Using Buyer Personas to Better Understand the Barbadian Consumer

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Abstract

This paper constructs three (3) basic Barbadian buyer personas and provides thirteen (13) suggestions for local businesses. Using a survey approach, the paper found that local businesses should: (1) mix traditional and digital advertising methods whenever possible; (2) include image advertisements with information about products or services in marketing campaigns; (3) keep social media websites and company websites up-to-date; (4) use Instagram, Facebook, email and WhatsApp to engage with Barbadians; (5) build brand advocates instead of loyal customers; (6) make information about products and services readily available to Barbadians; and (7) commit to answering social media and email messages timely. These results will help companies to better understand the Barbadian consumer hence improving their digital marketing efforts and return on investment (ROI).

Keywords: buyer persona, Barbadian consumer, digital marketing, traditional marketing, consumer behavior, social media, Barbados.

1. Introduction

Buyer personas are fundamental in helping to understand consumer behavior (Revella, 2015). A buyer persona represents your ideal customer (Mandal and Joshi, 2017). It is a representation of your best potential customer based on real data. This data may be collected from researching, surveying and interviewing your company's target market (Mandal and Joshi, 2017).

The buyer persona can be divided into two parts: the buyer profile and the buyer insights (Revella, 2015). The buyer profile focuses on the demographics of the fictional individual whereas the buyer insights examines the psychographics and behavioral aspects of their purchasing decisions (Revella, 2015). These psychographics and behavioral aspects seek to explain when, how and why an individual makes a purchase (Revella, 2015).

Understanding your target audience's demographics, psychographics and behaviors (see Table 1) are key to building an actionable buyer persona (Revella, 2015). This will in turn help with developing and executing successful digital marketing strategies (Mandal and Joshi, 2017).

Table 1: Some ways a market can be grouped

Demographics	Psychographics	Behavior
Focuses on the personal characteristics of consumers Some examples are:	Examines the attitudes, values and lifestyle characteristics of consumers Some examples are:	Examines consumer behavior towards products and services Some examples are:
Age[a]	Personality[a]	Engagement[b] (ex. likes, comments)
Gender[a]	Lifestyle[a]	Purchasing methods[b] (ex. online)
Education[a]	Attitudes[a]	Purchasing history[b]
Marital Status[a]	Opinions[a]	Devices used to access digital media[b]
Income[a]	Values[a]	Social media channels used[b]

Source: [a]Revella (2015). [b]Obtained from the author's survey.

1.1 A Brief Look at the Types of Personas and their History

Cooper (1999) created and made the term "personas" popular. He insisted that software designers divide customers into two categories: the buyer persona and user persona. Cooper (1999) believed this was necessary because buyers and users have different expectations, needs and goals.

1.2 Buyer Personas

Jenkinson (1994) developed the notion of the buyer persona. He believed that a market should not simply be segmented by appropriate factors, but rather, people with common characteristics should be grouped together. Jenkinson (1994) argued that grouping is more difficult than segmenting because grouping requires more intimate knowledge and a relationship with the consumers.

1.3 User Personas

Cooper (1999) believed that greater success would be achieved, if products were designed for a single person, instead of trying to accommodate the most people by broadening its functionality. He maintained that products should be designed for the actual user. Cooper (1999) further stated that although the buyer's needs should not be ignored, the buyer will be happier if the product makes the real end user happy.

To the best of my knowledge, there are no similar studies done on Barbados. The assumption is that some local companies may have done their own research to construct their respective buyer personas. The results of their research however, would be specific to their company and private.

My study contributes to literature in three (3) ways: First, it gives some insight into the Barbadian consumer. Second, it provides a foundation and framework for further examination of the Barbadian consumer. Third, it reveals numerous areas where future research can be undertaken to better understand the Barbadian consumer. For example, more in-depth research can be done on Barbadian consumer engagement, purchasing behavior, consumer's expectations of companies etc.

