



**The Essential Elements of a
Buyer-Centric Marketing Strategy**
and How to Apply Them Across Marketing

A buyer-centric marketing strategy can enhance your marketing programs and content creation through deep audience understanding and compelling positioning and messaging.

IN THIS EBOOK, YOU'LL LEARN:

- Frameworks for building the essential elements of a buyer-centric marketing strategy
- How to leverage these elements to create targeted messages by persona and journey stage
- Examples on how to apply strategy elements like personas and brand messaging to content marketing, product marketing, social media marketing, demand generation, and digital marketing

The essential elements of a buyer-centric marketing strategy are buyer personas, journey maps, brand identity, and positioning and messaging.

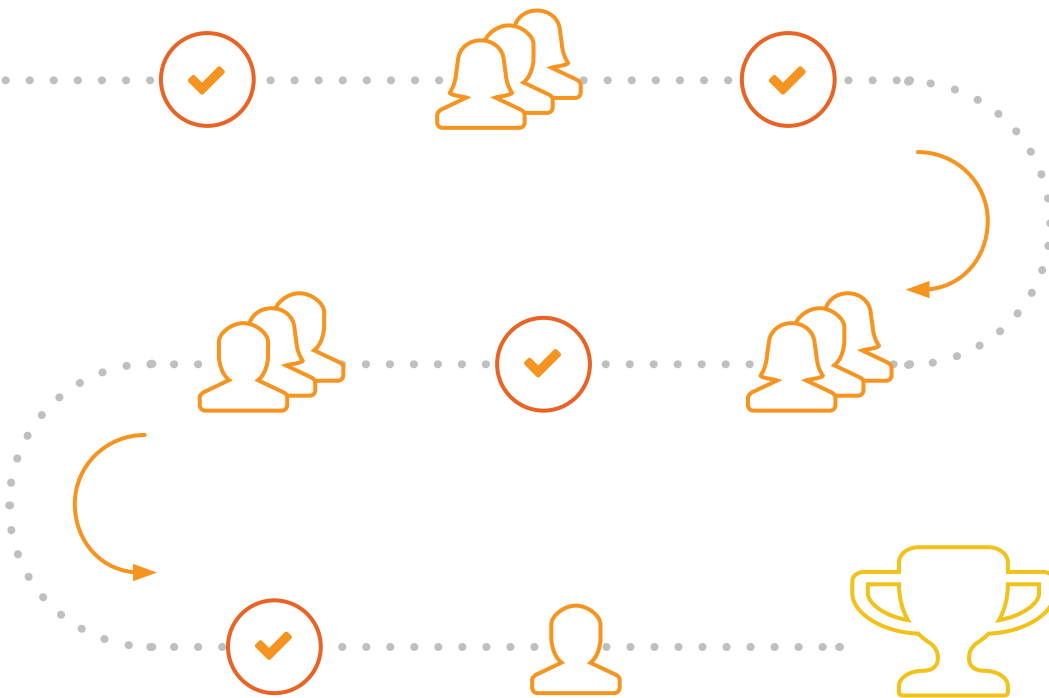
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SECTION 1:

The essential elements of a buyer-centric marketing strategy






To be buyer-centric is to be an expert in your buyers' business challenges and buying process, not simply an expert in your product.



TODAY'S B2B MARKETER NEEDS a buyer-centric mentality and approach in order to successfully engage and convert prospects overwhelmed with businesses vying for their attention. What does it mean to be buyer-centric? To be buyer-centric is to be an expert in your buyers' business challenges and buying process, not simply an expert in your product. Buyer-centricity is about *addressing your buyer's needs, educating them with expert insights, connecting with them on a deeper level and supporting their buying process in the manner they desire*. This approach ensures you build a trusting, engaging conversation with buyers that helps them move along their purchasing path.

How can you be successful at buyer-centric marketing? It all begins with understanding your buyers and how they buy, and ensuring your brand connects with them. That's why the essential elements of a buyer-centric marketing strategy are buyer personas, journey maps, brand identity, and positioning and messaging. These elements will drive the marketing programs and content creation—and even the sales actions—that engage your buyers and connect them to your brand at each stage of their journey.

