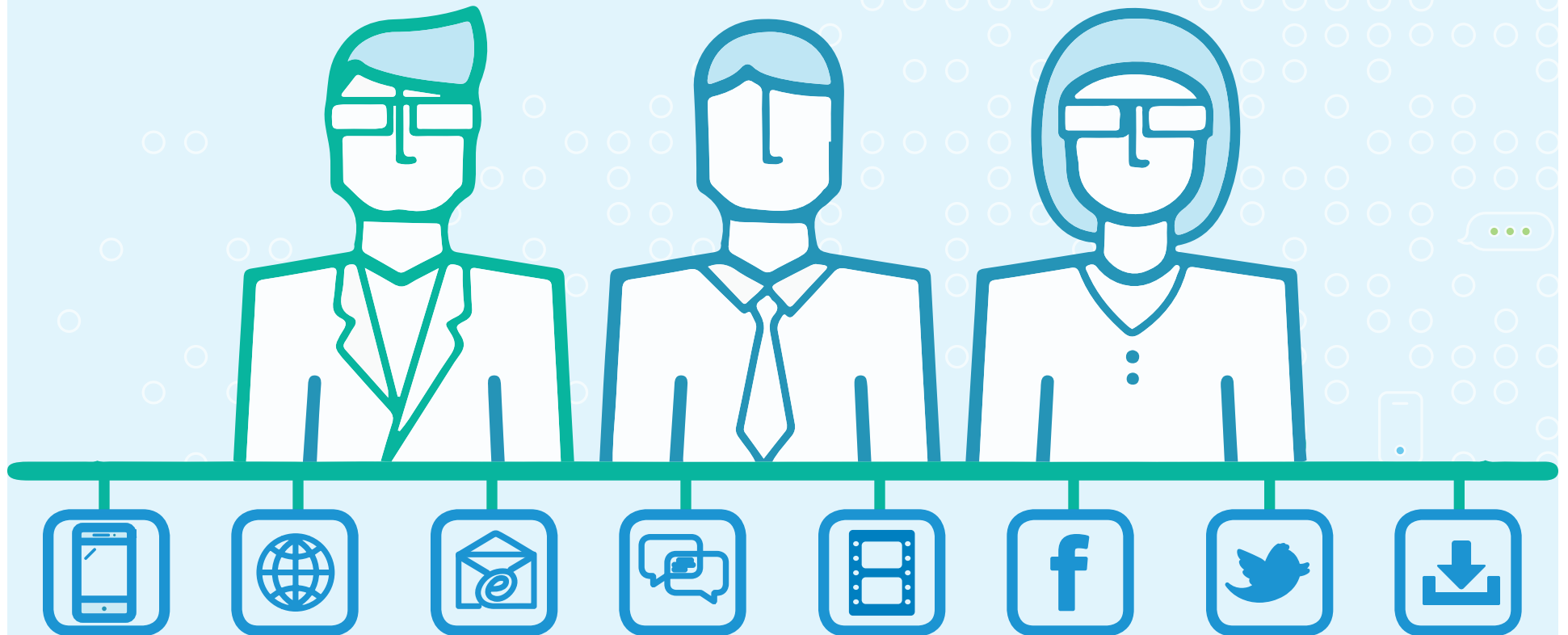


Customer Journey Maps and Buyer Personas: The Modern Tool Kit for Marketing



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Today's buyers have more ways to interact with businesses than ever, but this increase in communication channels and platforms doesn't necessarily translate to a positive customer experience: Only 22 percent of consumers say the average retailer understands them as an individual, and only 21 percent say the communications they receive from the average retailer are "usually relevant."¹

Most companies understand how critical it is to do better – 88 percent say their growth depends on personalizing the customer experience – but lack the resources and expertise to design an improved customer journey. Only 37 percent believe they have the tools they need to deliver exceptional customer experiences.¹

The complex nature of today's buyer journey, with more touch points across multiple channels and devices, can make enhancing the experience more challenging. Siloed data, fragmented marketing efforts and unbalanced budgets often conspire to create a less-seamless, less-rewarding experience.

