

Personas in a Nutshell

A persona is a **fictional character** that represents a subset of the market we want to address. A persona typically has a name, a picture, relevant characteristics such as age or income group, behavioural traits, common tasks, and a goal that describes the problem the persona wants to see solved or the benefit the character wants to achieve. This information is traditionally based on direct observation, interviews, and other qualitative market research.




Personas should help us develop sympathy for our users and customers. They encourage us to embrace a **user-centred** approach: [Putting the users first](#), and building a product that that does a great job for the users by meeting the goals of the personas.


Alan Cooper pioneered personas in product development in the 1990ies. Today they are a technique every product manager and product owner should be familiar with.

A Persona Template

While personas are a powerful technique to capture our knowledge about the users and customers of a product, it can be tricky to write effective personas: Some persona descriptions I have seen were too detailed and bloated; others lacked important information. That's particularly true when agile and lean practices are applied, and **good enough** persona descriptions are appropriate, which are updated and refined as more knowledge about the users and customers and their needs becomes available.

Using personas for my now products and in my client-facing work, I have found that there are three pieces of information that are particularly valuable to creating effective personas: the persona's **picture and name**, the persona's **details**, and the persona's **goal**. I therefore use the template below to write personas. Simply click in the picture to [download the template](#) as a PDF.

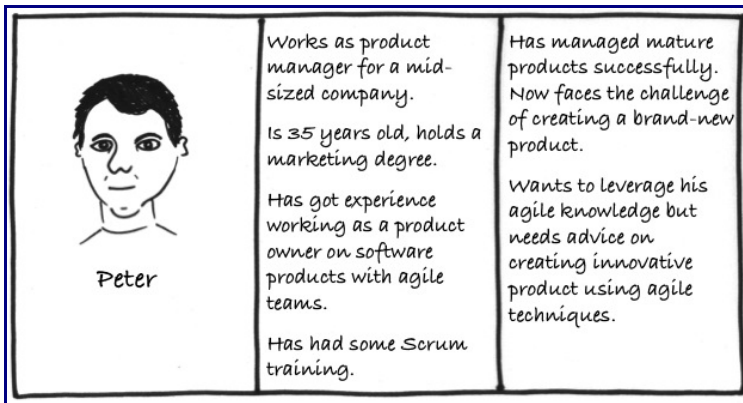
 PICTURE & NAME	 DETAILS	 GOAL
What does the persona look like? What is its name? Choose a picture and a name that are representative, and that allow you to develop sympathy for the persona.	What are the persona's relevant characteristics and behaviours? Consider demographics, job, lifestyle, spare time activities, attitudes, and common tasks, for instance.	Why would the persona want to buy or use the product? What problems should the product solve? What benefits does the persona want to achieve? If there are multiple problems or benefits, identify the main one and put it at the top.

<http://www.romanpichler.com/> 

The first two sections in the template above describe **who** the persona is. The last one is particularly important, as it makes us ask **why** the persona would want to purchase or use our product.

An Example

Here is an example of how the template can be applied. It features one of the personas of a new book I have recently started to work on:



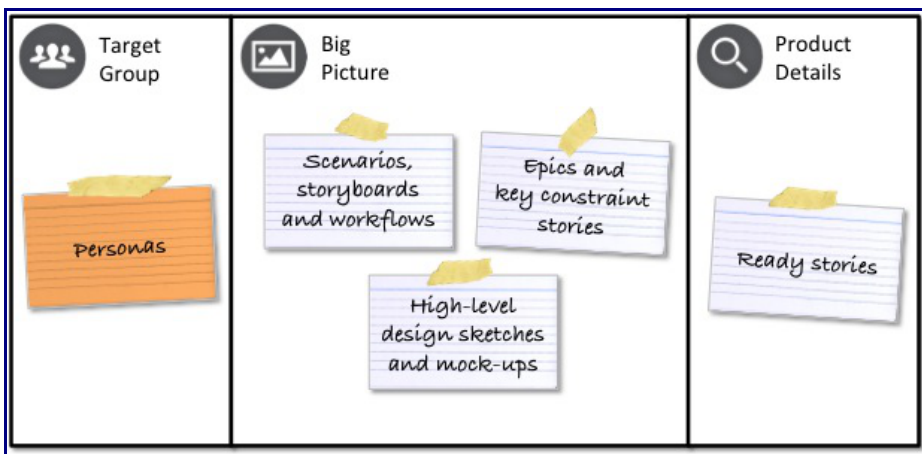
Notice that I have tried to make the persona description as **relevant** as possible. I have left out information that is not essential to understand who the character is and why the person would want to read the book. For instance, I decided not to include Peter's marital status.

At the same time, I have tried to be as **specific** as I can right now about the persona, so I can validate my assumptions. As I find out more about the target readers of the book, I will undoubtedly iterate over Peter's description, and update it.

While refining your persona, ensure that the character is **believable** and that its description allows you to develop empathy for it. You can do this, for instance, by adding pictures, likes and dislikes to the characteristics.

Visualising the Personas

I prefer to capture personas on paper, so I can easily visualise them, for instance, by putting them on the [Product Canvas](#), as the picture below illustrates. An A4 paper sheet usually works well.



Another advantage of using paper-based personas is the limited space available. This helps us focus on the relevant information rather than writing everything down we believe to know about the user.

Wrap-up

Personas are a great technique to describe the users and the customers. Employing the [persona template](#) introduced in this post helps you create effective personas by describing what matters while leaving out the rest.