SECTION 1, CHAPTER 1: Gain a deep understanding of your buyers through buyer personas and buyer's journey maps

5 ESSENTIAL LAYERS					
	Demographics	Goals & Initiatives	Solution Fit & Criteria	Buying Process	Content Preferences
BUYER PERSONA ATTRIBUTES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Titles Organization level Department Education level Gender 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Day to day business duties fulfilled and/or overseen How you're evaluated Current business challenges Upcoming initiatives Fears and risks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Primary need for a solution Additional desired benefits Desired outcomes or results Primary buying criteria Objections and concerns about the solution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Role in the buying process The deciders and influencers and how they evaluate the solution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Preferred content formats Sources of information (blogs, pubs, shows, etc.) Content tone that resonates

WHAT'S A BUYER PERSONA?

Engaging discerning B2B buyers requires rich insights into buyer attributes such as goals, challenges, concerns, and more. In-depth buyer personas provide these insights, and they're also a way to define the different buyers within your target audience. Buyer personas are aggregate representations of the actual buyers influencing or making decisions about your solutions and are based on real people, insights, and experiences.

WHAT'S IN A BUYER PERSONA?

A buyer persona has 5 essential layers, and each layer is organized around persona attributes that yield critical buyer insights.

SECTION 1, CHAPTER 1: Gain a deep understanding of your buyers through buyer personas and buyer's journey maps

WHAT'S A BUYER'S JOURNEY MAP?

After you've developed your personas, the next step is mapping their buying journey, so that you as a marketer understand how to engage them each step of the way. Buyer's journey maps detail the collective path—from the buyer's point of view—that each buyer persona, as well as all personas together as a group, go through to solve their business challenges. They give you a rich understanding of how your buyer personas discover, learn about, and choose solutions, and over time how they use these solutions to overcome challenges and improve their business.

WHAT'S IN A BUYER'S JOURNEY MAP?

First, you need to define the stages of your buyer's journey map. We propose seven buyer stages in the following framework.

Stage	Stage Description	Buyer Mindset
Discovering	The buyer has reached a tipping point, realizing they have a pain point they need to learn more about. They conduct research to better understand the problem and ultimately define it and decide to address it.	<i>I need to learn more about this issue from analysts, trade magazines, and influential bloggers.</i>
Learning	The buyer researches possible solutions and creates a broad list of solution options.	<i>I want to learn more about the various solutions that can address my problem.</i>
Choosing	The buyer compares and contrasts solutions, cuts their broad list of solution options into a short list, and then makes a final decision.	<i>I will drill down into specific offerings to see which best fits our needs.</i>
Purchasing	The buyer is procuring the solution and preparing for deploying, owning, and maintaining it.	<i>I need to ensure I get the best possible deal for my company while setting up for success with this vendor. I'm ensuring all concerns internally are addressed and that we have full support.</i>
Implementing	The buyer is deploying the solution, setting up users, receiving training, etc.	<i>I'm anxious to ensure the process is going smoothly and my objectives are being met on time and as expected.</i>
Proving	The buyer is using the solution and evaluating its qualities, benefits, and soon to be achieved ROI.	<i>I'm working with the new solution and attempting to assess success levels. I expect my vendor to be here to help me.</i>
Owning	The buyer is using the solution, maintaining it, receiving updates on new capabilities, realizing its ROI, and expanding usage of the solution.	<i>This solution and vendor are great to work with, making our lives easier, and improving our business performance.</i>

SECTION 1, CHAPTER 1: Gain a deep understanding of your buyers through buyer personas and buyer's journey maps

CONTINUED: WHAT'S IN A BUYER'S JOURNEY MAP?

Second, once you've defined your stages in your buyer's journey map, it's time to unearth valuable insights about each of your buyers at each stage. The best way to do this is to *capture four core dimensions* at each buying stage for each of your buyer personas: Needs, Activities, Content Preferences, and Participation Level. The following graphic defines these dimensions and also illustrates the integration of buyer personas and journey maps.

PERSONAS

Buyer personas are representations of the actual buyers influencing or making decisions about your solutions.



JOURNEY MAPS

Buyer's journey maps are divided into stages that collectively detail the path each buyer persona, and all personas as a group, take from initial investigation of their pain points and possible solutions through owning a solution. At each stage of the buyer's journey, it's critical to capture the Needs, Activities, Content Preferences, and Participation Level of each persona.

→ NEEDS:

What the buyer requires in order to go through their buying process at each stage.

→ ACTIVITIES:

What the buyer is actually doing at this stage to fulfill their needs.

→ CONTENT PREFERENCES:

What type of content the buyer desires to have at this stage.



PARTICIPATION LEVEL

What is the buyer persona's level of participation at this stage?