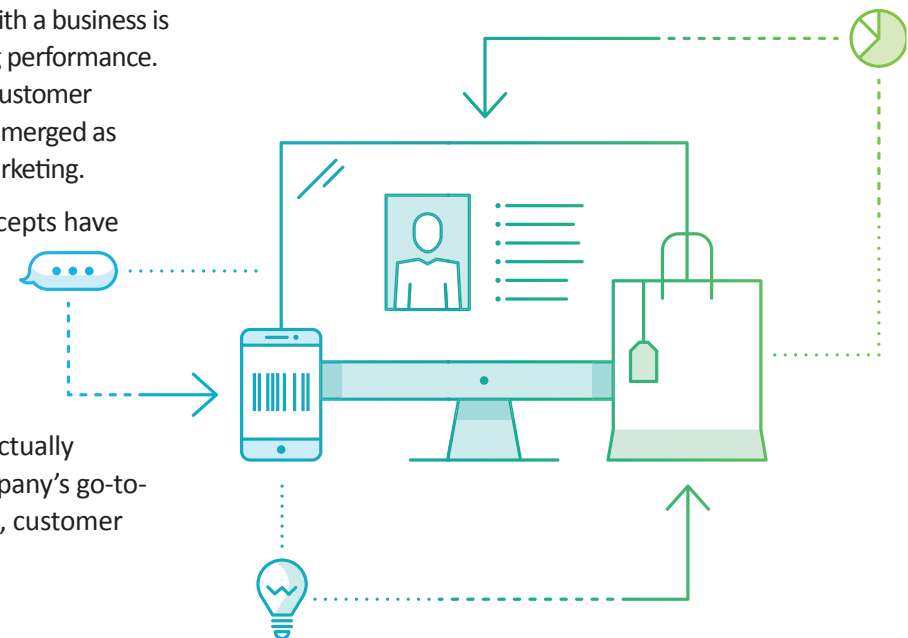
Many businesses are recognizing the danger of focusing solely on one part of the experience at the expense of others. Today's CMOs are investing across the entire journey – from discovery, learn and try to buy, use and advocacy – and planning to increase their spending across every stage of the buyer journey over the next two years by an average of 50 percent.²

Of course, simply spending money in these areas without a strong understanding of how contacts are feeling, what content they are looking for and how they want to interact with a business is likely a recipe for poor marketing performance. That's why buyer personas and customer journey mapping have recently emerged as some of the hottest trends in marketing.

While the initial terms and concepts have been around a while, the last two or so years have brought the terminology and practices to the forefront of marketing strategy, and for good reason: Buyer persona marketing can actually represent a huge shift in a company's go-to-market approach. Furthermore, customer

journey maps can help you facilitate customers' evaluation and purchase decisions and improve their experience.

This paper will explain the benefits of moving from feature-focused, specifications-rich tactics to adopting a more buyer-centric approach. Along the way, you'll learn how to think about these areas from a strategic perspective and discover new tactics you can employ to help design a customer experience that drives increased engagement and revenue.



A New Approach to Marketing

Shifting your marketing to a focus on the customer experience, rather than leaving the buyer journey as an afterthought, starts with empathy. Instead of focusing so intently on *your* products, *your* solutions and all aspects of *your* offerings, taking a customer-centric approach puts you smack in your buyer's shoes.

- **How are they feeling?** Stressed out? Curious? Excited?
- **What are they thinking?** Looking for ways to impress their friends or colleagues? Get a raise? Move past a tough milestone? Master a new skill?
- **What are their expectations?** Valet service? Flexible contract negotiations? Instant download?

Taking time to answer these types of questions will put you in your buyers' shoes, building empathy toward them: what they are going through and what they'd like to achieve. Having high levels of empathy in your go-to-market approach and messaging will help

ensure that what you're communicating will resonate with the folks you're trying to reach. You'll shift from pushing products to acting like a helpful concierge — answering their questions and concerns, and being on their team instead of the opposing side.

Imagine how successful you might be if your messages appealed to your target audience's core thoughts and feelings instead of droning on about features, specifications and generic benefits like your competitors. You'd probably eat their lunch — and their market share!

While the idea and concepts behind being buyer-centric marketing may sound obvious and simple, in practice it's far more challenging because you often have to unlearn the ingrained marketing and sales practices of being product-focused organizations.

In order to adopt these new buyer-centric approaches, you'll need to add some new tools to your digital marketing tool kit. First, you'll want to develop comprehensive buyer

personas that represent who your customer(s) really are. Then, you'll use this knowledge to create customer journey maps that illuminate how your contacts are engaging with you along the path to purchase — and beyond. From there, you'll be well-positioned to deliver that ever-elusive awesome experience your customers and prospects crave.



Understanding the Customer Journey: An Overview
View the video ▶

Section I: Buyer Personas

Buyer personas are iconic representations of your ideal customer. They are research-based, grounded in data, facts and actual interviews with recent buyers (and may even include perspectives from people who deferred a purchase decision or purchased a competitive solution).

Some marketers mistakenly think “personas” is just a hip word for segmentation, a term which refers to dividing a broad audience into smaller subsets based on common preferences or actions. However, properly constructed buyer personas dig deeper to reveal the attitudes, feelings and goals that motivate customers during the buyer journey.

