

Different Perspectives on Personas

Overview

- The “history” of personas
- Cooper’s personas approach
- Microsoft’s personas approach
- Beck’s personas approach
- Norman’s ad hoc personas approach
- Conclusion

The “History” of Personas

- Cooper heralded the use of personas in product design but didn't invent the method.
- Archetypical users are also used in contextual design.
Beyer, H. & Holtzblatt, K. (1998): Contextual Design. Morgan Kaufmann.
- User profiles and user representation have a long history in marketing.
Moore, A. G. (1991): Crossing the Chasm. New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers.
- There are debates about
 - how close or how loosely personas should be based on data
 - how they are to be used in the design process

Perspectives on Personas

Persona aspects according to Cooper:

- Be specific
- Be hypothetical
- Be precise
- Don't be “elastic”

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Personas approach by Microsoft (Pruitt & Grudin):

- Mixed teams of programmers, quality assurance testers, program managers, designers, technical writers, user researchers, marketing professionals
- Personas might help the designer to focus
- They provide a shared basis for communication
- Important for big projects:
 - The MSN Explorer persona project started in January of 2000, lasted 10 month, involved two people and four personas
 - The MS Windows persona project started in March of 2001 and lasted until 2003, involved 22 people and 6 personas

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Personas approach by Microsoft (Pruitt & Grudin):

- The basis were existing market-segmentation studies combined with metrics about market size, strategic and competitive placement
- International market and accessibility information was included in the personas
- There were also “anti-personas” to identify people that are specifically not being designed for

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Personas approach by Microsoft (Pruitt & Grudin):

- For each persona, a central “foundation document” was used as a storehouse of information including key attributes, data, reference materials, etc.
- The “foundation document” contains goals, fears, and typical activities that motivate and justify scenarios that appear in feature specs, vision documents, storyboards, etc.
- Example for a “foundation document”: Alan Waters

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- Overview – Alan Waters: *Get to know Alan, his business, family*
- A Day in Life: *Follow Alan through a typical day*
- Work Activities: *Look at Alan's job description and role at work*
- Household and Leisure Activities: *Get information about Alan does*
- Goals, Fears, and Aspirations: *Understand his concerns about his life, career, and business.*
- Computer Skills, Knowledge, and Abilities: *Learn about his experience and attitude towards technology (past and future)*
- Market Size and Influence: *Understand the impact people like Alan have on our business.*
- Demographic Attributes: *Read key demographic information*
- Communicating: *Learn how Alan keeps in touch with people.*
- International Considerations: *Find out what Alan is like outside U.S.*
- Quotes: *Hear what Alan has to say.*

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Personas approach by Microsoft (Pruitt & Grudin):

- Sanity checks on high-level and low-level characteristics were conducted for each persona
- In a kick-off meeting the personas were introduced to the development team
- Weekly update mailings on personas

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Personas approach by Astrid Beck:

- Sociographic aspects, e.g. education, profession, income, social class, etc.
- Psychographic aspects, e.g. motivation, values, needs and expectations, lifestyle, etc.
- Physiographic aspects, e.g. abilities, impairments, disabilities, etc.
- Geographic aspects, e.g. residence, state culture, etc.
- Technology-related aspects, e.g. technical equipment, level of knowledge and use, etc.
- Media-related aspects, e.g. media usage patterns, leisure activities, consumer habits, etc.

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Personas approach by Astrid Beck:

- Use personas for marketing your product ideas inside the organization
 - management
 - trade unions
 - employees
- Use personas for marketing your product with customers
 - show that you know what users need
 - show that you care for users' needs
- Use personas to select beta users or test participants

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Personas approach by Donald Norman:

- Personas are about empathy and understanding:
“How would Mary/Peter respond to this?”
- They do not have to be real but realistic
- They do not have to be accurate but characteristic
- Details about private and social lives are superfluous
- They make it easier to be human-centered instead of technology centered (“featurism”)
- They add empathetic focus to the design

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Personas approach by Donald Norman:

- Ad-hoc personas are not based on data but on experience
- Ad-hoc personas “are created quickly, they do not use real data, and they are employed without much background information and attention to detail. But even so, they serve as wonderful tools for building understanding and empathy into the design process in a way that would be impossible with any other method.”

Norman, Donald A. (2004): Ad-Hoc Personas and Empathetic Focus. Essay. Internet, URL <http://www.jnd.org/dn.mss/personas_empath.html>

Conclusion

- There are different theoretical models for personas and what they should be based on
- There are different ways of how to apply personas in practice
- There is no “best way” for how to use personas, it depends on the situation