MAKE YOUR OUTREACH MORE EFFECTIVE WITH PERSONAS

We see and hear as many as 5,000 marketing messages a day. From the things we read in magazines or on social media, to what we hear on the radio, we are bombarded with advertisements. But how many of those messages do you think we pay attention to? Probably very few. We’re so overwhelmed with marketing messages that we just tune them out.

Personas - How to Get Your Outreach Messages Heard

Unfortunately, **the majority of your outreach efforts get mixed up in all that advertising and get tuned out too.**

If you want to cut through this message clutter and reach people, you need to create outreach personas. The word persona may sound odd if you’ve never heard about them, but they are easy and fun to create.

A persona is a thorough, specific and detailed description of the distinct groups within your church body. Personas tell the story of your members’ behaviors, needs, and concerns. **They help you understand prospective community members better so you can speak to them clearly and directly in your church outreach activities.** And it’s the clear, direct messages that make it through to your intended receivers.

While creating personas might seem like an unnecessary step, the work is invaluable. Otherwise, your outreach messages will be less effective at cutting through the clutter, and less effective means reaching less people. So now that you know why you need personas, you’re probably starting to wonder how to create them.

How to Create Your Personas

**Do Research:**Your goal is to thoroughly understand who your community members are. To do this, you need to do some research. You can have conversations with your members, send out surveys to your church community, or talk to people in your network.

Go into the research process methodically and with an open mind. **You already know your members, but you’ll be a bit surprised with what else you can learn.** You should also start with a set of basic questions or a template for what you want to find out. In addition to the standard questions, be sure to ask some open-ended questions to take the conversation further.

Here are some common things you’ll want to find out:

* Personal details like age, gender, goals, concerns, challenges, education, spouses, and children
* Details about faith, beliefs, and worship preferences
* Professional or career background, skills needed for their work
* Where and how they like to find information (ex: social media, books, magazines, the news, etc.)
* Why (and how) they were attracted to your church

Not only will this exercise help you understand your community better, but cultivating deeper relationships in your church community will ultimately lead to a growth in outreach.

**Identify the Traits of The People You're Trying To Reach Most:**Now you’ll need to take the information you gained in your research and start to make sense of it. You’ll want to look for patterns and common characteristics to tell the story, or stories, of your community members. It’s normal to have a couple of different stories emerge, and you can have as many personas as you need to account for the generalities in your community.

**Document Your Persona(s):**Here’s where you can be creative. There’s no right way to document your personas. You can use poster board, PowerPoint, a whiteboard, or any other medium that captures the nuances of your personas. Some people like to name their personas so they are easy to remember, and assigning an image to your persona is also helpful. You will want to keep and use your personas for the foreseeable future, so be sure they are savable.

After you've created your personas, share them with your team. Ask for their feedback on what you’ve created. Your team will be able to share insight to help you refine your personas.

Personas Get Your Outreach Messages Heard

Now it’s time to be heard above all the advertising noise. **You can use your personas to create targeted outreach messages, using words and ideas that will resonate with your ideal community member(s).**From persona to persona, you'll use different message ideas, choices of words, colors, images, and placements.

For instance, if you're trying to reach hip 20-something guys, your message will be completely different than if you want to reach stay-at-home mothers. So use your personas to craft a perfect message each time you do outreach work, from fliers to social media posts.

Another thing that makes personas especially helpful is that they give you insight into a person's reasons for being an involved member, or conversely, not wanting to attend worship services. If you address or speak to these issues in your church outreach messages, they will be incredibly powerful and effective at reaching your potential community members.

As an example, **if you hear that your millennials love missions work and making a difference in the world, you can make that a compelling focus of your next social media post targeted towards that group.** Speaking directly to your intended audience like this is an extremely effective way to use your personas.

Personas Are a Powerful Tool for Reaching People

Personas should be a part of your outreach strategy. They will make your outreach messages targeted, specific, and effective for your intended audience. Although they take a little time to create, they are invaluable and will help you reach more people.

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