Creating buyer personas is both an art and a science. You can attempt to build your own personas, but if you work for a company with the resources, it might be beneficial

to hire someone to help you in your first buyer persona development exercise and “teach you how to fish.” After that, you’ll have the skills and experience to revise and maintain personas on your own.



The Buyer Persona Development Process: Getting Started

A buyer persona development process will typically take about six to eight weeks to complete. Doing a thorough job will ensure you’re able to build comprehensive personas and provide a firm go-to-market foundation for your marketing campaigns.

First, you’ll want to brief sales management. As the marketing executive sponsoring the buyer persona project, let your sales leaders know what the project is and that you’ll be contacting recent wins as well as clients that deferred their buying decision or purchased from competitors to ask them if they would be willing to participate in an interview. Explain that they are going to get some big upgrades to their sales tool kit at the project’s conclusion.

Preparing for Success

To develop your buyer personas, you’ll want to start by talking with customers about their experiences. Begin the process by developing a list of recent buyers to interview. Look at sales history in your CRM or order management system, and run a report of

recent purchasers. If you also track deferred purchases and lost deals, then include them in the report. Develop a list of about 50 to 75 potential interviewees.

Once you have your list, leverage your inside sales team, call center or support desk to recruit these people for interviews. Send follow-up emails to those you leave voice mails for explaining what the project is about and asking for their help. Recording the interviews is a must, so confirm in advance that the interviewee is comfortable with you doing so. Hopefully out of your 50 to 75 contacts, you’ll have eight to 12 people who agree to the interview process.

As you’re pulling together your list, you might find you already have some general demographic and behavioral information that provides valuable customer insights. Feel free to supplement your customer records with these insights, but keep in mind that information such as “Reads *Fortune* magazine,” “active on Twitter but not Facebook” or “Always attends XYZ conference” is usually too high-level to help you create differentiated messaging. So, don’t forgo the interview process because you already have a lot of information about your customers and “think” you know what you need.

Enhancing the Interview Process

To help make sure you get the most out of your interviews, you'll want to approach these conversations like a professional investigative journalist. If you don't have that fearless "get to the bottom of it" mentality, you may need to recruit other team members or third-party experts to help conduct the interviews.

Whoever is doing the interviews should ask probing questions and listen carefully to the answers, digging deeper where appropriate as customers are sharing their insights on how their evaluation and buying process went.

The goal should be to find out why contacts decided to look for a new product or solution, what brands they initially considered (and why), how they evaluated those brands, what was important to them and what concerned them. If the buying process was put on hold at any point, find out what other initiatives took precedence. Try to get interview subjects to remember and explain how they felt and what they were thinking as they moved through the buying cycle.

Extrapolating the Key Interview Takeaways

After (and only after) you have eight to 12 great in-depth investigative interviews, you're ready to compile the results. To help speed up the process, consider shipping your recordings to a professional transcription company to transform the audio recordings into printed documents. Go through each interview and begin highlighting key phrases or passages. Details you'll want to capture include:

- What triggered the buyer to begin a search for a new product or solution?
- What were their decision criteria?
- What results or outcomes were they looking to achieve?
- What other products or vendors did they consider?
- Why did they eliminate or select them?
- What was important to them?
- What were they feeling as they moved through the buying process?
- What do they perceive as risks with the project/product/decision?

After you've marked up each interview, go back through and paste the key findings you've

highlighted into a spreadsheet, grouping common themes and answers from your interviews. When this is finished, you should have three to five phases or aspects of the buying cycle fully supported and documented using the buyer's viewpoint, with six to 12 interview quotes for each phase.

Either incorporate all your highlighted comments into each aspect or put them into an additional comment area for further consideration during the messaging exercise.

As you're poring over your data and thinking about what personas make sense, your initial reaction may be to create many buyer personas because you have a lot of unique, insightful data. Keep asking yourself if you need a differentiated message for each possible persona, or if the same messaging will work and address the needs of multiple potential personas.

If there are completely different expectations for the purchase, and you need a unique messaging approach, then you may well need additional personas. Don't forget, though, that it's perfectly OK to end this exercise realizing you only need one persona to have an effective marketing program.

Turning Your Findings into Content

Once you've established your personas, it's time to think about how your interview content will translate into marketing messages. With this step, it's important to make sure you don't regress back into product/feature speak. Continue to keep the buyers' words front and center as you brainstorm compelling marketing messages. Synthesize your notes and spreadsheets to determine what the top-line messages should be. Rank these messages in terms of the importance to the buyer.

If you're working in a group to flesh out your messages, appoint one person to be the voice of the customer and give them full authority to

speak up when you get off track or revert to the old corporate-speak.

