

⇒ Persona Development

Why and when

Personas tell stories about users so that people in the organisation can understand the user and what they want. Personas are 'archetypal' users that act as 'stand-ins' for real users and help guide decisions about site aims, functionality and design. By designing a site to meet the needs of specific personas, the needs of wider groups of users with similar goals is met.

Personas enable development teams to focus on the issues of greatest importance to users, and deliver them in a way that is most suitable. As importantly, personas tell web teams and contributors what not to develop. They are a constant reminder – as an A4 print out on the pin board by the desk, as a poster on the wall, as a cardboard cut out, in the corner of the office – reminding developers about what's important to users.

However, to ensure that the personas reflect 'real' users, they need to be based on a detailed understanding of users, their goals and their priorities: user research is required to gain real insight and understanding into user needs and motivations.

Personas are usually developed at the start of a web development, or redevelopment process. They are particularly valuable for web sites that have accumulated large amounts of content, much of which is seldom used, which is present because content producers have published material they have - rather than what users want, and this gets in the way of users achieving their goals.

Our approach

The approach we adopt to developing personas ensures the 'right' research is undertaken to gain the necessary insights into users and their goals, which is then combined with a process to gain acceptance by the client to the final personas.

The right research

The right research will depend on: the number of user types; the existing level of understanding of users; the accessibility of respondents; the 'internal credibility' of the research required; and budget available. With our extensive user research experience, we can recommend an appropriate research methodology to ensure the research delivers useful outputs and provides value for money.

Action Oriented Process

A key issue is to get organizational acceptance to the final personas. We use a number of approaches to gain this but they all include ensuring key personnel gain a first hand understanding of users either by direct observation in research sessions or with video evidence shown at workshops.

Having viewed the user evidence, a WUP consultant facilitates a discussion to identify the key issues. This discussion means that the client takes ownership of the research results, and develops a collective view of the issues that enables the identification of *actionable* results.

WUP consultants bring to these discussions many years experience of strategic consulting in the private and public sectors. As the situation demands, we draw on this experience to ensure the discussions are guided by this knowledge.

How we do it

How projects are undertaken depends on the research objectives and appropriate methodologies, but typically there are three elements:

- Project preparation
- Conducting the research
- Persona development

Project preparation

We plan the research in consultation with the client so the client gets the 'right' solution - not an 'off the shelf' one. We agree with the client's project manager the key aims of the research, research methodologies, respondent profiles, research locations, timescales, etc. We prepare a discussion guide or questionnaires for the research for approval by the client's project manager in advance of the research.

When required, we undertake our own recruitment - we do not use third parties. We believe this allows us to recruit more accurately to our client's specification, provide greater flexibility, and treat testers in a decent and ethical way.

Conducting the Research

How the research is conducted depends on the methodologies used, but typically includes:

- Preparing discussion guides or questionnaires
- Scheduling the research
- Undertaking the research
- Analysing the outputs

Persona Development

WUP develops the personas for the target user groups based on the internal and user research and details:

- Name
- Representative picture
- Description of target user type
- 'Personal' details (e.g. sex, age, home location, marital status, children, home ownership, etc)
- Occupation details
- Personal background
- Their motivations for using the site - in their own words
- The goals they want to achieve on the site
- The words they would use to describe these goals

Involving key client personnel in the user research process, enables them to develop significant insight into the research used for the persona development, and involves them at important decision making points in the process. This ensures their commitment and buy-in to the resulting personas, and equips them to act as 'champions' for the personas more broadly in the organisation.

Outputs

The main output is the Persona or Personas for the site. Other supporting outputs would typically include:

- Reports at key stages of the research
- Presentations
- DVDs of the research sessions

Client examples

WUP have undertaken a large amount of user research and persona development projects. Recent work includes:

Client	Project	Date
British Museum	Online user survey and depth interviews with 45 respondents to inform new site information architecture and persona development	August 2006
Environment Agency	User research in connection with developing personas: depth and telephone interviews with 53 internal stakeholders and 60 respondents	May 2006
Houses of Parliament	User research in connection with developing information architecture included an online survey (844 responses) and depth interviews with 36 respondents	April 2006
Welsh Development Agency	User research to understand user goals on WDA International site. Depth and telephone interviews with 17 respondents	Feb 2006
Small Business Service	User research to understand attitudes to proposed Business Link web site developments. 7 separate projects involving depth interviews and focus groups with more than 100 respondents	2005

Fees

Most of our work is tailored to individual client's requirements and we quote an inclusive price for each piece of work. The cost of persona development depends largely on the scale of the user research. However, the following gives an illustration of typical costs:

- Depth interviews with 12 respondents followed by workshop and persona development £7,950
- Focus groups with 24 respondents (4 groups with 6 participants each) plus persona development £14,500