
Who Is Your Audience?

Understanding your audience is a key component in deciding what kind of content you serve and how you serve it. Sometimes it's not always obvious, and other times your audience may shift.

Companies with large budgets often hire market research firms to create personas for their business. They use empirical research (data-based) by conducting usability testing, surveys, analytics, field studies and interviews.

You don't have to hire a large market research company to do your own nonempirical research (assumption-based.) Take advantage of existing knowledge to benefit from a user-centered focus on content. As long as your nonempirical research is built on real cases, consumers or readers, you can have some success at creating your own personas for your agency.

Basic Demographics

For basic demographic research on the people who visit your site, you can use Google Analytics. Google Analytics offers some general information about the visitors on your site, including:

- Age
- Gender
- Location / City
- (As a state agency, your audience ideally lives in Georgia or plans on moving to Georgia.)
- Interests

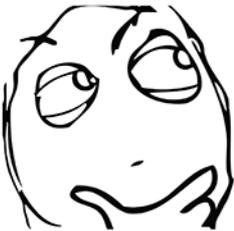
Read more about [how Google acquires demographic data](#) [1] on Google's support page.

Other basic demographic data about your readers (should you take an educated guess) may include:

- Lifestyle
- Education
- Household Income

Have Empathy For Your Audience

Once you have a basic idea of your audience's demographic, dig a little deeper to get in their head. One simple tool to capture a persona snapshot is called an empathy map. An empathy map is designed to help you predict a person's needs based on how they think and feel, what they see and hear and ultimately, what they say and do (Be aware that what people say and actually do is often different.)

Think?	EMPATHY MAP	Feel?
<p>(What really counts / Aspirations)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Important to him: Supporting his family on one income • Dreams: Taking his 3 kids on the ultimate Disney World vacation for the first time • Unspoken desire: Attending the Super Bowl one day • Wonders if: he's being paid what he's worth 	 <p>We call this person: "Suburban Working Dad"</p>	<p>(Worries / Appreciates)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worries: his job is not stable enough • Stressed about: commuting to work everyday • appreciates: for his wife who manages the household • Concerned about: about aging parents who may need to move into assisted living • Is glad that: His kids are healthy
Hear?		See?
<p>(Influences)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • His friends say: "You should invest in rental property." • His wife says: "I wish you had more time to spend with the family" • His kids say: "You're fun, Daddy!" • His TV says: "Be very concerned about losing your hair." • His Consumer Reports subscription says: "Pssst, pay attention to these new car reviews or you'll get duped." 		<p>(Environment)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He lives: in a 5 bedroom house in a private swim / tennis subdivision in Alpharetta, Ga. • He's surrounded by: family and neighbors -2 parents, 3 kids, his wife and a dog. • He sees friends and neighbors who seem to "have it together" with investing, saving and money management. • He gets: a ton of junk mail -catalogs, vacation offers, contractor flyers, etc.
Say?		Do?
<p>(Public Attitude)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Don't live beyond your means" • "Don't get into debt" • "I have all the answers" • "I like spicy buffalo wings, beer and football" 	<p>(Actual Behavior)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He lives (slightly) beyond his means • He has credit card debt • He turns to Google for answers • He eats spicy buffalo wings, drinks beer and watches football 	
Pain	Basic Demographics	Gain
<p>(Fears / Frustrations / Obstacles)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fear: Making a "wrong decision" • Frustration: No practical idea how to simplify things without sacrificing his current lifestyle • Obstacles: Not having enough free time to research purchases and make major financial decisions with reliable information. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Alpharetta, Ga. • Gender: Male • Age: 42 • Education: MBA • Status: Married with 3 kids • Social status: Upper middle class 	<p>(Wants / Needs / Measure of Success)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wants: More leisure time and less stress. Less credit card debt and the <i>willpower</i> to consume less. • Needs: A life coach. Better communication and goal sharing with his wife • I'm successful when: My credit cards and cars are paid off, I'm able to contribute more money to my retirement plan and I can afford an assisted living community for my parents.

[2]

Humans are complicated. While you can't expect to peg a ?type? exactly, you can certainly get a big picture of common situations shared by thousands of people. Use this [Empathy Map Template](#) [3] to create as many personas as you need based on the users you already know and have visiting your site.

As you create personas for user groups, think about the following:

What Does Your Audience Value (and Fear?)

On Consumer Ed's site, people are posting questions based on what they value and fear. Take a look at the kinds of questions consumers ask when they contact you and sort them into groups. For example: John Doe posted a question about who is liable for fraudulent transactions using credit cards with the new chip and pin technology. John values his security and may be fearful of theft or identity theft. Jane Doe posted a question about grocery stores selling expired food products. Jane values her health and may be fearful of getting sick.

What Does Your Audience Want?

Based on values and fears that govern most human decisions, everyone has a problem they are trying to fix. All your readers have a story and a problem, and your job is to provide content that delivers a solution. Based on your various personas, aim to discover what answers your user groups seek.

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