Done correctly, you'll realize that now your marketing messages need to be much more about how your company or product solves the buyer's problems, how something will be used, or how their processes will change than about explaining your product's features and benefits.

There might be lots of cool product bells and whistles that your buyers didn't even say they needed or were unimportant in their evaluation process. In these cases, you might need to put these features on the back burner and instead concentrate on illustrating how

your product or solution addresses buyers' most pressing needs — no matter how proud R&D is about what it's built.

Once you've fleshed out some of your potential marketing content, look to incorporate this new persona messaging into your company's sales enablement tools (if applicable). Some of the persona findings will be helpful in the sales discovery process or perfect for training your inbound call center. Other elements will help your sales reps address competitive threats. Take the time to think about what makes sense where, and make sure these buyer persona insights are formatted and migrated into existing sales enablement processes and documents.

The Power of Combining Nurture with Your Website Content Management System

If you've done the hard work to develop your buyer personas and depict your customer journeys in a journey map, why not take the implementation a few steps further and use this information to customize your website for each visitor? It might not be that difficult, and the increased personalization can go a long way toward reducing bounce rates, increasing site time and raising overall effectiveness. Your website content management system should allow you to define rules for what's displayed and where.

Simply incorporate persona-based rules to streamline site navigation, eliminating navigation that's not necessary and highlighting the "best choice" navigation in a premium place. You can also promote certain content pieces or product offers over others. By eliminating content and navigation that's irrelevant to certain personas, you're automatically simplifying your website and highlighting only what's necessary. This should streamline the customer journey, improve the customer experience and focus your buyers on the next step in their consideration process.





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Common Mistakes with Buyer Personas

As with any hot trend, lots of companies and marketers are trying to hop on the new technique and take short cuts just to get to the finished project. Doing so will probably make your entire effort for naught. Make sure you avoid these five common mistakes:

1 Creating an “Empty Icon” or demographic-only persona:

Sometimes, marketers who are in a hurry or don’t have the resources to create a proper persona create an “Empty Icon.” This is a stock photo headshot or cartoon drawing of a person they *think* their target buyer looks like and includes a short description of that person’s title, education and background, along with some guesstimates about his or her needs and perspectives.

It might even include some more detailed information, such as “Early Periscope User,” “Reads *Entrepreneur Magazine*” and “Has an MBA.” Because this persona isn’t based on interview content distillation, though, its utility is shallow: before long you’ll likely find yourself back at the old feature/benefit marketing approach.

2 Depending on sales reps: In many instances, sales reps are wonderful resources, but they are typically of little help in the buyer persona development process. If you’re in the B2B market, chances are good that your prospects are already 50 percent to 75 percent of the way through their buying process before they ever encounter sales. Therefore, sales reps usually won’t have information on the most important part of the buying cycle that you need to know about to impact your marketing efforts.

3 Undervaluing the interview process: To uncover out all the “whys” of a buying cycle, you need someone with the determination (or financial motivation) to ask the right questions. If you don’t have the budget to hire an expert to do your buyer persona interviews, you might be forced to do them yourself, and this can be fraught with peril.

You or a team member might, for example, not be comfortable doing the calls, quitting after one or two interviews, ending interviews early or neglecting to probe deeply enough. As a result, insights that could make a big difference in your messaging might be missed.

The most important part of the buyer persona creation process is having strong in-depth interviews, so don’t take shortcuts here.

4 Using some other department’s personas: Imagine this scenario: You hear through the grapevine that another department has just completed a top-notch buyer persona exercise. You look at the deliverables from their work, and they look fantastic. You think to yourself, “What if I just copy this stuff and avoid all the time and investment to create my own personas.”

In most cases, this approach will not work. Think of it like this: If the other department just finished an exercise to capture personas of people who buy water-skiing equipment and surfboards, you can’t just copy those personas and use them to sell climbing equipment and camping gear. Although both sets of customers might be outdoor enthusiasts, there just isn’t enough in common between the groups and how they decide to buy, evaluate and purchase equipment to warrant sharing personas. Build your own.

5 Creating personas of executives who aren’t the buyers: This is a particularly common mistake for B2B marketers. You think your buyer is a CMO, CIO or other high-level executive. But unless you sell to small or medium businesses, the C-level executive is most likely not your buyer.

Instead, they are going to review and rely on their lower-level employees to make product and services decisions. As the sponsoring executive, they'll come into the decision process later, merely asking questions about the evaluation process.

Using Your Personas

If you've invested the time to create your personas and avoided the common mistakes

and pitfalls, you'll have a valuable marketing document that should inform much of your strategy over the coming year (or longer). You can immediately use the messaging you've developed in all your content efforts, email offers and website copy.

