

Personas

What is a Persona?

"A persona is a user archetype you can use to help guide decisions about product features, navigation, interactions, and even visual design." (Kim Goodwin, Cooper.com)

Personas are a model used to describe users' goals, skills, abilities, technical experience and context. They are detailed descriptions of archetypical users constructed out of well-understood, highly specific patterns of data about real people. A persona is not based on an individual - it is a construct developed through a detailed process, not the result of a search for the "right" individual (see [persona creation](#) for more on this). They are used by the design team (and larger project team) to describe, and keep front and center the user(s) for whom the system will be built.

[Fluid Persona Examples](#)

Why Use Personas?

The goals of creating and using personas are to make user-centered design possible and to communicate what is being learned with the larger team. They put a face on the user - a memorable, engaging, and actionable image that serves as the design target. They convey information about the user to your product team in ways that other artifacts cannot. Personas will help you, your team, and your organization become more user focused.

"Interaction design is a complex and difficult craft and requires good tools like any other. The popularity of personas has exploded because they are the foundational tool upon which the practice of interaction design rests. Interaction design is about making a particular group of humans effective at achieving a narrow set of goals. Because using personas is a remarkably powerful technique for bringing those humans and their objectives into focus, it becomes the most critical tool for designing the behavior of software." - Alan Cooper, Cooper.com

The problem:

- Being user-centered is not natural
- Users are complicated and varied
- Those who may be doing user and market research are not typically the people who actually design and build the product
- The word "user" isn't very helpful (like "injury" is to the ER)
- Raw data isn't inherently useful, and neither are most reports

Personas:

- Make assumptions about users explicit (articulate a common language to talk meaningfully about users)
- Place the focus on specific users rather than on "everyone"
- In limiting our choices, personas help us make better decisions
- Personas engage the product design and development team (personas are fun)

When to use Personas?

Make sense of research findings

- Analyze results and identify patterns across research
- Capture most important information about who they are, what they need to accomplish, their skills, abilities and pain points, etc.

Plan your product

- Analyze competition through the eyes of your personas
- Brainstorm possible features using your personas
- Prioritize features using a persona-weighted feature matrix

Explore design solutions

- Scenarios and Design Mapping
- Mood boards and visual design explorations

Evaluate your solutions

- [Cognitive walkthroughs](#) and design reviews with personas
- User testing and ongoing user research with personas

- Quality assurance (QA) testing and bug bashes (focus QA testing and create persona-based test cases, persona bug labeling (23 Joe bugs, 43 Susan bugs))

Support the release of your product

- Documentation, training, and support materials (personas can help focus instructional materials, guidebooks, and editorial content)
- Marketing and sales (tailor efforts based on personas, differentiate between users and customers (students versus IT, for example))

Communicate with the project team and beyond

- Share your learnings with the rest of the team
- Gain consensus of who you are designing for early on...before design happens
- Hang your personas around the project room to keep them in focus
- Create a shared language & vision

Remember, the goal of personas is to keep the user in view throughout the product lifecycle. Personas are not perfect for everything, but are very useful when utilized properly.

How do you Create Personas?

The goal is to develop a precise description of your user(s) and what he wishes to accomplish. A good persona will enable you to build a product which solves a real problem and that people love.

- What motivates the users?
- Why are they really using the system?
- What are they really trying to accomplish?

[More on creating personas...](#)

More on Personas
Designing with Personas
Persona Creation
Persona Categories
Persona Format
Other Persona Resources
Example Personas:
Fluid Personas
Sakai Personas
uPortal Personas