



## The Power of Personas

Marketing personas bring the defining characteristics of customers to life, helping to build universal consensus around their needs. For brands seeking to deliver a better experience, it is a powerful tool to foster greater insight and empathy.

People love to eat chicken.

All kinds. Fresh. Frozen. Wings. Legs. Thighs. Backs. Boneless. Roasted. Barbequed. Thin sliced. Whole. Halved. Fried. The list goes on.

Chicken is the most popular meat amongst Canadian households, seen as healthier and more affordable than beef or pork. The average household eats chicken at least once per week when preparing meals at home – and spends about \$250 per year.

Yet when Craig Evans, President of Granny’s Poultry, a farmer-owned food processor based in Winnipeg, wanted to increase sales of its nutritionally-enhanced line of chicken products – known as “functional foods” – he was uncertain whether the market was large enough. And even if the market size warranted the gamble, could he risk staking the future of the company on a niche category? He had other uncertainties: Which consumer segments were worth targeting? How could he even reach them when the shopper buying decision often revolved around price? And how could he build brand awareness in a low involvement category?

As if all that was not enough, the store category managers rigidly control their shelf allotments. As Craig admits: “Walmart doesn’t

return our calls”. Especially in the frozen food section, shelf space is at a premium, making it hard to displace established brands. And although Granny’s Poultry had always enjoyed strong regional brand recognition, it lacked the media firepower to make itself a national brand. Without stronger consumer demand, Craig was unlikely to win shelf space. He needed a more innovative approach to brand building – one that would give his company sufficient name recognition while capturing the attention of those grocery shoppers who care most about the quality and origin of the food they eat.

To give him the facts he needed to bolster his business case, Craig commissioned a market segmentation study. But he wanted more than just facts. He wanted a story he could tell the grocers – his board – his employees – and, most importantly, the primary shopper. For that, he needed to develop personas which would bring the segments to life: vivid character sketches of people who represent typical shoppers, describing their attitudes, values, lifestyle orientation, concerns, aspirations, dreams and behaviour in a way that would be understood by everyone. A persona tells the story of a person in the same way a biographical profile does, revealing their inner thoughts and desires. It might also chronicle a “day in the life” of that person and be liberally populated with verbatim quotes, just to make it as

real as possible. Personas are a great tool for helping marketers see the world from the perspective of a customer – for evoking empathy – for exposing latent needs – for experience design – and, in the case of Granny’s Poultry, for figuring out the best go-to-market strategy.

The market segmentation study identified five distinct segments, two of which were predisposed to health and wellness messaging: young mothers drawn to social causes who were highly active online, and a fussy group of shoppers who were ultra-conscious of their nutritional needs. Both these groups liked to research their food options; preferred chicken raised locally and ethically; and were willing to try nutritionally-enhanced food products. Even more encouraging: they already favoured Granny Poultry’s products.

The segments were converted into personas based on their survey responses. The socially active Mom became **Kaitlyn – Community Organizer**: “highly principled who believes companies she supports should be too.” The savvy shopper became **Michael – All Natural**: a single guy with an active lifestyle “who tries to take a natural approach around food and health care”. The opportunity with Kaitlyn – tap into her social advocacy enthusiasm and community activism by taking a leadership position in the progressive food movement; with Michael, serve as a vital source of information on food origin and nutritional value.

In appealing to these two segments, Granny’s Poultry had a distinct advantage over privately owned food processors: as a farmer’s co-operative, it was perceived as more socially responsible, with animal care and food safety taking precedence over profits. “Doing the right thing is an underlying model of the company,” Craig says, adding: “The future lies in changing the food habits of a population through innovation in food.” Confident that a brand messaging

strategy around responsible food choice would resonate with its primary market, Granny’s Poultry could seize the moral high ground without anyone challenging its authenticity, and position itself as a “virtuous producer” who could be trusted to act in accordance with its principles.



**Marketing Personas are the ultimate expression of how customers think and feel and is the best way to gain universal consensus on how to serve them.**

## Sea of Skepticism

Connecting with the passions, values and belief systems of customers is critical for brand building today. Persona development brings those attitudes and motivations to life, drawing on the voice of the customer. And that is critical in rallying everyone around the purpose of a brand: why it exists and how it serves the needs of people.

In the case of a large construction products manufacturer, whose end-user market is made up of building contractors, owners and design professionals, personas became an essential tool in the process of shifting to a new selling model. In the past the company leaned heavily on distributors to tell its story. But that market channel was too limiting for the company to differentiate itself. It needed to get closer to its end users, the contractors, to drive demand more directly.

In many large commercial enterprises with a vast army of sales people, change management is always an exercise in persistence: repeatedly making the case for change until everyone accepts that business as usual is not an option. Sales people instinctively resist change, afraid of the unknown, and skeptical of the payoff. They tend to scoff at abstract marketing concepts like “customer intimacy”. Their constant refrain: What’s In It For Me? Driving adoption in a sea of skepticism means one thing: finding early believers who will validate the transformation vision through their personal success and agree to serve as champions of change.

That’s where personas can help: even the most cynical sales professionals will suspend their disbelief if they see compelling evidence that customers are strongly in favour of change. In the construction market, building contactors differ greatly in their attitudes and business practices, although they all share a passionate enthusiasm for their work and are mindful of their legacy. They take immense pride in their contribution to the architectural landscape – to the buildings and structures they help to put up. The sales people just needed to be convinced that contractors craved more direct help from manufacturers – wanted someone knowledgeable to guide them through the myriad of product choices based on an understanding of their individual needs. Someone who would care as much about the success of a project as they do. Someone who would be there when things took an unexpected turn, as they often do on a project. And, most importantly, someone who could be counted on to have their back.

