying decisions are made by committee.

This means they must work together in some way to reach consensus or a purchase decision will not get made.



The process of developing buyer personas should include discovery about how each of them interacts with the other personas on the committee.

Depending on the role each plays in the decision about solving the problem or meeting the objective, the information they need to share with each other will be more effective if it matches the appropriate perspective.

When you look at “a day in the life” of your persona, be sure to include these interpersonal relationships. The overlays can also inform you about how to get your content and ideas into the hands of an elusive persona via one more willing to pass it along in service of their own agenda.

For example:

IF THE DIRECTOR OF IT

is delegated to do research and evaluation about how to solve a problem and report back to the CIO, they may be motivated to share a paper with strategic insights that they can use to help convince their boss about the selection they'd like to make.

The CIO may not be directly reachable via your marketing programs, so looking for alternative routes to get your company's expertise in front of them is a good choice.

Likewise, in this scenario, the line-of-business sponsor (budget holder) for the project may not know what they don't know.

In this case, the Director of IT could serve as a mentor and pass along information designed to educate them about the issue by matching their perspective.

The information that will sway this persona is likely not the same information that will influence the Director of IT.



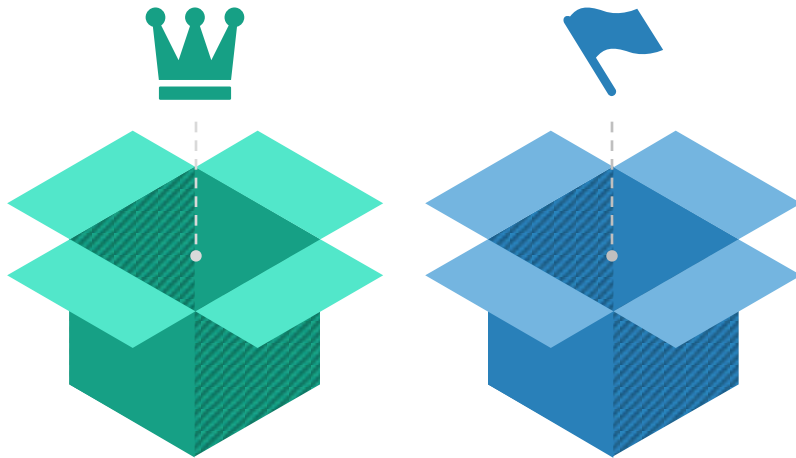
PART 5

How Are Personas Like Snowflakes?

No Two Are Alike



Personas Are Never Interchangeable



Personas Out of the Box?
You're out of your mind.

“Over the last few years, I have created more than 100 personas. No two of them have been interchangeable.

In fact, I'd argue that if the same content can be used for more than one persona, you don't have more than one persona.”

-Ardath Albee

Personas are developed based on roles and responsibilities, not titles.

One persona may be representative of a variety of titles depending on the problem being solved and the hierarchy most commonly seen in the companies in the market segment the persona addresses.



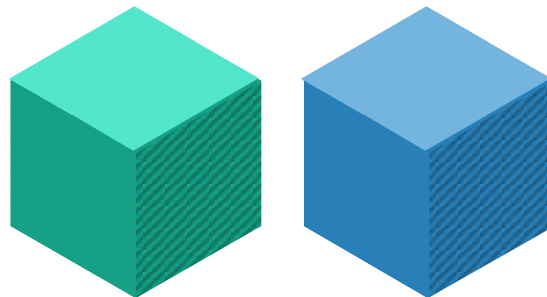
What makes them unique is perspective. For example, a role that's responsible for company growth may view a problem or objective quite differently than a role responsible for managing costs. Think CEO vs. CFO.

Nuances can change everything.

For example, I see a lot of projects where the goal is to reach marketers. As the practice has grown and morphed due to new channels and means to market, that doesn't mean much as companies grow in size.

