

select and test the next segment—for example, the people with diabetes or the moms who want to lose weight—until I find an attractive segment or decide to pivot.

Use Personas to Describe the Customers and Users

A helpful technique to describe the customers and the users of your product is the use of *personas*.²³ Personas are fictional characters that usually consist of a name and a picture; relevant characteristics, behaviors, and attitudes; and a goal. The goal is the benefit the persona wants to achieve, or the problem the character wants to see solved. Different personas can have different goals. For instance, I could create a persona for my healthy-eating app who wants to lose weight, and another persona who wants to experience fewer digestive problems. Understanding the personas' goals allows you to create a product that does a great job at creating value for the customers and users. It avoids the fallacy of a solution-centric approach: worrying more about the product and its features and technologies than the reason people would want to buy and use it in the first place.

Persona Tips

Any persona description should be based on knowledge gained from direct interaction with the target customers and users. Before you create your personas, you should therefore get to know your audience, for example, by observing how they currently get a job done and by interviewing them. Otherwise, your characters may not accurately represent your target group. In the worst case, they are based on ideas and speculation, not real people. Put aside any ideas about the desired user experience and the product features when you develop your personas. Describe the characters according to your market insights. Do not make them fit your ideas and assumptions!

23 Alan Cooper pioneered the use of personas in software development; see Cooper (1999).

Distinguish between customer or buyer personas and user personas, as their goals and characteristics may significantly differ. This is particularly helpful for B2B products like enterprise software or health-care equipment. Take a medical device like an X-ray machine. While the radiologists who use the machine will want to create accurate diagnoses, a hospital trust that purchases the machine is likely to have a different goal: a low total cost of ownership.

Once you have created a cast of characters, select a *primary persona*. This is the persona you mainly develop the product for. Working with a primary persona creates focus and facilitates decision making: the goal of the primary persona should largely determine the user experience (UX) and the product's functionality. If you find it difficult to choose one primary persona, this may indicate that your target market is too large and heterogeneous, or that your product has become too big and complex. If that's the case, then resegment the market, unbundle your product, or introduce product variants.

Finally, visualize your personas. Put them on the office wall so they are visible to the development team. Some of my clients even print out personas on life-size cardboard sheets. Seeing the personas reminds the development-team members who they are designing and building the software for, and it avoids a solution-centric mind-set.

A Persona Template

To help you create your persona descriptions, I have developed a simple but powerful template that you can download from my website. The persona template consists of three sections: a picture and a name, the details, and the goal of the persona, as Figure 19 shows. Unlike traditional persona descriptions, which are fully fledged, detail-rich user models, my template encourages you to start with simple, provisional personas that capture the essence of the character.




 PICTURE & NAME	 DETAILS	 GOAL
What does the the persona look like? What is its name?	What are the persona's relevant characteristics and behaviors?	Why would the persona want to use or buy the product? What benefit should be achieved? Which problem should be solved?

FIGURE 19: A Persona Template

The section on the left of the template in Figure 19 captures the picture and the name of the persona. This makes it easier to develop empathy for the character and to refer to it. The latter comes in handy when you design the product and create scenarios, user stories, and other artifacts. I like to reuse the persona names in my user stories, for instance.

The middle section lists the relevant characteristics, attitudes, and behaviors of the persona. This can include demographics, job-related information, and hobbies. Don't make the mistake of listing everything that might be relevant, but focus on the details that are important in order to understand the persona. If a demographic attribute such as age or job role is not helpful, for example, then leave it out. Don't clutter your persona descriptions, and make sure that they are easy to understand. As a rule of thumb, your persona description should fit onto an A4 sheet of paper.

The section on the right states the problem that the persona wants to overcome, the benefit the character wants to gain, or the job it wants to get done. Make sure you describe the goal from the persona's perspective. Don't formulate it based on what you think your product

should do, or what it can do today. Make the goal specific and state it clearly. While it's fine to list more than one problem or benefit, I recommend that you identify the main or primary reason for the persona to buy or use your product and state it at the top of the section. This creates focus and helps you make the right decisions.

When applying the persona template, start with the persona goal whenever you create something new, be it an adjacent or a disruptive product. Then consider the details and choose an appropriate name and picture. This avoids the risk of overlooking people who will benefit from your product, as I describe in more detail in the section "Segment the Market."

Find an Itch That's Worth Scratching

To create a successful product, you must understand why people would want to buy and use it. You must know which problem it solves, which pain or discomfort it removes, and which benefit or gain it provides. What's more, if the itch is not strong enough, your product is unlikely to be a success. Finding a problem that people want to have solved, or a benefit that people would no longer want to miss once they experienced it, is the most important step to achieving product success.

Let's look at the example of Sonos, a hi-fi system that consists of wireless speakers and audio components. It allows people to enjoy music by providing easy access to their digital music collection and to a range of streaming services from any device, while still offering a decent sound quality. It's simple and convenient to use. You no longer have to put a handheld device into a cradle or try to find a CD, switch on the amplifier, and look for the remote control. While the Sonos system does not solve a pressing issue, it is a product that is sticky. After starting to use it, I wouldn't want to miss it anymore.

Products like the Sonos hi-fi system are sometimes called *vitamins*, as they don't solve a pain or an urgent need. They rather provide a nice-to-have benefit, similar to vitamin supplements. Products that address a problem are referred to as *painkillers*. An Internet search