A market segmentation study found four major segments of contractors, differentiated mainly by their business goals and management orientation, which tended to be highly correlated with company size. A select number of contractors representing each

segment were interviewed in depth to learn more about their business history and company ethos. Those personal narratives were then used as the source of inspiration for persona development.

On one end of the spectrum were large established contractors whose driving vision was not simply to be the biggest but to be the best at what they do. Another key segment was unsentimental in their outlook, with a watchful eye on the bottom line, and always on the lookout for ways to reduce labour costs. The smaller contractors were divided into two groups: one saw themselves as “craftsmen” with a higher order purpose while another was made up of gruff, plain-spoken, tough-minded owner/managers with no time for “relationships with sales people”.

Each of these segments had unique challenges, perspectives, goals and needs. Each needed to be treated differently. And each demanded varying levels of support and responsiveness, not simply from the sales representative but from the manufacturer as well. The main takeaway: the company had to persuade contractors to believe as strongly in the integrity of the sales relationship as they did in the quality of the products.

**Customer Personas**



## Kaitlyn

Lifestyle Community Organizer

Kaitlyn is a young mom with 2 small children, a husband, a part-time teaching job and a voracious appetite to be involved at school and in her community. When it comes to the digital world, Kaitlyn is the most connected of anyone. She likes to express her opinion and doesn't back away from starting an online movement for something she believes in. You'll find her on Facebook, Twitter and CafeMom.

Kaitlyn is health conscious, regularly visits her doctor and sees a naturopath as well. Vitamins and supplements are a must along with keeping active and setting a good example so her kids will be active too. When it comes to meals, Kaitlyn leans toward free-range poultry and antibiotic-free meats and will choose locally produced, farm co-operative products when she can. She is open to additional ingredients if they have a nutritional benefit. Kaitlyn is highly principled and believes companies she supports should be too. A company's approach to food safety, the green movement and support for social causes all matter very much to Kaitlyn.

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| <p><b>Product Spend Index</b><br/>(Comparison to Average Spend)</p> <p><b>WHOLE OR PIECES</b></p> <p>Fresh    Below +<br/>Frozen    Above</p> <p><b>PROCESSED</b></p> <p>Fresh    Above ++<br/>Frozen    Above ++<br/>Deli      Above</p> | <p><b>Purchase Drivers</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 Production practices</li> <li>2 High nutritional content</li> <li>3 Heart health</li> </ol> | <p><b>Social Causes</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 Poverty</li> <li>2 Global hunger</li> <li>3 Nutrition for children</li> </ol> | <p><b>Social Media Behaviour</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Social media maven</li> <li>- On Facebook and Twitter whenever she can and likes to participate in blogs about parenting, living healthy and having fun</li> </ul> |
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*"I like trying things that are good for my family and I'll pass the message on to other moms."*

**Demographic Profile:**

- 30 years of age
- Household income \$45,000
- Married with a toddler and an elementary school age child
- Works part-time as a substitute teaching assistant

**Segment Value:**

- Annual Poultry sales – \$683 mm
- 9% share of households
- 14% of annual poultry sales
- Above average monthly poultry spend (\$149/month, highest spenders of all segments)

**Opportunity:**

**In building a groundswell of social media support for Granny's products, you need to get Kaitlyn on board. She's vocal and she cares about making things better for her family and other families.**

**Marketing Personas typically take the form of a vivid character profile describing a specific customer type who represents a needs-based segment.**

## Marketing versus Buyer Personas

The acknowledged inventor of persona design is a software engineer by the name of Alan Cooper who popularized the idea in a book he published in 1999 called “The Inmates Are Running the Asylum”. At the time, the common practice was for business analysts to collect “user requirements” (often through “Joint Application Design” workshops) and then pass those findings on to developers in the form of prioritized software features. A better approach, Cooper argued, was to think of the end users of a system as real-life people, and then design the experience around them. User personas have since become the cornerstone of web and application development.

Marketing personas are similar in their purpose, the goal being to foster empathy toward customers by looking at the world through their eyes. But the use of marketing personas is much broader, cutting across many strategic areas of a business, from brand positioning, to product and experience design, to content marketing.

A subset of marketing personas is a “buyer persona”, used to gain a common understanding of buyer roles and expectations to align and sharpen sales messaging. Whereas marketing personas are generally crafted around needs-based segments, buyer personas tend to reflect the different types of decision makers involved in the buying process, and can usually be created without the effort and expense of a segmentation study. In situations where marketers are deeply familiar with the dynamics of the market, they have the fast-track option of inventing “assumption personas”, drawing on a mix of past research and the collective insights of customer-facing staff.

For marketers directly in charge of customer experience design, personas are part of a larger arsenal which includes other insight-generation techniques. For example, personas are used as the conversational starting point in a “game-storming” workshop called Empathy Mapping where participants are asked to speculate on what a certain type of customer may be thinking or feeling in different usage scenarios. Personas are also used as input for Customer Journey Mapping, which describes the exact steps a customer must take to complete a task while traversing touchpoints, helping to spot the major potholes they are likely to encounter on the way.

Too often marketers reduce their strategic planning to a set of high-level market facts and loose hypotheses about what matters to customers. A rigorous persona design process, beginning with segmentation, will take the guesswork out of experience design and lead to a more empathetic brand whose starting point is always how customers feel and think.



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