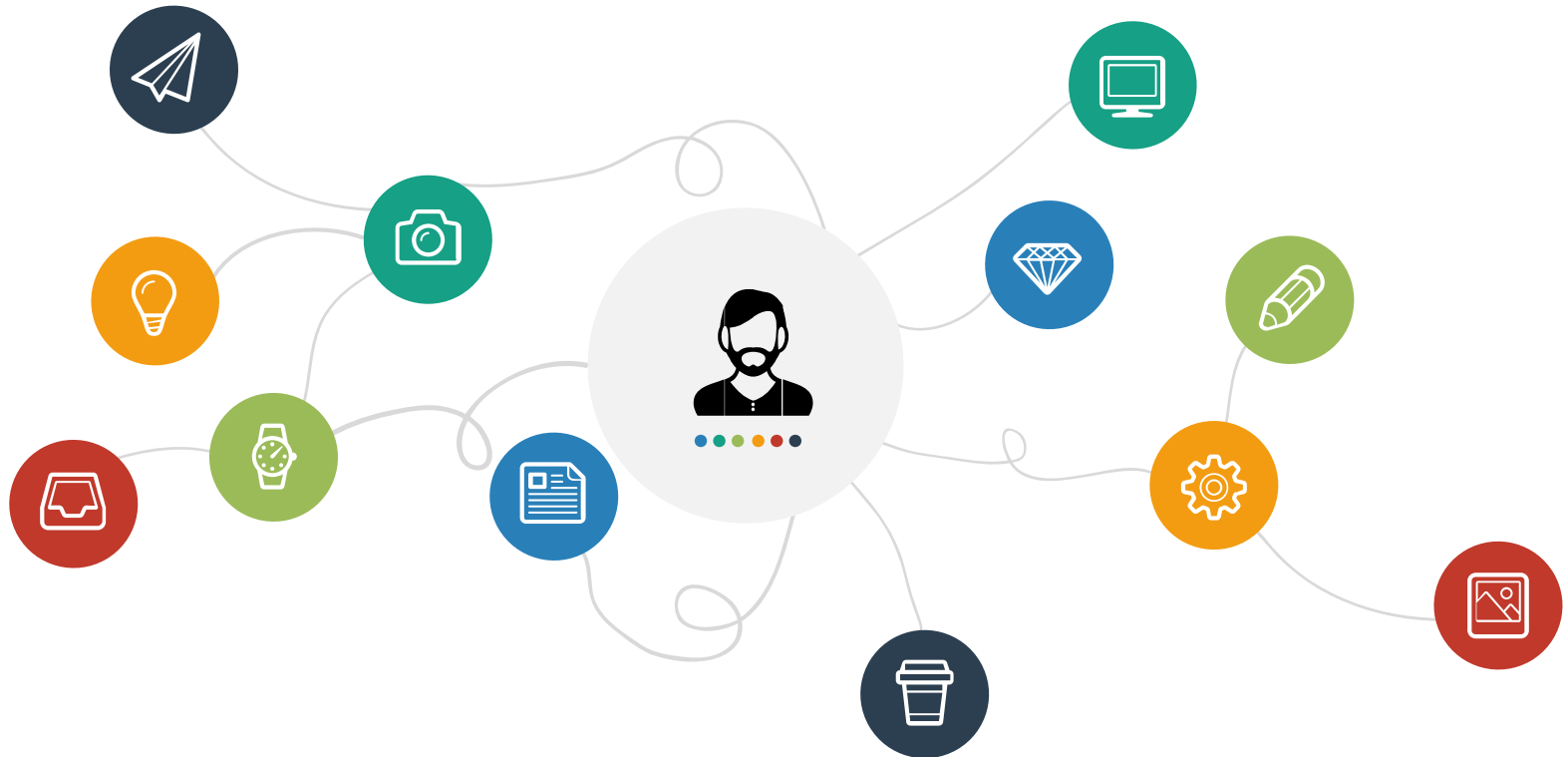
A **Director of Demand Generation** may be responsible for lead generation where a **Director of Social Media** could be evaluated based on brand awareness, reach, and industry conversations.

The same messaging won't appeal to both of them. Their objectives are different, as are the components they include in their strategic plans.



PART 6

The Components of a Persona



There are a variety of components needed to create personas with the depth needed for them to serve as active tools. Here is a brief summary. (A more extensive review can be found in *Digital Relevance*, Chapter 6).

The Components of a Buyer Persona

Engagement Scenarios



Print this page. It would look fabulous on your wall!