A **Driver** directs the process at this stage.



A **Gate Keeper's** approval is needed to pass this stage.



A **Participant** takes part in activities, but does not direct the process at this stage.



One **Not Involved** is not a participant at this stage.

SECTION 1, CHAPTER 2: Build a powerful brand that connects with your buyers

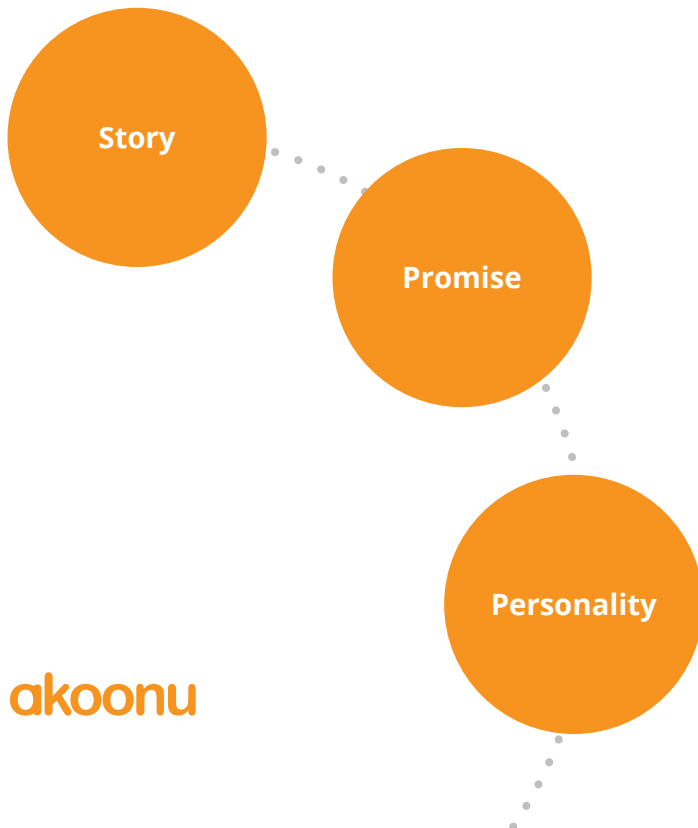


A COMPANY'S BRAND is one of its most valuable assets. It's ultimately the perception you create about your company in the marketplace and in the minds of your prospects through the many factors you use to communicate to your audience. To set your company apart, you need a powerful brand that connects with your buyers. The components of brand include brand identity, brand positioning and messaging, targeted messages, and style guidelines. The buyer insights you gain from your personas and journey maps are critical to influencing each of these brand components. You will need to consider these buyer insights to craft a brand that resonates with your audience. Your brand must be consistently embodied in everything you communicate and at every touchpoint with your buyers.

SECTION 1, CHAPTER 2: Build a powerful brand that connects with your buyers

BUILD YOUR BRAND IDENTITY

Brand identity is a collection of elements that define the essence of a brand. It includes internal brand elements like values, mission, and culture, and elements like promise, personality, and story that convey the external expression of the brand. A clearly defined brand identity influences every communication from social media posts to CEO earnings calls; it shapes the physical and psychological work space for your employees, and it creates affinity with the audience.



Your buyer insights will impact how you define your external brand identity elements, some of which include:

- **Story:** This is the chance to tell how and why the organization, business, and products came to be. The origins, evolutions, mission, success, and fun and interesting trivia.
- **Promise:** All brands promise something to their customers and constituents. It is what they expect from a company. It is what the company signals it will do for the buyer.
- **Personality:** This is the collection of human traits and characteristics associated with the brand and organization. It's important for developing trust, and the tone of voice in communications of all kinds and across all channels is a critical aspect of personality that must be consistently applied.

SECTION 1, CHAPTER 2: Build a powerful brand that connects with your buyers

BUILD YOUR POSITIONING AND MESSAGING

Positioning and messaging are the actual messages you hope to clearly communicate to the market or community in which a company operates. Positioning communicates the company's role in the market relative to competitors or substitute offerings, the buyer's need for its solution, and the value and critical capabilities of its solution or services, including how it's differentiated. It gives everyone a common way to talk about the brand and is the foundation for all written and verbal communication.

Positioning and messaging tools include a positioning statement and a brand message map.

The positioning statement articulates the key elements of brand positioning. It's often the elevator pitch and provides a clear, concise description of a company's target market, as well as a compelling picture of how the company wants that market to perceive them.

