THE POWER AND POTENTIAL OF PERSONAS

How B2B marketers use and view buyer personas

Learning from a B2P industry survey

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b2p™ Making b2b more **powerful** by making it more **personal**

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Overview

The B2B marketing strategy firm, B2P Partners, completed proprietary research to determine, understand, and benchmark the current use of B2B buyer personas. The research probed how companies are using buyer personas, where and how they have been effective (or not effective), and what obstacles, real or perceived, block the path to success.

A buyer persona is a composite profile of the perfect prospect, reflective of their actual interests, goals, perceptions, and role in the solution consideration process.

Our learning covers:

- How marketers are producing buyer personas
- The potential for personas
- How are personas performing
- How can performance be improved

Executive Summary

Increasingly buyer personas are becoming part of the marketing toolkit:

- Over half (58%) of B2B marketers say they are currently using personas and 28% say they will start using personas in the next 1-2 years.

  "Personas are drivers of our segmentation strategy"

- But only a third (35%) report that personas are very or extremely effective.

  "[Buyer personas] lead to better targeting, media usage and prioritization of budget"

- For nearly half (47%), buyer personas helped them discover important new insights or corrected faulty assumptions.

  "A contributor to product development"

The promise of buyer personas is being diminished by the practice of some marketers to create personas from internal projection rather than external research with real prospects.

- Overall, B2B marketers are most likely (49%) to rate their buyer personas as "somewhat effective". Several (16%) consider them "not at all" or "not very" effective and a third (35%) rate their buyer personas as "extremely" or "very effective".

- Over three quarters (77%) of the "extremely" or "very effective" personas are based on new external research while almost three quarters (72%) of the "ineffective" personas are not based on new external research and were created from existing data.

Ineffective personas lead to cultural misperceptions and underperformance:

- While many (33%) say buyer personas are respected and/or understood in their company, one third of B2B marketers (29%) report that they are not respected.

- A quarter (26%) say personas have not yet revealed many new insights.

  "In the main, personas tend not to drive any new learning, but rather skin existing learning with a newer, somewhat obvious conclusion"

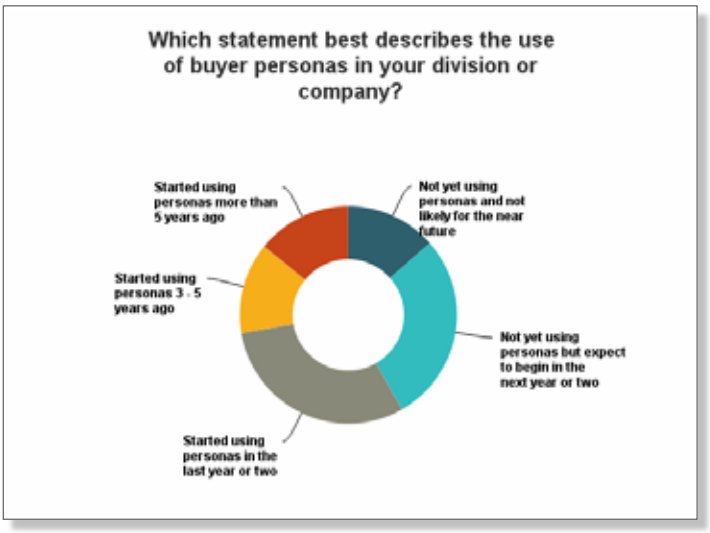
Detailed Research Findings

Section 1:

HOW ARE MARKETERS PRODUCING BUYER PERSONAS?

While most B2B marketers claim familiarity with buyer personas, active use of them is relatively recent.

- Only a few have used personas more than 1-2 years. About a third (31%) started using personas in the past two years. Only 15% have been using them for more than five years.
- 42% have yet to create any personas.

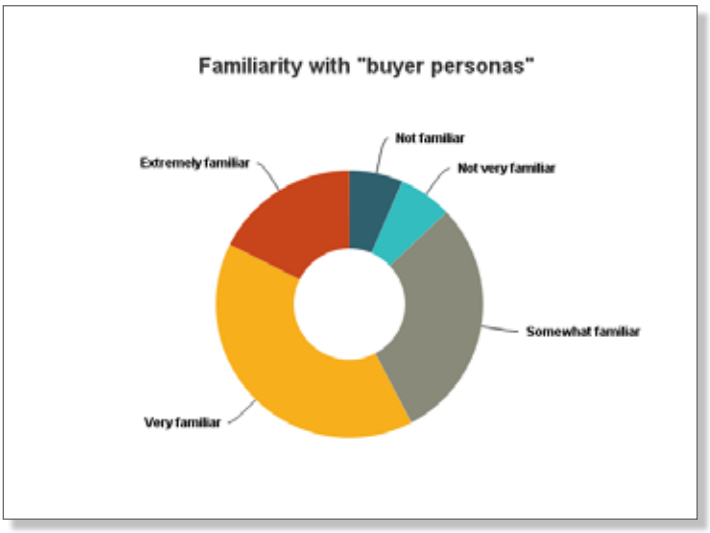


Over half (58%) of marketers are currently using buyer personas, and 28% say they will be using them in 1–2 years. 59% believe that personas usage is increasing.

