Persona Development
Conversion Pathways

What is a persona?

There are millions of people in this nation who will spend eternity separated from God and will never have an opportunity to hear the Gospel message unless churches begin to reproduce at a much faster rate. We are praying for and working towards a church multiplication movement because we believe it is the only way to reach this generation.

Personas are a way to maximize our efforts and serve the masses as we try to filter for people of peace who will engage their existing relationships (oikos) with the Gospel. Personas are conversion pathways or spiritual journeys with similar behavior patterns that people in each context walk, from unbelievers to followers of Jesus.

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 3:21, "So let no one boast in men. For all things are yours…". Just as all people submit to the laws of gravity and nature, so also people tend to follow sociological patterns and trends. As we seek to reach this generation, in step with the Holy Spirit, we want to use the best of what God has given us through research and what can be gained from others' experience.

We want to identify the five most common pathways. Some pathways will relate to religion — maybe they were radical Muslims or Atheists or low-practicing Muslims. Other pathways may be more linked to personal issues and circumstances — divorce, depression, dreams/visions, etc. Still other pathways could be more social in nature — political unrest, unemployment, etc.

Personas help us create the right content to most effectively find and serve genuine seekers.

The best people to get this kind of information from are people who have taken a faith journey most recently or are currently on one. Interview recent local believers because they will be reflect the current state of the

persona. If you are unable to interview believers, ask current seekers or near neighbor believers.

Personas should be realistic. Though they are specific, personas do not describe or represent just 1 or 2 people. They represent thousands of people who may go down a similar pathway.

What is the Purpose of This Research?

As we identify common pathways that end in faithful, reproducing followers of Jesus, we will shape our media strategy to best serve and prioritize those seekers. Common pathways can be used to predict what kinds of media resources and relational patterns will be most beneficial in moving curious seekers to faithful disciples. We want to create content that answers the questions seekers are actually asking.

For example, Ahmed may be in the midst of a painful divorce. He is desperate to know that there is hope and peace. He is searching for hope on the internet and comes across one of our ads that addresses the source of hope for Christians in his nation. He clicks on that specific ad and begins to go down a pathway towards encountering Jesus and engaging his family and friends with the Gospel.

Maybe, the website landing page where the ad takes him will have a testimony of a local Christian who was in a hopeless marriage when they first heard about Jesus and the change the Gospel made. Then a few days later he will receive a 3-minute video clip from a Christian TV series addressing the issue of hope. A week later he receives a text that lets him know he is being prayed for. A few days later he is emailed a parable of Jesus that shows the hope there is for the lost and asks him to talk with a few of his friends about this story.

All of these media 'pushes' will be driving Ahmed to engage his family or friends with things he's learning and being exposed to. When he has found a group of people who are willing to discuss and engage with Scripture, he will be prioritized for a face-to-face meeting with a believer.

Call to Action

Below you will find questions you can use as you talk to locals and conduct interviews. These are just example questions of what you could ask, so the questions you ask and the data you seek may be more fully developed as you gain experience into personas.

When listening to people's stories, be sure to focus on the motives behind their behaviors. Pay attention to *why* someone searched or persisted, and not just noting their action. Have them share their faith story with as many details as possible. You may need to ask some questions to fill out the template, but try not to ask too many leading questions.

As you research and gather info, it is important to love your brothers and sisters well. You are not merely trying to gain data, you are trying to build partnership and esteem your local brothers and sisters.

After you conduct the interviews, you will identify similarities and patterns that can become five personas or five road names. All of this will be extremely useful for setting up your media platform, creating content, and strategically targeting those in your persona.

Interview Process

Ask the national believer to describe his/her journey from the beginning of their spiritual search until he/she decided to become a Christian. Use a blank sheet of paper and begin with a dot on one side and say, "*This dot represents when you first started to consider becoming a Christian*." Then on the other side of the paper draw another dot and say, "*This dot represents when you decided to become a Christian. I want to know the major points along this road and what helped you get from 'here' to 'here'.*" We do not want to get merely cognitive memory and data. We also want to engage the emotive side of their brains.