When you are crafting your positioning statement, you must take into consideration key attributes of your buyer personas, including day to day business duties, how they're evaluated/measured, their top business challenges, and their buying criteria.

A FRAMEWORK FOR BUILDING A POSITIONING STATEMENT:

Targeted for:

These are the primary target audiences you are marketing and selling to, and that your solution is designed to serve. It can include target market segments, titles, and audience characteristics.

Who are challenged to:

These are the primary business challenges facing your target audience, and why they therefore need a solution like yours. These must be serious challenges causing real, measurable consequences that are absolutely necessary for your target audience to address.

Because they need but don't yet have:

This is what your audience needs to move forward to address their primary challenges, but they don't yet have. It's the market need your solution fulfills and why it therefore exists.

Company name is:

This is what category your company operates in, and what your offering is in plain, simple words.

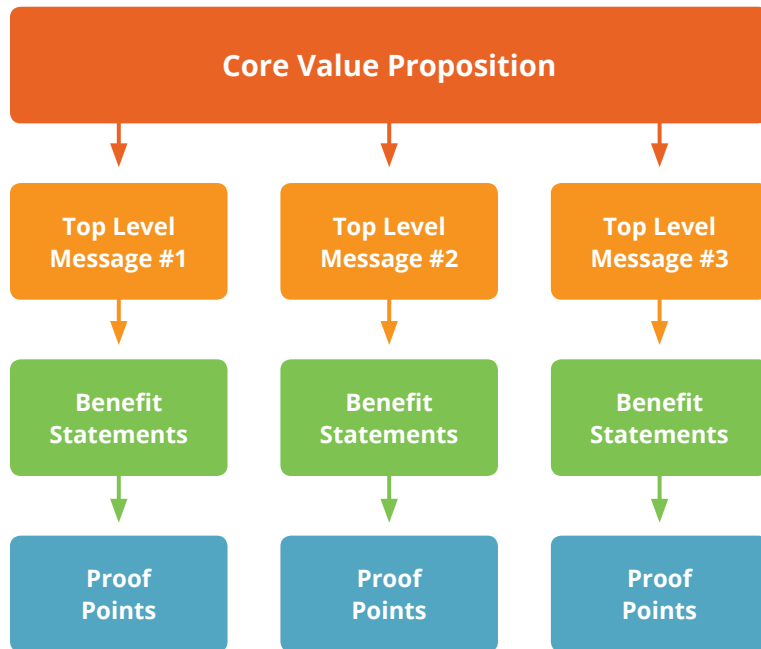
Unlike/only we:

This is how you differentiate from your competitors and state what only you have/provide—it's your unique selling proposition.

So you're empowered to:

This is the core value proposition, which is the central, substantial business benefit customers gain by working with your company. It should be a primary benefit that resonates with your audience and sets you apart from others.

SECTION 1, CHAPTER 2: Build a powerful brand that connects with your buyers



CONTINUED: BUILD YOUR POSITIONING AND MESSAGING

The brand message map is a framework to capture your brand's top-level messaging and core value proposition. Combined with the positioning statement, it serves as the foundational messaging that articulates the critical reasons why a business will want to consider and purchase offerings from a company.

THE BRAND MESSAGE MAP INCLUDES, BEGINNING FROM THE BASE:

→ A list of benefit statements:

Each benefit statement is a feature/capability and its associated benefit that you do equal to or better than your competition. *They should align to the very top needs of your buyer personas and each should be tagged to the relevant persona(s). Always view key persona attributes when drafting your benefit statements.* Also, each benefit statement should have proof points, which are a repository of evidence to support your core value proposition, top-level messages, and benefits statements.

→ The three top-level messages:

Top-level messages are benefits the company provides its audience. Each top-level message is an umbrella embodying several related benefit statements. *All three top-level messages should be buyer must-haves.* At minimum,

one must be both a must-have and an aspect of your offering that is superior to your competition (aka a key differentiator). The other two can be must-haves that are ideally differentiated, but may be simply on par or better than the competition.

→ **Core value proposition:** The core value proposition is the central, substantial business benefit customers gain by working with your company. It answers why your target audience buys from you and not competitors. *The core value proposition is often a combination of all 3 top-level messages and may be very similar or identical to a brand's promise. It is also represented in the positioning statement.* Your core value proposition should be the benefit your buyers receive by leveraging your essential capabilities to address their primary challenge.