The study is useful to the extent that it will provide a better understanding of the Barbadian consumer. This will help local companies formulate better digital marketing strategies and improve their return on investment (ROI)[1].

The structure of the paper is as follows: Section 2 looks at digital marketing and how it compares to traditional marketing. Section 3 deals with the methodology and data. Section 4 focuses on the results. Section 5 provides some suggestions for local businesses. Section 6 contains the conclusion.

2. Digital Marketing

Digital marketing has become the norm for businesses around the world and more recently in Barbados. In light of COVID-19, businesses are utilizing digital marketing methods even more as they try to survive this pandemic. They are also trying to minimize in-store traffic by encouraging customers to shop online. This reignites the notorious comparison of digital and traditional marketing (see Table 2).

Table 2: Comparison of traditional and digital marketing based on a few components.

Component	Traditional Marketing	Digital Marketing
Consumer reach	Limited[a]	Global[a]
Cost	More expensive in most cases[b]	More cost efficient[b]
Communication	Communication is usually one-way (i.e. from the business to the consumer so engagement is rarely possible)[a]	Communication is two-way so engagement is possible.[a] Consumers are also able to communicate with each other.[a]
Targeting	Can target segments of the market but not specific individuals[b]	Specific individuals can be targeted as demographic, psychographic and behavioral targeting is possible[b]
Campaign planning, design and implementation	More time-consuming[c]	Uses various digital tools to make the process quicker[c]
Campaign flexibility	Changes can not easily be made (ex. printed magazine ads and signs)[c]	Changes can easily be made throughout the campaign's development[c]
Campaign effectiveness	Difficult to measure[c]	Easier to measure through analytics[c]
Return on Investment (ROI)	Difficult to measure[a]	Easy to measure using analytics tools[a]

Source: [a]Ahmati (2015). [b] Todor (2016). [c]Sathya (2017).

Digital marketing, also called online marketing, is the use of digital technologies to market products and services (Sathya, 2017). These technologies include the Internet, mobile phones, display advertising and other digital mediums (Sathya, 2017). Traditional marketing on the other hand refers to any type of marketing that is not digital (Todor, 2016). Some examples are: cold calling, direct paper mail, radio, television advertisements and sales flyers (Todor, 2016).

Based on the advantages that digital marketing has over traditional marketing, some believe that digital marketing will eventually replace traditional marketing. Others however, maintain that digital marketing will grow at a faster rate than traditional marketing but will not replace it. They are also advocates who believe that the two methods are most beneficial when used together.

Detailed buyer personas are the foundation for the best digital marketing strategies (Mandal and Joshi, 2017). Using buyer personas in digital marketing allows companies to focus specifically on their target audience. It allows them to understand when, how and why consumers make purchases (Revella, 2015). With this information, companies can provide engaging content and advertisements for their target audience. This will help to build trust and meaningful relationships with consumers which will increase company sales.

The opportunities for digital marketing in Barbados are great but the important question is whether local

businesses are fully exploiting these opportunities. A study done by Antilles Economics in 2018 revealed that 84.4% of Barbadians are active on at least one social media platform. We Are Social and Hootsuite's Digital 2021 Report indicated that Barbados has about 235,100 internet users with approximately 200,000 of them being active social media users. These figures represent about 81.8% and 69.6% of the total population respectively. This means that a local business can reach a significant number of individuals by effectively and efficiently utilizing digital marketing campaigns. These campaigns however should be data-driven instead of simply trial and error.

3. Methodology and Data

3.1 Research Method

A survey was conducted using various social media channels, telephone calls and in person. The sample size was capped at 234 respondents.

3.2 Data

The primary data used to construct the buyer personas was gathered from the survey.
The secondary data used to develop the theory was collected from journals, books, articles and reports.

4. Results

The survey results were analyzed and used to build these three (3) basic Barbadian buyer personas.