Done correctly, you should see a shift from product-centric offers to more customer-centric content that helps contacts select the best product, get better personal results or feel

even better about a purchase (if you're a B2C marketer) or solve problems, gain increased competency and improve business operations and results (if you're a B2B marketer).

These are fantastic benefits, but they're just the start. You can use buyer personas to enable increasingly sophisticated marketing approaches. Specifically, you can use personas to facilitate a better customer journey for your clients and prospects.

Client Success Story: Paper Style

Paper Style, an online retailer that sells customer invitations and stationery, had traditionally sent the same message at the same time to its entire database. Looking to boost engagement, it worked with its agency Whereoware to identify two key personas for nurturing: brides and brides' friends.

Whereoware then developed an innovative campaign focused on promoting Paper Style's wedding offerings. The campaign was comprised of a series of emails using IBM Silverpop's Programs functionality that followed a bride and/or her friends through wedding events, offering Paper Style products to match their needs along the way.

Through a series of customer journey mapping exercises, Whereoware and Paper Style developed a wedding "timeline" for bridal shoppers to follow. For example, the timeline assumes that a bride might buy Wedding Favors (given at the wedding) before Thank You Cards (usually sent after the wedding). The campaign was laid out following this logic.

Completing specific actions, such as clicking a link in an email, visiting a certain Web page or purchasing an item, triggers a series of targeted emails guiding customers through the wedding timeline. Each email offers content and product suggestions in keeping with the current stage of wedding planning.

These targeted emails have resulted in a 244 percent increase in Paper Style's open rate versus its previous average email rate, a 161 percent increase in click-through rate, and a 330 percent increase in revenue per mailing.

Section 2: Customer Journey Planning

Think about your favorite brand. If you had just a sentence or two (or even a word or two) to describe that brand, how would you answer? Usually, your answer is a synthesis of all your interactions with the product, the packaging, the people who work for the brand (or represent the brand) and more. Using this construct, the brand and what it represents and the customer experience might be closely aligned or perhaps even identical.

Customer experience, then, is the cumulative impact of multiple touchpoints over time that result in a real relationship feeling — either positive or negative. Are your customers raving fans? Strong advocates? Complaining tell-alls? The answer is typically based on your customers' experiences — the summary in each person's mind of what he or she thinks of a brand or product.

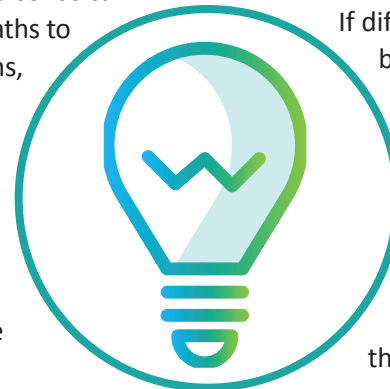
Every company and product provides an opportunity to deliver its own unique customer experience, although experiences with other products in a company's portfolio will account for a lot in the overall perception when encountering new products from the same business. A carefully designed buyer journey can lead to an excellent customer experience and help you drive value, reduce cost and build competitive advantage.

What Is a Customer Journey?

A customer journey (or buyer journey) encompasses all the steps users, prospects or customers go through in engaging with a company as they consider a product or service and then become users of these products and services. The ideal result of a customer journey is that as a brand or company, you're offering a unique, helpful, frictionless experience for your buyers, and what you do and how you do it allows you to stand apart from your competitors.

In most cases, people don't make purchase decisions in exactly the same manner. Your prospects and customers likely go through different steps and processes to consider and purchase your products.

In fact, different buyer personas can take radically different paths to considering your solutions, making a selection and following through with a purchase. And the same people can take very different paths for a different product set that might even be made by the same company.



Mapping the Customer Journey

Given all these unique individual journeys, how can you gain a deeper understanding of the different steps and stages your prospects and customers go through as they're interacting with you? This is another area where buyer personas can help — you should use them (and buyer interview details) to begin to outline both an "as is" state of the customer journey and a desired view of what you (and your buyers) would like it to be.

Once you begin to do detailed analysis of your company's customer journey(s), you'll probably find it's easiest if you summarize the possible interactions into a customer journey map — a handy visual representation of the steps and stages that customers and prospects experience.

If different personas experience your brand in unique ways, then you might want to construct different customer journey maps for each one. The exercise of discussing and formulating a map of your customers' journey will help employees see the common stages and processes that customers go through to work with your company.

The True Buyer Journey: A Multichannel Experience

All the technology available to consumers may be used in virtually every purchase decision. Savvy marketers, then, will want to facilitate a customer journey that takes into account and accommodates these multichannel interactions.