SECTION 1, CHAPTER 2: Build a powerful brand that connects with your buyers

CREATING TARGETED MESSAGES BY PERSONA AND STAGE

A targeted message is a message developed for a specific persona at a specific journey stage, with the goal to increase buyer engagement by addressing the needs and interests the buyer likely has at that point.

TO CREATE A TARGETED MESSAGE:

- List each of your personas and their participation level at each journey stage.
- For each persona that's involved at each stage, take into consideration their persona attributes (goals, challenges, concerns, etc.), as well as their needs and activities at that stage, and tag them with relevant benefit statement(s).
- Take into consideration the persona's attributes, their needs and activities at that stage, and the tagged benefit statement(s), and create the targeted message(s).

Targeted messages enable marketers to connect directly with the needs and concerns of each buyer at each stage of their buyer's journey.



Camilla
Warehouse Manager



Henry
Director of IT

Journey Stages	Camilla Warehouse Manager	Henry Director of IT
Discovering	Deliver the right product on time to enhance customer relationships, reduce error-related costs, and drive repeat business.	Easy-to-use solution reduces errors and ensures staff are functional within hours.
Learning	Always be ready for changes in people, products, and processes	Seamless integration improves operational efficiency, reduces downtime, and eliminates the need for customer coding.
Choosing	Trust the expertise we have gained through 15 years of working with customers like you.	Optimize labor management leveraging in-depth insights on worker productivity.

EXAMPLE OF TARGETED MESSAGES

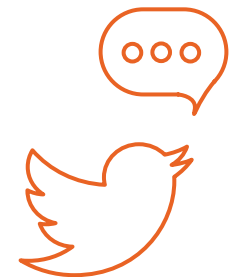
SECTION 2:

How to apply your marketing strategy to content marketing, product marketing, demand generation, social media marketing, and digital marketing

BUILDING A MARKETING strategy requires cross functional collaboration and organizational commitment. But the work you put into uncovering deep insights into your buyers, defining your brand identity, and collaboratively honing your messaging will accelerate your marketing effectiveness across the board. From content creation and sales enablement to CTAs, social engagement, and website design, your strategy will guide and influence every aspect of your marketing efforts. To get a glimpse into this, the following pages provide specific examples on how your strategy can be applied to content marketing, product marketing, demand generation, social media marketing, and digital marketing.

But first, here are a few common examples of strategy insights that marketers will commonly apply across these multiple marketing programs.

Understanding Your Buyers and How they Buy	Content and Campaign Planning	Content Creation
Buyers' trusted sources of information, including influencers and outlets	Which top-level and targeted messages to use by persona and stage within content, promotions, and digital experiences	How to consistently apply your positioning, top-level messaging, and targeted messaging
Buyer persona pain points, challenges, concerns, goals, daily responsibilities, buying criteria, and more attributes that guide quality content creation	Which content formats to create, use, and promote by persona and stage	How to consistently apply your brand tone of voice and personality
Buyer needs and activities at each stage of the journey to create and use content that addresses their buying requirements and processes	Which content is best for brand awareness and thought leadership, and which content is required to support sales actions in the middle and end of the purchasing process	The nomenclature that resonates with personas and within markets
How buyers engage with other buying participants at each stage in their journey	Which content supports Sales actions in the middle and end of the purchasing process	
Exactly which buyers (both decision-makers and key influencers) to target within an account and how to best nurture them at each stage		



SECTION 2: How to apply your marketing strategy

CONTENT MARKETING

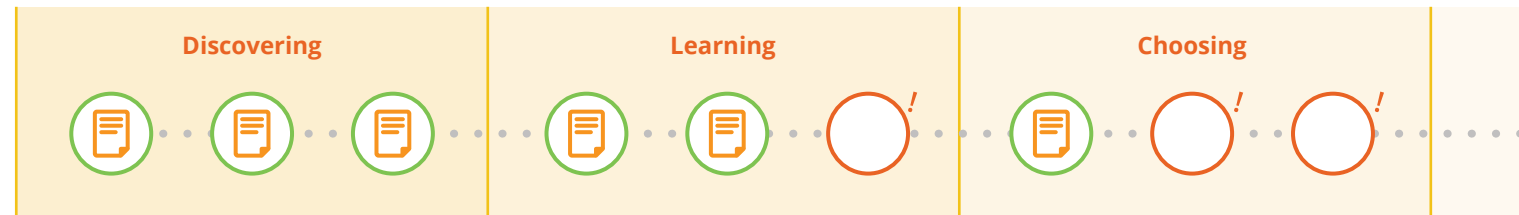
Content is now the primary way buyers discover, learn about, and ultimately choose solutions. Here are examples on how to apply your marketing strategy to content marketing strategy, planning, and creation.