Buyer Profile							
Demographics							
18 - 45			46 - 66		67 and over		
Gen Z, Millennials and some Gen X[2]			Some Gen X and Baby Boomers II[2]		Baby Boomers I and Post War[2]		
M 52.5%	F 46.4%	? 1.1%	M 20%	F 80%	M 17%	F 83%	
Buyer Insights							
Psychographics							
Marketing and advertising preferences							
Prefers a mix of traditional and digital marketing			Prefers a mix of traditional and digital marketing		Prefers a mix of traditional and digital marketing		
Prefers image advertisements with information about the products or services			Prefers image advertisements with information about the products or services		Prefers image advertisements with information about the products or services		
Expected digital media response times from companies							
Expects a social media response in an hour or less			Expects a social media response in an hour or less		Expects a social media response in an hour or less		
Expects an email response in 24 hours or less			Expects an email response in an hour or less		Expects an email response in 24 hours or less		
Behavior							
Channels used to find information about products and services							
Uses social media websites, search engines and company's website to get information about products and services			Uses search engines, company's website and social media websites to get information about products and services		Uses social media websites, call and visit the company to get information about products and services		
Device usage							
Uses mobile phone to access social media and email			Uses mobile phone to access social media and email		Uses mobile phone to access social media and email		
Uses mobile phone and computer to make online purchases			Uses computer and tablet to make online purchases		Uses computer to make online purchases		
Engagement							
More likely to engage with companies they are interested in			Less likely to engage with companies they are interested in		Least likely to engage with companies they are interested in		
Willing to engage on Instagram, Facebook, email and WhatsApp			Willing to engage via email, WhatsApp, Facebook and Instagram		Willing to engage via email, WhatsApp and Facebook		

Purchasing behavior		
Is most likely to purchase a product or service after some type of research[3]	Is most likely to purchase a product or service after some type of research[3]	Is most likely to purchase a product or service after some type of research[3]
Sometimes shops online with local companies	Sometimes shops online with local companies	Seldom shops online with local companies
More likely to do more online shopping with local companies due to COVID-19	Less likely to do more online shopping with local companies despite COVID-19	Least likely to do more online shopping with local companies despite COVID-19
Purchasing history		
Made online purchases because of digital advertising within the last 5 years	Made online purchases because of digital advertising within the last 5 years	Did not make online purchases because of digital advertising within the last 5 years
Made in-store purchases because of digital advertising within the last 5 years	Made in-store purchases because of digital advertising within the last 5 years	Made in-store purchases because of digital advertising within the last 5 years
Made online purchases because of traditional advertising within the last 5 years	Made online purchases because of traditional advertising within the last 5 years	Made online purchases because of traditional advertising within the last 5 years
Made in-store purchases because of traditional advertising within the last 5 years	Made in-store purchases because of traditional advertising within the last 5 years	Made in-store purchases because of traditional advertising within the last 5 years