- 39% have created 1–4 personas
- 30% have created 5–9 personas
- 31% have created 10+ personas

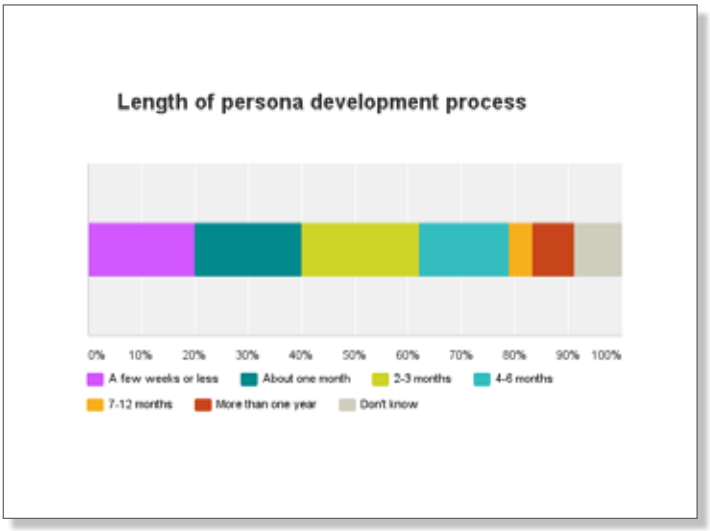
There is a wide range of practices in spending on B2B buyer personas.

- Over a third (36%) built their personas internally and invested no funds in creating them.
- 19% paid up to $10,000 per persona.
- 14% paid between $10,000 and $19,000, and another 14% paid more.



Buyer personas include a wide range of elements but there is not much consistency among them. No one element is included in even two-thirds of personas.

- 62% Personal Profile
- 58% Buyers' Journey
- 58% Core Insights
- 49% Influence Points (where, when, and how to reach them)



Section 2:

WHAT IS THE POTENTIAL FOR PERSONAS?

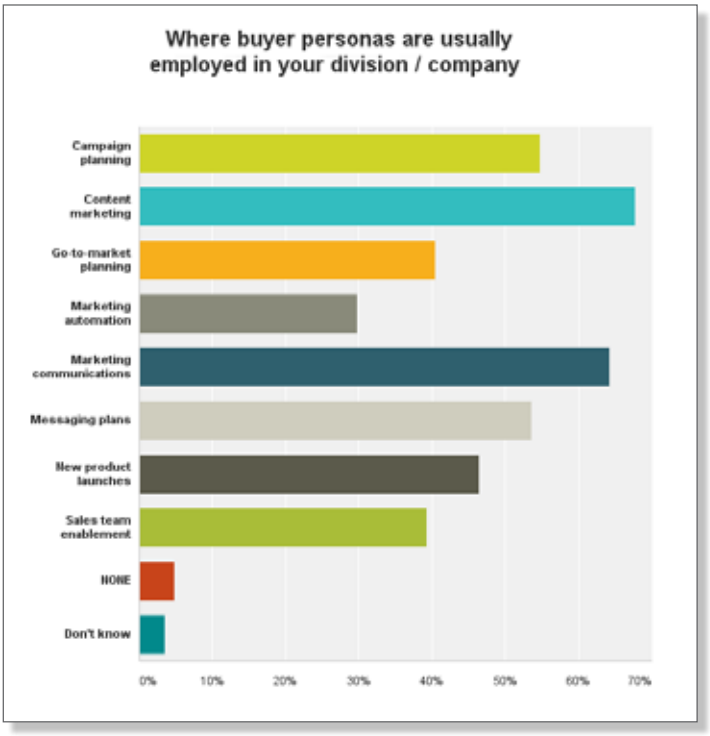
At least half of B2B marketers report that buyer personas are effective when used for:

- 67% Content Marketing
- 64% Marketing Communications
- 55% Campaign Planning
- 53% Messaging Plans

"Better targeting, media usage and prioritization of budget"

Only one-third report finding them effective for other applications.