CONTENT MARKETING STRATEGY AND PLANNING

Before you can plan and create your content, you first must know where to focus your efforts. Once you've developed your marketing strategy, you should tag each of your current content assets by persona, stage, and messaging. You'll clearly see where you have gaps—for example, a lot of content for a particular persona and not enough for another, or a significant amount of content for Discovering, but not enough for Learning and Choosing. And the same

goes with your messaging. You may find much of your content supports your “easy to use” top-level message, while you lack content supporting your “adaptability” message. Once you identify where you have gaps, you can strategically plan each content asset by persona, journey stage, and targeted messages. In addition to preventing content gaps, this will also inform how much unique content you need to create versus how much content you can create for multiple personas based on shared attributes.

BUYER'S JOURNEY



CONTENT CREATION

By applying your marketing strategy to your content planning, you can effectively keep your content creation more focused in its targeted audience, purpose, and messaging, rather than trying to do too much all at once. Use your personas and journey maps to gain specific insights into personas such as their challenges, pain points, concerns, and trusted sources of information,

as well as their needs and content preferences at each stage. With this approach, you can confidently create targeted content assets that provide valuable information and that are in your buyers' preferred format. And importantly, you save time. You can more quickly and consistently write better content that rises above the noise while eliminating the wasted time and expense creating content that goes unused.

SECTION 2: How to apply your marketing strategy

PRODUCT MARKETING

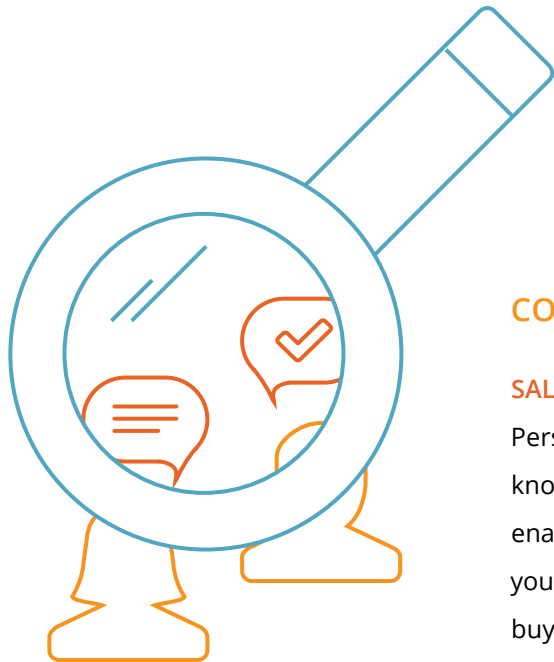
Product marketers develop and support the execution of the go-to-market strategy for a product or line of products. Here are examples on how to apply your marketing strategy to vertical marketing and sales enablement.

VERTICAL MARKETING

Product marketers frequently sell a product across different vertical markets. For instance, a pharmaceutical company and an academic research lab may use the same product, but use the product in different ways or to address different challenges. Personas and journey maps help product marketers understand these differences at an in-depth level so they can effectively position the product in each vertical market. An example of this is understanding industry-specific primary buying criteria. The pharmaceutical company may care most about the product's output quality tracking for FDA compliance reporting and the product's throughput for production. The research lab, on the other hand, may care most about the product's cost and ease of use since they are cost-conscious and have many people of various skill levels who need to use the product. Your personas and journey maps provide rich industry-specific insights such as this to ensure you successfully market your product across these various verticals.



SECTION 2: How to apply your marketing strategy



Buyer's journey maps create opportunities to support Sales by recognizing and relieving points of friction in the sales process.

CONTINUED: PRODUCT MARKETING

SALES ENABLEMENT

Personas and journey maps provide a wealth of knowledge to guide the planning and creation of sales enablement programs that directly resonates with your buyers. For instance, by understanding how your buyers are interacting with each other at each stage, you can create sales tools that address their needs and content preferences. Consider this real-world example from a buyer persona interview:

Persona Insight: The IT Director believes that the solution will cause integration and performance issues with their other systems, and for this reason they often block the sale mid-way through the buying process.