? - Preferred not to say

5. Suggestions for Local Companies

1) Make the information about the company's products and services readily available for Barbadians. Educate Barbadians more about the products and services the company sells. Encourage consumers to provide product and service reviews and testimonials. This will help individuals who are in the consideration stage move down the marketing funnel quicker (see Figure 1).
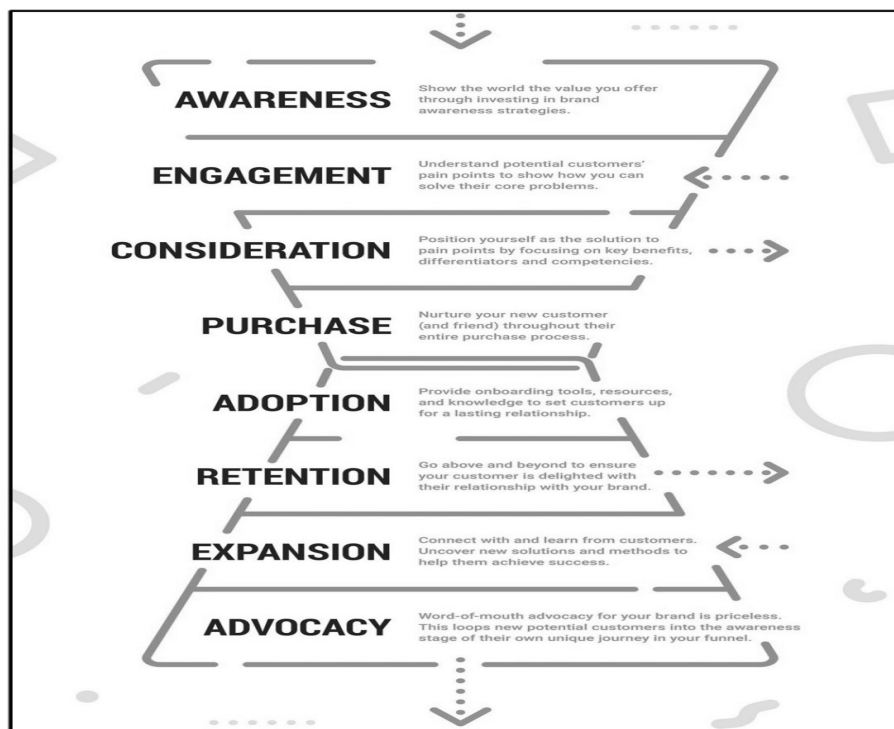

Figure 1: Campaign Monitor's New Marketing Funnel
Adapted from "The New Marketing Funnel," by Campaign Monitor, 2019,
https://www.campaignmonitor.com/resources/infographics/the-new-marketing-funnel/. Copyright 2020 by
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2) Keep social media websites up-to-date. Barbadians primarily rely on the social media websites of companies to find out information about a company's products and services. These websites should therefore be properly maintained.

3) Monitor social media websites frequently. Companies can employ social listening tools to help them monitor the websites efficiently. Here is where businesses can capitalize on customer engagement and build meaningful relationships and trust with consumers. The more organic consumers a company can acquire through this method, the lower the company's cost per acquisition (CPA)[4] will be.

4) Provide customer service training for the person(s) responsible for maintaining and monitoring the social media platforms. How employees handle queries and respond to situations can positively or negatively impact the business. Remember, the world is watching on social media. Brand advocates can provide tremendous benefits here (see Suggestion 10). They may choose to respond to the customers by offering their personal experiences which would help portray the company in a positive light. Nevertheless the responsibility of pacifying customers and situations is the company's own.

5) Use Instagram, Facebook, email and WhatsApp to engage with Barbadians. Barbadians are willing to engage with companies on these platforms. Properly utilizing these channels can help to increase customer acquisition.

6) Enhance search engine optimization. More attention should be given to search engine optimization. Companies should strive to rank higher in the search engine results and maximize on the number of site visitors they attract. The increase in website traffic will help to increase the company's conversion rate[5].

7) Keep the company website up-to-date. Barbadians also depend on company websites for information so similarly to the social media websites, they should be properly maintained.

8) Make company websites mobile-friendly and easy to navigate. An easy mobile shopping experience can improve a company's sales. Having to switch devices to make purchases may cause companies to lose impulse purchases.

9) Ensure the company website is secure. People will be reluctant to enter their personal information on a website that is not secure. Cyber security is especially important now as many countries have seen a notable increase in cybercrimes and cyberattacks since COVID-19 originated (see Interpol's COVID-19 Cybercrime Analysis Report - August 2020 and the FBI 2020 Internet Crime Report). This was attributed to the rise in online dependency of people around the world, as well as individuals and companies not updating their cybersecurity defenses.

10) Build brand advocates instead of loyal consumers. Companies should strive to move their consumers from the retention or loyalty stage of the marketing funnel to the advocacy stage (see Figure 1). In this stage, loyal consumers become brand advocates and seek to spread their own positive messages and experiences online about the business, product or services. This advocacy is priceless and helps to attract potential customers to the awareness stage of the funnel.