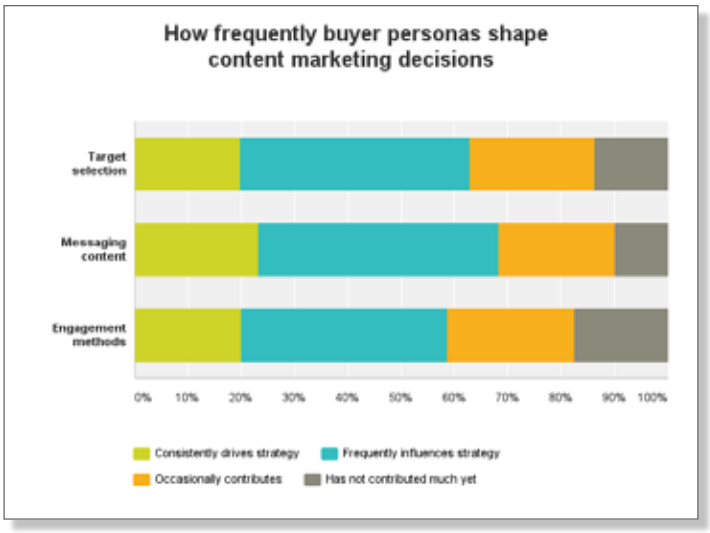
- 36% Sales Enablement / Alignment
- 35% Go-to-Market Planning
- 35% Campaign Planning
- 33% New Launch



Section 3:

HOW ARE PERSONAS PERFORMING?

Fully half of B2B marketers (49%) say that personas have become a permanent strategic tool for them but only about one-fifth say they use them consistently for content marketing issues like targeting, messaging, or creating engagement plans, and 42% say that personas create competitive advantage.

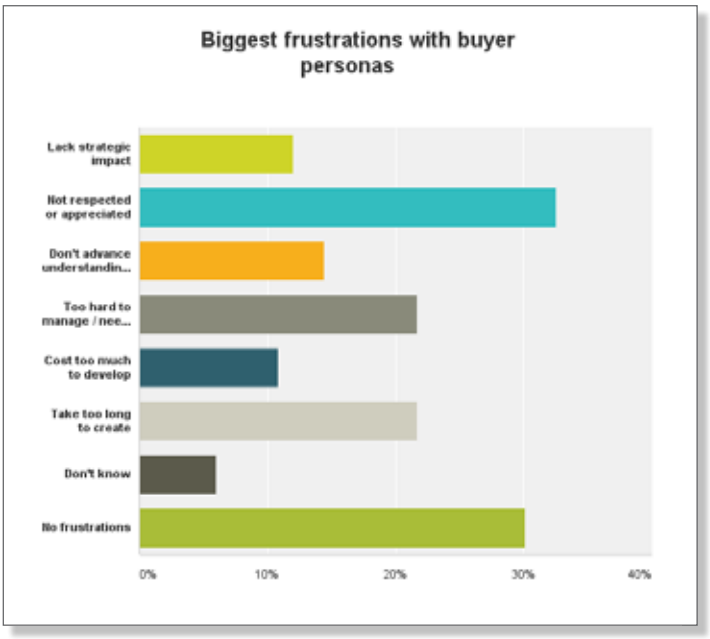


"Personas are drivers of our segmentation strategy."

"Personas moved our client to a much more nuanced understanding of their customers' motivations, goals and behaviors"

"The focus is on the number of leads, not quality"

However, 32% say their biggest frustration with buyer personas is that they are not respected or appreciated. Fewer are disappointed with executional issues like personas taking too long to develop (XX%), there being too many to manage (XX%), or costing too much (XX%).



"There is a disconnect between strategic and executional components. There is often no unifying champion"

"There is too big a gap between high-level buyer understanding and how to create programs"

Section 4:

HOW CAN PERFORMANCE BE IMPROVED?

The major variable in the "success" or effectiveness of buyer personas appears to be a basis in new primary qualitative research.

Perhaps the biggest difference is between marketers who create personas based on insights from primary qualitative research and those who rely on internal discussions and existing internal information.

Of the 58% of marketers who are currently using buyer personas, 35% report that they are very or extremely effective. 17% find them ineffective.

Over three quarters (77%) of the "extremely" or "very effective" personas are based on new external research while almost three quarters (72%) of the "ineffective" personas are not based on new external research and were created from existing data.

"Many do not understand or appreciate the value of personas and fall back on personal knowledge or biases."

Methodology

Results are based on an online survey of 170 B2B marketers in winter 2014 / 2015:

- Nearly all (94%) are focused on B2B while one-third (30%) have both B2B and B2C responsibilities
- Nearly all have global (52%) or US national (45%) responsibilities for their firms
- They are concentrated in technology/communications firms (31%) or marketing agencies (30%)
- Represent a range of company sizes – 18% over $1B, 50% from $1M up to $1B, 24% under $1M

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