Components, defined:

Objectives

What do the personas need to accomplish?
What are they responsible for?

Problems

The flip side of objectives. What's in the way of achieving their objectives?

Obstacles

What could keep them from taking next steps at each stage?

Questions

What will the persona ask they choose to take each step in their research and evaluation? Begin at status quo—in relation to their current situation and work forward.

Orientation

What appeals to them and what personality traits are common across the segment. For example, an engineer is likely to be very detail oriented and think logically.

Keywords and Phrases

Aside from SEO, this is about relevance and context. What will they query? What will catch their attention in the stream of information they see?



Engagement Scenarios

Map out the steps of what it will look like to engage the persona, from attracting attention to moving them toward purchase. Include the channels and types of content and conversations that could be used. Don't forget to consider their interaction with other personas.

First Person Scenarios

Draft this as a "day in the life" of the persona told in first person as if they're speaking directly to you.

Social media and online destinations

There are a lot of social media channels. Which ones will your persona use? Where else online do they look for information?

PART 7

The Value of a Persona





Creating personas with this level of depth that can be used as active tools contributes to achieving and sustaining relevance maturity.

When creating digital strategy and execution plans for a considered purchase, marketers must be able to sustain the consistency of messaging and storyline over a long period of time—ranging from months to years

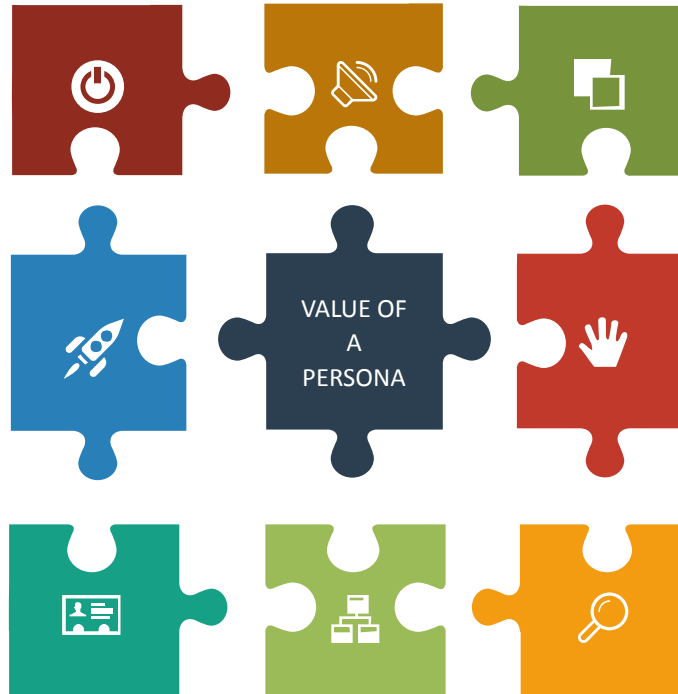
Personas can help marketers better achieve their goals by:

Enabling writers to grasp **context and interests** quickly to streamline content creation without veering away from the storyline

Brainstorm **new content ideas** by determining all the different ways the personas questions can be answered with content

Optimizing resources by only distributing content in **preferred channels**

Helping to design the flow of a **cohesive story** across all buying stages designed to guide prospects progressively toward purchase

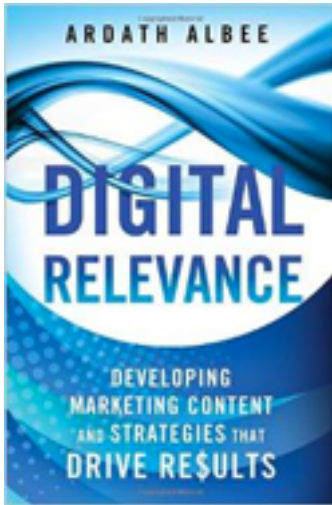


Simplifying the effort to map content to buying stages

Understanding how to **revise or refresh** existing content to get more return from investments already made

Increasing company and brand **credibility** with target markets and customers

Providing better ways to **measure outcomes** based on goals aligned with a persona's objectives



KEEP READING...

For more information about leveraging buyer personas to reach radical relevance in your marketing, read [*Digital Relevance: Developing Marketing Content and Strategies that Drive Results*](#)

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