11) Use a mixture of traditional and digital marketing if possible. Although this method should be seriously considered, it does not apply to every business. The ability to successfully mix these methods depends on a number of factors, for example: type of industry, target market, company's budget etc.

12) Include image advertisements with information about products and services in your marketing campaigns. Although image advertising was the most popular in this study, A/B testing[6] should still be done to see what works for your target audience. Having compelling advertisements with clear call-to-actions (CTA)[7] will improve the click-through rate (CTR)[8] of the company.

13) Commit to responding to social media queries within an hour and emails within 24 hours. The company's service-level agreement (SLA) should reflect these changes. Remember the sooner the response, the closer the consumer feels to having their issue resolved, and the closer they are to customer satisfaction. This aids in building brand advocates.

6. Conclusion

The development of an actionable buyer persona is essential for understanding consumer behavior (Revella, 2015). To create an actionable buyer persona, companies must understand the demographics, psychographics and behavior of their target market (Revella, 2015). This facilitates the creation and implementation of successful digital marketing strategies (Mandal and Joshi, 2017). It will allow businesses to improve areas such as customer acquisition, customer engagement, campaign planning, advertising and service level agreements. Improvements in these key areas will ultimately lead to a notable increase in their return on investment (ROI).

This paper constructs three (3) general Barbadian buyer personas and provides thirteen (13) suggestions for local businesses. The primary data used to build the buyer personas was collected from a survey. The survey garnered 234 respondents.

Some important points to note are to: (1) mix traditional and digital advertising methods if possible; (2) include image advertisements with information about products or services in marketing campaigns; (3) keep social media websites and company websites up-to-date; (4) use Instagram, Facebook, email and WhatsApp to

engage with Barbadians; (5) build brand advocates instead of loyal customers; (6) make information about products and services readily available to Barbadians; and (7) commit to answering social media and email messages timely.

This study has, however, some limitations. A survey was the only method used to construct the buyer personas. Buyer surveys are most beneficial to buyer personas when used to confirm insights obtained from other methodologies, particularly, in-depth interviews with a small sample of buyers (Revella, 2015). In addition, although the sample size used is acceptable for this type of study, a larger sample size would provide a more accurate representation of the population. Despite these limitations, this study still provides valuable insight into Barbadian consumers. It also reveals numerous areas where further research can be done to better understand Barbadian consumers.

To go a step further, the financial success of local businesses, through enhanced digital marketing strategies, will ultimately lead to an improvement in the Barbadian economy. This will encourage activities such as domestic investment which will help boost economic growth in the short and long runs (Mamingi and Perch, 2013). These types of activities will help Barbados to recover from the negative financial impacts of COVID-19.

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Notes

[1]Return on Investment (ROI) - is a calculation of the monetary value of an investment versus its cost. see https://mailchimp.com/marketing-glossary/

[2]For the purpose of this study: Generation Z - 18 to 24 years old; Millennials - 25 to 40 years old; Generation X - 41 to 56 years old; Baby Boomers II - 57 to 66 years old; Baby Boomers I - 67 to 75 years old; and Post War - 76 to 93 years old.

[3]Research includes: in-depth research of the products or services, checking product or service reviews, asking friend(s) about the products or services and checking the reputation of the company promoting the products or services.

[4]Cost Per Acquisition (CPA) - is how much you spend to win a single paying customer. see https://mailchimp.com/marketing-glossary/

[5]Conversion Rate - is the percentage of user actions taken after total clicks on a display ad or other digital asset. see https://mailchimp.com/marketing-glossary/

[6]A/B Tests - is creating 2 versions of a digital asset to see which one users respond to better. see https://mailchimp.com/marketing-glossary/

[7]Call -To-Action (CTA) - is what you want your target audience to do after receiving your marketing message. see https://mailchimp.com/marketing-glossary/

[8]Click-Through Rate (CTR) - The percentage of users who click on the link in your digital marketing message after seeing it. see https://mailchimp.com/marketing-glossary/