Keep in mind, though, that these multichannel interactions also take place offline. Legacy methods such as phone calls, direct mail

and in-store interactions can be stalwarts in delivering an outstanding customer journey.

Some of the channels and related interactions involved in a customer journey could include:

- Visiting a website
- Opening a mobile app
- Communication with call center
- “Liking” something on a social channel
- Reading company-provided content, such as an ebook

- Visiting a physical store location
- Responding to an SMS message
- Watching a video
- And much more

When building your customer journey, design it with these myriad of channels in mind. The more channels you can effectively integrate, the more you can accommodate and facilitate customers with differing preferences.

Customer Journey Planning and the Power of Analytics

As you plan, create and revise your customer journey maps, supplement the research you’ve done with your buyer personas by tapping the analytics capabilities of your digital marketing platform. The latest sophisticated tools allow marketers to automatically visualize and quantify the different and unique paths customers are engaging in. In a landscape in which it’s critical that your view of your customers isn’t siloed in a specific channel or tactic, these analytics can provide key insights on the most effective interactions across channels throughout the entire buying cycle.

Here’s a sampling of some questions about the buyer journey that analytics tools can help you answer:

- What specific assets are resonating during the customer journey?
- Which mix of marketing channels is most effective?
- Where are customers exiting their interactions with us?
- What paths are the shortest or most profitable?

These insights can inform your work on future customer journey maps and help you focus on key outcomes that create a more customer-centric experience and shorten the buying cycle, increase loyalty and retention, and boost customer lifetime value. By integrating these analytical capabilities into your journey mapping and content planning process, you’ll help ensure you have the data and knowledge to engage with customers at the right place and in the right fashion.

Perfecting the Journey Map Development Process

As you might imagine, creating a journey map requires a lot of careful thought and consideration, and the process might seem overwhelming when you're starting out. Here are five tips for helping you map the customer journey.

1 Identify the initial stage of your journey map.

Usually the first stage is some sort of trigger that caused the buying cycle to begin. From your buyer persona interviews, hopefully you've captured the main triggers. These could be problems they needed to solve, frustration due to lack of capabilities or features with what they already have, or even an external trigger such as a move.

For B2B organizations, remember that the trigger may occur far before your sales rep begins interacting with the buyer; that is why you should use your persona interviews to guide your journey planning.

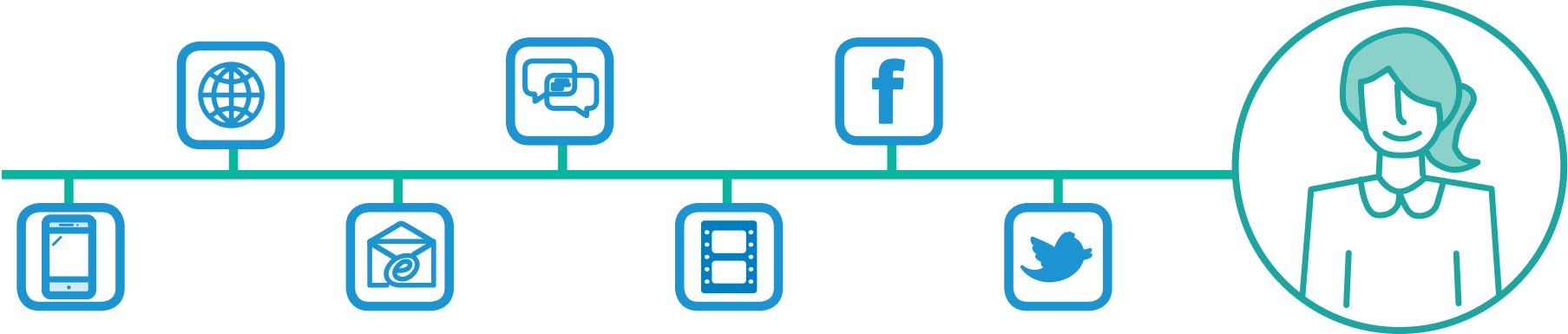
Also, you might get inspiration from other maps to help you determine the proper stages, but don't take another's stages to simply fill in the columns in your spreadsheet. Synthesize all your persona interviews to determine the natural categories that make sense for your buyers.

2 Isolate the rest of your stages.

The next stage after the initial trigger is likely to be a research or investigation stage. This is where the buyer is usually relying on Web and print research. In addition, they are likely tapping their social networks

to ask their connections, friends and acquaintances how others are addressing similar needs. In this stage, they are beginning to get familiar with the brands and companies that might offer something that could help them.

