Audience Persona Toolkit

A persona is a realistic character sketch that adds a human face to your audience data and statistics. The beauty of using a persona is that it helps you to step into someone else's shoes and see how they might respond to your offer or your marketing.

Creating a research-based persona allows you to focus your efforts on the audience segments that are most important to you. Having the right personas in mind when you develop your programming, think about your customer experience, and plan your marketing means that you and your whole team can be sure that you are serving your target audiences and fulfilling your organisation's purpose.

Understanding Interests and Barriers

It's not just about getting demographic information that helps you to target marketing. Personas allow you to respond to the interests and goals of your target audience. Each strand of your programming can be designed through the lens of one or more personas. You'll be able to think about what your persona needs and wants, and what they will value in an event or show.

Barriers are important too. Perhaps your persona is an older person who relies on public transport to get to your venue. Knowing this can help you make decisions around when to run events – avoiding late evening events that necessitate a taxi journey to make it home.

But wait… aren't you excluding other people if you use just one or two specific personas? The truth is we all work with a persona in mind - most often someone just like ourselves. By creating and using a persona based on real evidence, you'll be helping to combat unconscious bias and keep your target audience front and centre of everything you create.

How to use this toolkit

Steps one to three in this toolkit will give you strategies for collecting and sorting the information you need to build your persona/s. Then, we'll provide an example persona, along with a template for you to fill out. Lastly, we'll go over some practical ways to make use of your persona day-to-day.

Step One: Gather Your Data

Your persona needs to be based on real research and evidence. You might already have some of this – perhaps you have target audiences and an audience development plan, so you can create your persona stemming from these. But if not, there are plenty of ways to find out about your current and potential audiences. (In fact, our Strategic Insights Director Chris has detailed them in this research methods blog.)

Here's what you should be looking for in your research:

- Gender
- Age
- Location
- Family
- Finances
- Jobs
- Interests

Use a mix of information on your current audiences (ticketing data, web analytics, surveys), along with information that can tell you about your potential audiences (desk research, census information, reports on audiences for similar art forms). Remember to get your wider team involved. They can provide a different viewpoint and they'll be the ones using the persona in the end too.

Step Two: Get Some Insights

Look at the information across your different research sources and identify any trends. Keep in mind your organisation's overall purpose too – there's no point targeting young families when you only run over 18s events.

You can identify one or more personas that make sense for you to target. Aim to make no more than four personas - it's okay to have just one!

Here's an example of how a Belfast arts centre might conduct persona research;

Their first step was to look at the data sources they already had on their current audiences;

- Desk research on typical arts audiences in their area
- Desk research on audiences for the art forms they programme
- Box office data
- Audience analytics from google analytics and social media

From here, they found the overall age group to be 25 – 45, with 65% of these visitors being female. Their next highest segment was older people aged 65+. Because the first segment was much bigger, they decided to focus on that as a persona.

Their next step was to look at census information and find out if there were more of these people in the surrounding areas, and to do a bit more desk research on their preferred marketing channels. They also did some surveys using their mailing list to find out more about the wants and needs of this segment.

Their final research findings:

Their finding	Data Source/s
Majority female audience	Booking data. Google analytics and social media analytics.
Average age 25 - 45	Google analytics and social media analytics.
Living within a 30 minute drive time of the venue.	Postcode info from box office
Many with young children.	Census information on local area demographics.
Venue café popular with parents and children	Consultations with venue and café staff. Survey results on customer satisfaction with café.

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Step Three: Create Your Persona

This is the creative part, where you add that extra layer of individuality and humanity to make your persona come to life. Base it in facts but add fictional details to make the persona real.

If your persona is a particular age/gender/demographic, you can do some desk research on this type of person to find out more about their preferred marketing channels and interests. Our Audience Snapshots are a good place to start.

Try to think about what the challenges are for your persona, what are their goals and interests – and how can your organisation meet them?

Remember to give your persona a name and a photo to represent them. This may seem silly but it will really make the persona easier to use!

Here's an example:

Young Families Persona – Ashling, 36

Family:
Ashling is 36 and has one small child, Ben, and lives with her husband Niall.

Interests:
She loves craft and DIY and is interested in improving her skills and meeting others through evening classes.

Job:
Works part-time at an estate agents. She has some weekdays off and is always looking for things to do at weekends with the whole family.

Goals:
Finding somewhere to bring Ben that will have kid-friendly activities and spaces, along with a coffee shop and easy parking.

Location:
Her family home is a 15 minute drive away from the venue.

Finances:
She wants to make sure that a family day out is value for money.

Marketing Channels:
She keeps up with her friends on Facebook. Prefers to get information in advance online before a day out.

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Persona Template

Your Persona's Collated Details:

Detailed Persona

Name, age, family:

Interests:

Job:

Goals:

Location:

Finances:

Marketing Channels:

Other Plans for Research…

Digital Analytics, desk research, ticketing information, talking to staff, surveys…

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Step Four: Personas in Practice

When you've got your persona finalised share it with your team. As with all aspects of audience development – your persona should not just affect your marketing strategy. Personas are at their most powerful when their used to inform your programming and visitor experience as well.

You may need to change your target persona for different events or exhibitions. For example, a young single student without kids will never be the target audience for your family fun sessions.

A persona allows you to change your thinking from what you have to what your persona will experience. Here's an example from the Audience Agency about barriers faced by families.

Think about your offer from their perspective:

- How does your venue or event meet her goals?
- What might stop her – how can you overcome these things?
- What practical considerations do you need to think about?
- Timing – when are they free and looking for something to do? What other demands on their time do they have?
- Where are they likely to look for or come across information?
- Cost – can they afford it and is it an experience that provides value for them?
- Transport – how will they get there?
- What do you want them to think, feel, say after experiencing your offer?

The same goes for your marketing copy. You can turn organisation-centric copy like this…

> Backstage theatre was founded in 1995 by a local community group. We programme cutting edge productions alongside fun-filled favourites. Our 100 seat auditorium comes equipped with state of the art technology for a world-class experience. The Mezzo café serves lunch and late bites.

Into audience-focused copy like this…

> Visit Backstage theatre for a fun-packed night or a great value afternoon out for all the family. Enjoy one of our famous local ice creams while watching shows like Sister Act, the Nutcracker, or Stomp. With free parking and our Mezzo café on-site, a visit to the theatre is easy and accessible for all.

Keeping it up to date…

Remember to keep your persona template visible – don't be afraid to print it out and share it around. You should aim to check in and update your persona as needed once a year. If you'd like some more advice or simply someone to talk things through with, check out our Audience Appointments.