Point to the dot that represents the beginning of their journey. "*Help me understand what you were thinking and feeling at this moment.*" The concern is more with asking question that invoke the memories linked towards emotions and thoughts. As he/she describes the major events, use the following questions to draw out more information:

- How did you first become interested?

- What was going through your mind at this moment?

- Asking about details may jog certain parts of their memory: What were you wearing? Whose home were you at?

The following questions are not to be used as a check list, so don't just list these questions and get their answers. These are cues to help you in drawing details out of the interviewee.

- When did you begin your search for truth about Jesus?

- What were the circumstances of your life during that time? (Were you working? unemployed? a student?)

- What was your perception about God at the beginning of your journey?

- What is unique about your spiritual journey?

- What are some key adjectives that would describe you during that time in your life?

- As you think back to the first dot what were some of your greatest needs?

- How were those needs meet? What drove you to continue to search?

- Along your journey, who did you trust? Who/what did you consider to be credible authorities for truth?

- At what point did you start interacting with someone (live or virtually) about your spiritual journey?

- What were key events (decision points) where you had to make a choice whether to continue on this route or go a different direction?

- What were some of your biggest fears here (noting different dots on the timeline)?

• You said you began your search for truth (the first dot). Can you identify any circumstances or events prior to this that were preparing you to start the journey?

• When did you first start talking about your journey with someone else? At what point did you start to tell people you were investigating Christianity? Who did you share that with?

• When was the first time you shared your faith or told someone else you were a Christian?

• When was the date/time when you first identified yourself as Christian?

You as the interviewer should fill in significant points on the timeline as you seek to record their journey. Make as many notes as possible on the paper but you will need to take additional notes (electronically or by hand) as the interviewee is sharing. Every detail may be important, even if you don't immediately see its value. The piece of paper is primarily a tool for you to be able to draw out as much information as possible from the interviewee. All of this will then need to be synthesized into categories using the Persona Template below.

Persona Template

DEMOGRAPHICS What demographics do you think are important to identify?
- Occupation:
- Gender:
- Age range:
- Urbanicity:
- Interests:

IDENTIFIERS: How would they describe themselves? (religious, atheist, etc)

FELT NEEDS: What are the felt needs they had while seeking?

SUCCESS FACTORS: What was successful in addressing their felt needs?

PERCEIVED BARRIERS: What were their perceived barriers while seeking?

DECISION CRITERIA: What were the stepping-stones that moved them along the path towards conversion?

TRUSTED SOURCES / INFLUENCES: Who did they trust? What had the greatest influence over them? How would something be deemed credible in their opinion?

KEY WORDS/TAGS: What kind of words would they Google?

MEDIA PLATFORMS: What media did they use in their faith journey? What is the most popular source of media among their friends and family (Facebook, WhatsApp, etc)? How prevalent are smart phones? Are they mostly Android or iPhone users?

Persona Example — Skeptic

DEMOGRAPHICS
- Occupation: Student
- Gender: Male
- Age range: 23
- Urbanicity: Grew up in a village in the south but came to capital for university
- Interests: soccer, Facebook on his phone, coffee shops, having a family

IDENTIFIERS:
- belief disruption/religious seeking
- identifies as atheist

FELT NEEDS:
- validating their opinion
- safe & relevant local place/person to express themselves
- though rejecting Islam are still seeking a higher truth
- access to Scripture

SUCCESS FACTORS:
- confirmation of their journey
- validating their skepticism
- affirming availability of relevant resources
- access to an expert

PERCEIVED BARRIERS :
- social rejection
- persecution
- potential syncretism
- challenge in redefining new terms
- materialism

DECISION CRITERIA:
- started communication with believers
- they engaged in considering scripture for the first time
- explored Christian website content
- got access to Scripture

TRUSTED SOURCES / INFLUENCES:
- friends, internet, testimony of local believer

KEY WORDS/TAGS: Bible, trusted, truth, Christianity, similarities and differences, God