Buyers at this point might reach out to the company to begin a "direct dialogue," or they may just continue in "stealth mode" doing research on their own. This is where you must have superb content on your website to encourage prospects to provide their email address in return for your best offer. In most cases, email will be your most effective method for building a sophisticated dialogue and sharing additional helpful content.



The remaining stages will vary widely depending on what you're marketing. Rely heavily on the insights you've gleaned from your interviews. If your decision is one that involves a team evaluation or multiple levels of approval, then you'll need to account for that in your customer journey map.

3 Tap into your buyers' thoughts and feelings.

Reiterate from your persona work what people are thinking and feeling at each stage. Don't forget that your buyers are humans with

thoughts and feelings. Tap into this when building your journey map and your follow-on marketing plan. Building emotional hooks into the customer journey might allow you to build real relationships earlier in the buying cycle.

4 Document the channels your buyers will use.

Depict the channels that might be involved or used at each stage and the resources the buyers are most likely to consult. This will help you ensure that you remember to develop plans to capture behaviors in

these channels and feed them into a central database so you can act on these interactions and deliver a more rewarding experience in these channels.

5 Anticipate everything.

A well-thought-out customer journey exercise should be responsive to all the questions that buyers might have. If you take the time to foresee what these might be, you might be able to rework your website or develop new helpful content that eliminates concerns before they even surface.

After the Sale: The Post-Purchase Journey

Many marketers stop thinking about marketing once the sale is made, yet by developing a full customer journey map, you should force yourself to consider the ways a customer continues to interact – or fails to interact – with your business following a purchase of your product or service. Then, you can consider what marketing tactics or customer experience plays you can make to give you the best chance of turning buyers into repeat customers and strong advocates for your brand.

Should you incorporate a post-purchase onboarding program to further introduce support or helpful how-to's? Would cross-sell recommendations drive a better experience – and perhaps more revenue? Might it be beneficial to have a formal brand evangelist program among your strongest customers to help new clients learn the ropes? How about developing a loyalty program to encourage more purchases?

Would encouraging customers to connect with you via other channels make their experience better? How about a private membership site or support portal where customers can help each other? Is there a particular point in the post-purchase journey in which many contacts become inactive?

All of these questions and more will help ensure you're maximizing the success of the entire buyer journey, moving beyond the sale to design a post-purchase experience that cultivates brand advocacy and increases lifetime customer value.



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Journey Maps: Common Questions and Tips for Getting Them Right

Each business is unique, and so are each company's respective customer journeys. As you're sketching out your journey maps, then, a number of questions are bound to arise. With the strong foundation you've built through your buyer persona work and additional research, you'll be well-positioned to work through them.

Here are a few common questions that frequently pop up during the journey mapping process, how you might approach answering them, and what you should consider to help make sure you get your customer journey maps right.

Can we copy a journey map from another source?

Don't be lulled into thinking you can simply download someone else's great-looking customer journey map from a Google images search and then do a cut/paste of your information. You need to create your own customer journey map relying on the intelligence you've collected

from the buyer persona interview exercises. Go through the hard work of developing your journey map from scratch and you'll find it a far more powerful instrument.

What's the difference between the sales and marketing pipeline and a customer journey?

For B2B sales and marketing organizations, a pipeline or funnel has traditionally played an important role in forecasting future business, assessing sales reps and determining resource requirements. Usually each company has their own processes and methodologies for using these tools for reporting, analytics and sales management.

While they might share some common stages or attributes, a funnel is an internally focused tool, while a customer journey is an externally focused view of what a customer needs and does as they consider a product or service. You need both, but you shouldn't attempt to shoehorn your marketing into the internal methodology.



How many customer journey maps do we need?

The answer to this question will depend on a variety of factors, including the services and products you offer, the number of buyer personas you've established, and how many people are typically involved in the buying decision process.

For example, for B2B buyers where group decisions are often the norm, you may want to think about whether you can combine multiple decision processes into one map or design a separate journey map for folks that have entirely different evaluation processes.

If a company is considering a new management solution, for instance, sales department personnel will be researching and determining what they might need for their new software solution, while the evaluation and buying process for the same order management group might be completely different for the global tax department.

In short, there's no hard and fast rule around how many journey maps you need. Less is generally better, but make sure you have enough maps to reflect the differences among various buying constituencies.

How do we account for people moving at different paces through their customer journeys?

Some buyers will make decisions in hours or days, while others will take months and maybe even years. The art of a great customer journey is to make sure you can help facilitate buying decisions no matter what the pace. Give your buyer the option to contact you directly by making your email and phone number easy to find. Also, consider website chat features so you can help those that prefer to type rather than talk.

