

Guide to B2B Buyer Persona Effectiveness Scoring





B2B Buyer Personas Can Stand a Bit of Improvement.

Let's Get Started > > >

Does your buyer persona have what it takes to contribute effectively to content relevance that delivers increased marketing performance?

According to the [Benchmark Study on Understanding B2B Buyer Personas](#) released by Cintell, less than 30% of B2B marketers who exceeded their goals said they were very effective at using personas. It's worth noting that companies that meet or exceed their revenue goals are 2.4X as likely to be effective, or very effective at using personas, than those who miss their goals.

The same study found that B2B marketers who exceed their revenue goals also use their personas for multiple purposes. The top 3 include using personas for messaging, demand generation and sales training.

Another study, B2P's [The Power and Potential of Personas 2016](#) [PDF], found that marketers reporting their personas as only somewhat effective has risen to 63% from 49% the year before. It's telling that 86% of personas rated as ineffective were based purely on internal assumptions, without any external research or interviews.



B2B buyer personas are a tool that should inform content marketing strategy, help you to produce engaging content that resonates with a specific audience, and increase momentum in the buying process. If your personas don't help your company achieve these objectives then there's work to be done to improve them.

Randomly trying to improve the effectiveness of personas wastes time and energy. By answering the questions in each section that follows, based on a *SWOT* approach, you'll be able to pinpoint where to focus your attention.

Improving your personas will deliver dividends to the ROI you'll reap from your investment in developing them. This includes higher engagement, more qualified opportunities, and shorter time to revenue.

Strengths indicate that your buyer persona has the basics it needs to inform an effective content marketing strategy across the continuum of the buying process.

Weaknesses identify areas of improvement to help you capitalize on the Strengths and Opportunities provided by your buyer personas.



Opportunities are indicative of advanced techniques that can be applied to enhance the strengths of your buyer personas..

Threats are warning signs that indicate actions to take to get the value the construct of buyer personas promises—when they're developed as an actionable tool.

Scoring the Effectiveness of Your B2B Buyer Personas



Using the SWOT format to assess Strengths, Opportunities, Weaknesses and Threats, you'll be asked to assess elements in each category as a 1, 3, or 5. In each case, 1 is less desirable, 3 is okay, and 5 is optimal as they are positioned for the category.

Step back and review your personas for each element and be honest about how well each statement is represented in your buyer personas.

Consider the following during your assessment of each element:

- Is the information represented by this element in our personas?
- Is it of a level of depth that makes it useful?
- Does this element help us to understand our audience?
- Are we using this element to influence the design of our content and interactions and the experiences we create?

Rank the following statements with a score of 1 (not true), 3 (could be better), 5 (well done)



B2B Buyer Persona Strengths	1	3	5
Includes a narrative that helps us step into the persona's issues and situation			
Maps questions, needs and drivers at each stage of the buying process			
Identifies obstacles that could impede buying at each stage of the buying process			
Portrays the persona's relationships and influence on the buying committee			
Identifies channel and content topic and format preferences			
Subtotal for each column			
Total score			

A narrative—also known as a “day in the life” of your personas is a first-person account of their status quo situation, recognizing the problem and why they have yet to solve it. It includes their relationship with other personas, shares their perspective and illustrates their responsibilities.

Questions should be mapped to each stage of the buying process and reflective of a persona's needs as they take next steps. Answering their questions with content creates a story flow across the continuum of the buying process.

Obstacles can occur in any stage of the buying process and derail forward progress. Influencers, circumstances, turf wars, fear of change, confusion, and perceptions of risk can all be underlying causes for obstacles.

B2B buying is a group activity, therefore reaching consensus to pursue buying is crucial. Your personas should express the overlays that come into play with your personas. Who influences whom? Why would one push back against the idea of change? Knowing these overlays can help you to create content that helps your personas answer back effectively to resolve conflicts.

Formats and channels are important to understand so that you can deliver the right content in context as related to the persona's place in the buying process. Channels are important as this choice plays in to how you will create, design and distribute content. This knowledge will also keep you from spending resources, time, and effort on content that won't engage your personas.

Rank the following Weakness statements with a score of 1 (agree), 3 (somewhat agree), 5 (disagree)



B2B Buyer Persona Weaknesses	1	3	5
Includes demographic/lifestyle info that is ineffective at informing content design			
Objectives, problems and needs are too high level to point to specific application			
Leans more heavily toward title than role			
Doesn't address the persona's status quo or current situation			
Has a number of similarities to other buyer personas you've built – not unique			
Subtotal for each column			
Total score			

Demographics, such as age, income, and lifestyle are not useful in B2B buyer personas. Instead, look for professional attributes such as time in career, associations, certifications, etc. that can actually inform how you'll develop content that resonates. LinkedIn is a great source.

Objectives the persona is striving for must set context. For example, "grow revenues" is ambiguous, but "streamline our product release process to shorten time to market" actually tells you how to write content that will engage this persona.

Focusing on title limits the potential of your personas to engage audiences. It's not the title, but the role and responsibilities that should inform personas. A persona can address multiple titles and still be a valid, single persona.