Marketer Reaction—

Create New Sales Enablement Solutions:

"We spoke with Sales to further understand these potential roadblocks in the sales process. We realized that IT Directors in our target industry generally shared this misconception, so we needed to create content Sales could easily share with them during the sales process that would help alleviate this concern."

Sales Enablement Solutions—

Two New Sales Tools:

- ➔ Integration best practices, including case studies featuring Directors of IT from current customers
- ➔ Documented performance benchmarks

SECTION 2: How to apply your marketing strategy

DEMAND GENERATION

Successful demand generation produces high quality leads and works effectively with Sales to convert those leads. Here are examples on how to apply your marketing strategy to designing campaigns and CTAs.

CAMPAIGN DESIGN

To whom are you targeting your campaign? Your personas and journey maps will inform you on which personas you can group together for a particular promotion. If you're promoting a whitepaper that addresses a particular concern or challenge, you'll know, for example, that this will resonate with your warehouse manager and supply chain executive personas, but your IT director persona will require something different. With this understanding, you can stay focused in the messages you use and the outlets in which you promote the whitepaper.

CREATING CALLS-TO-ACTION (CTAs)

A powerful CTA is one of the most critical—and often one of the most internally debated—aspects of an email nurture or content asset. When you know exactly which persona you are targeting and at which journey stage, you can create a CTA that is aligned to the needs of the buyer. What information does the buyer need next? What are they doing next and with whom are they engaging? What are they looking to learn as they continue moving forward in their buying process? This is critical knowledge to creating a CTA that keeps your buyers engaged with you.



SECTION 2: How to apply your marketing strategy

SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING

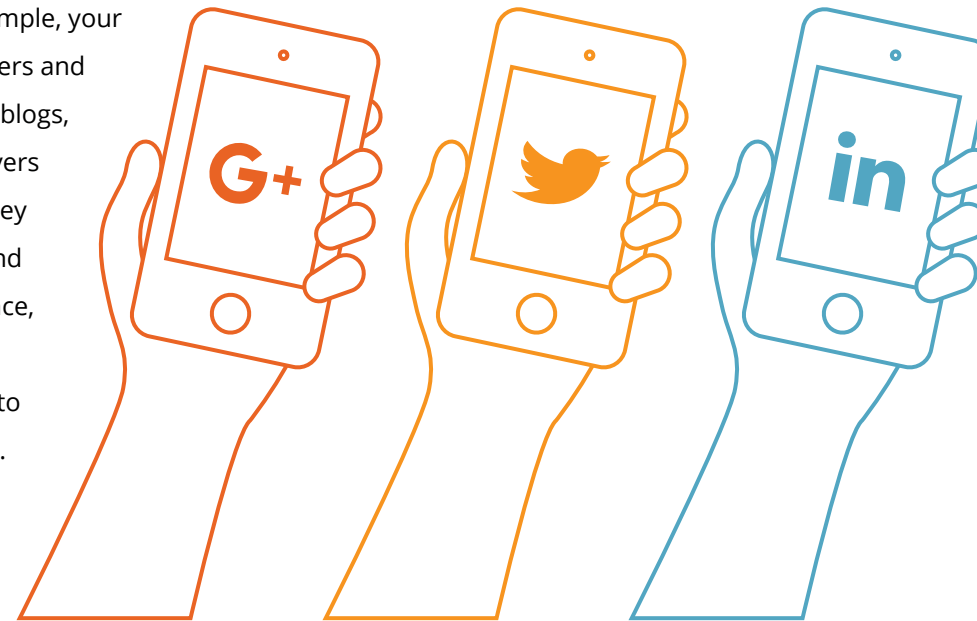
Social media channels have become a primary way to establish brand awareness and thought-leadership with your target audience. Here are examples on how to apply your marketing strategy to your social content strategy and audience engagement execution.

SOCIAL CONTENT STRATEGY

Your marketing strategy outlines how your buyers view each social channel, whether as a way to search for solutions, gain expertise on a particular topic, learn best practices, validate brand credibility, or network with others. You'll also learn what types of content your buyers seek and engage with in different social channels. Together these insights will guide which content topics, content formats, and messages to share by buyer persona and social channel. For example, your buyers will likely prefer educational whitepapers and case studies on LinkedIn, and shorter how-to blogs, articles, and infographics on Twitter. How buyers are using social media channels at each journey stage will also shape the content you share and the messages you use. Buyers may, for instance, leverage social media for best practices early on in the buying journey, but they may use it to validate brand credibility in the middle stages. This impacts everything from what you share to how you organize content on your corporate LinkedIn page.

AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT PLAN

How active are your buyers in each social channel? Which influencers do they follow? What are popular hashtags they use and LinkedIn groups they belong to? What activities do they engage in within each channel and what is their purpose? Your personas and journey maps will tell you how, when, and where to engage with your audience on social media.



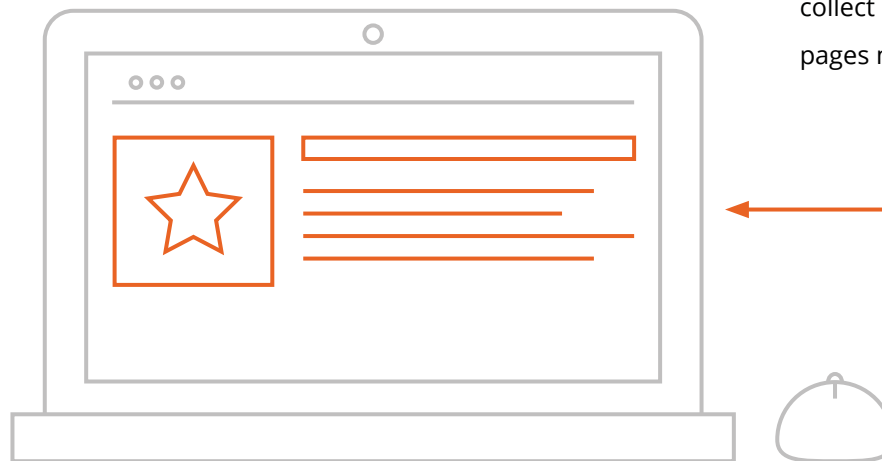
SECTION 2: How to apply your marketing strategy

DIGITAL MARKETING

With online research playing such a significant role in the buying journey, providing targeted, engaging digital experiences is essential to capturing the attention of discerning B2B buyers. Here are examples of how to apply your marketing strategy to website design and personalization.

WEBSITE DESIGN

By understanding the challenges your buyers want to solve and the information they require to support their needs throughout their buying journey, you can design your website in a way that guides different personas to the content and messaging relevant to them. As an example, you may group similar personas into “Warehouse Operations” and other personas into “Warehouse IT.” Your buyers will self-identify with these sections on your website and quickly navigate to the information valuable to them.



TARGETING AND PERSONALIZATION

However basic or sophisticated your targeting and personalization strategy is, you cannot execute it successfully until you’ve developed your personas and journey maps. To enable content targeting and personalization, you’ll first need to tag your current content assets by persona, journey stage, and targeted messages. Once you begin collecting web visitor data, you can segment your data by persona. Based on the type of content your personas access, you can determine their buying stage, and then target them with the tagged content relevant to them. Also, as you collect more data, you can begin personalizing website pages most visited by persona.



To learn more about buyer personas and buyer's journey maps, including detailed guides on how to build them and in-depth examples of each, check out our resources below.

WRAPPING IT ALL UP

By building a buyer-centric marketing strategy comprised of buyer personas, buyer's journey maps, brand identity, and positioning and messaging, marketers can significantly improve the effectiveness of all their marketing programs and empower a more consistent, efficient, and high quality buying journey. In today's highly competitive, buyer-driven world, these strategy elements are a must-have for all B2B marketers. The key is to collaboratively build these elements the right way, at an in-depth level, and ensure the entire organization is aligned on them and can easily share and leverage them.

[BUYER PERSONA RESOURCES](#)

[BUYER'S JOURNEY MAPS RESOURCES](#)

About Akoonu

Akoonu, Inc.™ is the first marketing strategy platform that empowers B2B marketers to develop and operationalize the essential elements for successful buyer-centric marketing from planning through execution. Our configurable frameworks, workflows, integrations, and collaboration features enable B2B marketers to develop and continually update in-depth buyer personas and buyer's journey maps that yield rich audience insights, to collaboratively advance their positioning and messaging, and to consistently apply their brand standards. Our platform activates your buyer insights and brand standards organizationally so that everyone across Marketing, Sales, Product, and Services can access, leverage and share them in real-time. As a result, marketers can empower an efficient, high-quality B2B buying journey through a deep understanding of their audience and engaging content that embodies your brand, fuels relationships, motivates your buyers, and drives business growth. For more information, visit www.akoonu.com and follow Akoonu @Akoonu. Also feel free to contact us directly at +1.844.4. AKOONU or hi@akoonu.com.

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