A powerful game plan is to integrate your call center solution into your marketing automation/digital marketing platform so you can supply your call center reps with as much intelligence as possible and better route calls. The same benefit can apply in the reverse, where information collected in the call center can be used in your marketing automation system for rule-based emails and SMS messages.

For those that prefer to engage at arms' length, respect their wishes. Continue to give them helpful content and engage with them via email to find out where they are in their process.

How should we account for behaviors in our customer journey planning?

Simply put, behaviors are usually the most powerful part of the customer journey. Prospects or potential buyers do a number of things to express interest throughout their journey. They open your emails, they interact with your website, they download ebooks or other content, they visit your social network pages, they download your app, they dial up your call center, and more.

All these behaviors are telling because they indicate how these contacts are engaging with your company. Make sure to develop a strategic content plan to help facilitate the journey, capturing every possible interaction and making sure you're recommending the next piece in your content path.

Build out your triggered emails or SMS messages, for example, so that every download response is more than just a method to download the file. Don't forget to inject a human tone into your messages, and use personalization wherever possible to help increase engagement.

Designing the Ultimate Customer Journey

Journey maps make excellent internal communication tools, and in a landscape in which customers are demanding seamless, rewarding experiences across channels, these maps can help facilitate the types of conversations that reduce disjointed efforts.

Share them with other departments with an eye toward getting everyone on the same page. For example, the journey maps can be indispensable guides to show sales just how much a prospect has researched before they even get a rep involved.

As you're communicating your findings, highlight areas where you consider your product or company to be best in class and also stress those areas where you need to improve. Are you as efficient and effective as you can be in all channels? Are you being empathetic to your prospects' feelings? Being proactive in addressing their fears or concerns?

You might realize that your personas are a much more mobile-savvy group than you thought and that your current technology

implementation doesn't allow you to communicate with them accordingly. Showing where in the customer journey mobile is used and its importance might help you make the business case for a next-generation mobile app.

Your research might reveal that there's a lot of back and forth between the website and the mobile app and that you need a good Solution Developer Kit (SDK) that allows interaction data to be passed between the mobile device, website and digital marketing platform. When you use a journey map as part of these discussions, these types of needs can surface for all stakeholders. In this way, customer journey maps can help eliminate fragmentation within the marketing department as well, where data and personnel are often siloed.

Bring this increased sense of collaboration and workflow to your digital marketing technology, teaming with other department members to build campaigns and programs that enhance the customer journey across channels and using the tools at your disposal to maintain a sharp focus on the customer experience.

Conclusion: Making Buyer Personas and Customer Journey Maps a Marketer's Way of Life

If you go to all the hard work to develop these critical strategic assets for your marketing department, don't just relegate them to annual planning notebooks or seldom-used PowerPoints. Every time you're working on messaging, updating content or building out campaign strategy, use what you have developed. Constantly refer back to your buyer persona documents and customer journey maps to help you remain on point.

Periodically conduct more interviews to refine what you've developed and keep customer focus at the forefront. At every planning meeting, ask yourself and your coworkers, "What would our buyer want?" or "What does our research indicate that we should do?"

Consider performing annual content audits to help ensure you have current materials to engage contacts at the different points in the customer journey – and via the channels through which your contacts prefer to interact with you at these moments.

Finally, monitor your analytics tools for changes in the customer journey that may arise over time.

Taken seriously and institutionalized throughout your company, the process of developing buyer personas and mapping the customer journey will go a long way toward designing an improved customer experience – and propelling your team to new levels of success.

Footnotes:

1-IBM and Econsultancy, "[Listening to the customer: 7 key customer experience trends](#)," March '15

2-IBM, "[Marketing is a \(buyer\) journey, not a destination](#)," Aug. '1

Additional Resources:

"Buyer Personas: How to Gain Insight into Your Customer's Expectations, Align Your Marketing Strategies, and Win More Business" by Adele Revella

"Outside In: The Power of Putting Customers at the Center of Your Business" by Harley Manning and Kerry Bodine

About Silverpop

Silverpop, an IBM Company, is a cloud-based digital marketing provider that offers email marketing, lead-to-revenue management and mobile engagement solutions. Silverpop Engage — the foundation of the IBM Marketing Cloud — uses customer data and individual behaviors, collected from a variety of sources, to inform and drive personalized interactions in real time. IBM Marketing Cloud powers the delivery of exceptional experiences for customers across the buyer journey by leveraging key data, providing analytical insights and automating relevant cross-channel interactions.

As part of IBM Marketing Solutions, Silverpop helps make it easier to design meaningful customer experiences across applications, devices and time, accelerating today's results and tomorrow's ambitions. Silverpop is trusted by more than 5,000 brands around the globe. For more information, [view our demo](#) and visit silverpop.com.