Status quo is the starting point for personas. By knowing their situation today—and where they want to go—you can plot the story across the entire continuum of the buying process, effectively addressing each step forward. You also need to know why they haven't yet solved the problem or achieved the objective in order to start engaging them and building a relationship on common ground. A mistake I see often is that marketers assume their target markets already know they need their solution. Often not true.

The litmus test for a persona is that it is unique in relation to all other personas. If similarities exist, you may not have two personas, but only one. And, if your personas are similar then your content won't differentiate between audience context and perspective. This results in either engaging no one or attracting the wrong people into the process.



Rank the following Opportunity statements with a score of 1 (not doing), 3 (sort of doing), 5 (am doing)

B2B Buyer Persona Opportunities	1	3	5
Identifies ways to help the persona resolve conflicts with others to move forward			
Points to tone and style that will improve content resonance			
Helps you shift context with content as persona progresses through buying stages			
Enables you to create consistency of experience in execution across channels			
Informs the development of a content strategy across the entire buying process			
Subtotal for each column			
Total score			

Conflicts are what keep buyers from moving forward to find a solution to a problem. These are often represented by obstacles that can impede progress for a persona. Look at the influence of other personas or others in the organization who can block progress. Make sure to look pre-sales, as a decision must be reached to look outside the organization for a purchase journey to begin at all.

Consistency in the content you create for a persona is an imperative for building recognition, relevance, and trust. The “personality” of your persona should serve as the guide rails for design, tone, and style used to create a unique experience for each persona. For example, if your persona is detail oriented, then you should provide facts backed up by research in the content developed to engage them.

Context changes with each step. Your persona has learned something new that helps them move forward. Your content should show the same progress, meeting them where they are in their buying process. Questions asked at each stage can help with this, as well as writing progressively based on what moves them forward.

Experiences with your content should be consistent across the channels and with the formats you use to engage personas. This element is about meeting expectations you’ve set with each successive engagement.

Informing a content marketing strategy is the ultimate goal for buyer persona development. If your personas are not doing so, then there’s work to be done.

Rank the following Threat statements with a score of 1 (agree), 3 (somewhat agree), 5 (disagree)



B2B Buyer Persona Threats	1	3	5
We haven't been successful socializing buyer personas across the organization			
We didn't use external research or customer interviews to create our personas			
We don't use buyer personas in our company beyond our marketing team			
We haven't updated our personas in more than one year			
Different functions have created their own personas independent of ours			
Subtotal for each column			
Total score			

Socializing buyer personas across the organization is critical to creating a seamless experience for buyers across functions. If every team is working from a different understanding of your audience, the likelihood that consistent valuable experiences will be provided at each interaction is not high. It helps if you include cross functions in the development process to create ownership. This is much easier than trying to mandate use.

Not using external research or interviewing customers is a recipe for disaster based on assumptions. You are not your buyers. What you think doesn't count. The secret to successful buyer personas is in actually getting to really know your customers—almost better than you know your company.

Intelligent buyer personas should inform much more than marketing, including customer service, sales, and product development.

Updating buyer personas is almost as important as creating them in the first place. Circumstances change. The nuances and impacts of problems shift along with industry trends, technology development, and your customers' go-to-market strategies. Personas should be refreshed at least annually. Biannually is better.

It's common for buyer personas to be created divisionally. However, doing so independently of personas that have already been developed is also a recipe for disaster. For example, consider that the same role may buy multiple products from your company. While the storyline, questions asked and objectives will be different based on the problem being solved, the orientation and some of the challenges faced by the persona will be the same. After all, it is potentially the same person. You need alignment or you'll end up creating Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde experiences that will do more harm than good.

Evaluating Your B2B Buyer Persona Effectiveness Score



A score of 25 for each section indicates that your B2B buyer personas are effectively developed and that you're using them to best effect. Take a look at any "3" scores in each section. Improving those will bring the fastest impact to how your personas impact your marketing programs. However, addressing any "1" scores will bring the most impact to improve effectiveness. If the total score for your buyer persona across all sections is less than 87, your buyer personas are performing well below their true potential.

Look at the relationships between the things where your buyer personas excel and where they are found lacking. For example, if your personas ranked a 3 for socializing them across the enterprise and a 1 for a lack of external research and customer interviews in the Threats section, doing that work will help you improve the acceptance of personas within other functions. The work will also likely help you to identify potential areas of bias or assumptions that have limited their performance as a useful tool for your team, as well as for others.

Although the B2P study found that 49% of marketers created buyer personas in house, with no expense, the 51% who did invest in buyer persona development spent \$18,000 per persona, on average. That's a lot to spend to not get the full benefit buyer personas can bring. For those who built personas in house, there may be a few things you haven't thought of that you'll find helpful by scoring your personas.

If you'd like help perfecting your B2B Buyer Personas,
[Check out my assessment service.](#)



Ardath Albee, CEO of her firm [Marketing Interactions, Inc.](#), helps B2B companies with complex sales create and use persona-driven content marketing strategies to turn prospects into buyers and convince customers to stay. Ardath is the author of *Digital Relevance: Developing Marketing Content and Strategies that Drive Results* and *eMarketing Strategies for the Complex Sale*. She has been one of the 50 Most Influential People in Sales and Marketing for the last five years and was selected as a 2014 Woman to Watch in B2B Marketing by FierceCMO.