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The complete guide to buyer personas





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Introduction

This guide introduces you to the concept of buyer personas and the valuable customer insight your firm can gain for the purposes of client acquisition.

Being able to effectively engage with customers (or potential customers) requires a sound understanding of who they are and what challenges they face. This is true in most walks of life, and marketing any kind of business would be impossible without some idea of who the customer is and what makes them tick. Long gone are the days when brands dominated the conversation and simply told customers what they wanted them to hear.

Buyer power has never been greater than it is now, and businesses must appreciate their pain points and how they want to be engaged before reaching out to them. Only then can you begin to figure out how your services can support them and what the most compelling message will be.

We've helped a wide range of accountants find their niche, from startups at launch to established firms wanting to pivot their offering, from those seeking to expand their service to others keen to get more of the right types of clients.

Spending time to obtain this insight doesn't have to be huge, but it could be a game-changer in terms of connecting with your ideal customers.

What are buyer personas?

Before you begin to communicate with someone, you need to fully understand them.

Software engineer Alan Cooper is generally credited with having invented the concept of what were then called 'user personas' in 1983.

His big idea was that focusing on the needs of a single imagined end user would produce better results than trying to turn out products that did all things for all people.

Today, buyer personas (or customer personas as they're sometimes called) are often used to give marketing activity a clear target.

"A buyer persona is a profile of your perfect client or a key segment of your target audience."

To identify your perfect client or a key segment of your target audience, you need to gain an in-depth understanding of your customers. This will leave you well-placed to engage them with relevant content which will help explain how your firm can support them to overcome their challenges.



THE PURPOSE

- Build a picture of your clients.
- Who you want to attract and what their characteristics are.

Questions your firm needs to ask:

- Who are the most profitable clients?
- What are their characteristics?
- What are their motivations?
- Who do you not want as clients?



WHAT THIS ENABLES

These are the people we want to ensure we attract through digital marketing.

The reason this is so important for practitioners is that customer expectations have evolved when it comes to selecting an accountant.

Research we conducted with SMEs last year found that 71% said it was important that their accountant knew their sector.

If you can genuinely demonstrate expertise and experience in certain sectors and understand the challenges your customers face and how your brand answers them, this will make sure that they identify strongly with your business over another.

They' ll see themselves and their needs reflected in your website copy, in the imagery you choose, the specific services you offer and the way you deliver them. They' ll recognise their own stories in case studies and testimonials – proof that you really do have experience helping people like them.

Imagine an accountancy firm that focuses on the SME market, for example. They offer similar services to those provided by their competitors, and generic tax and business advice through their marketing, website messaging and blog content.

Then imagine a competing firm which has chosen to focus on, say, the construction industry. They' ve taken the time to understand the pain points and challenges SMEs in that sector face. They know what motivates those who own and operate companies in the field and what they want to achieve in their businesses.

All their SME advice is tailored, clearly related back to those prospects, answering their challenges and mitigating the pain points. Every case study is from a building firm and every example they offer relates to the construction.

It' s no longer generic SME advice – it' s now vital information that speaks directly to those target clients. If you compare those firms, which do you think the head of a house-building business is going to contact about their accounts?



What can buyer personas do for your business?

To identify your perfect client or a key segment, you need to gain an in-depth understanding of them.

Having a defined set of personas for your business also gives you something to refer to when looking at potential marketing strategies.

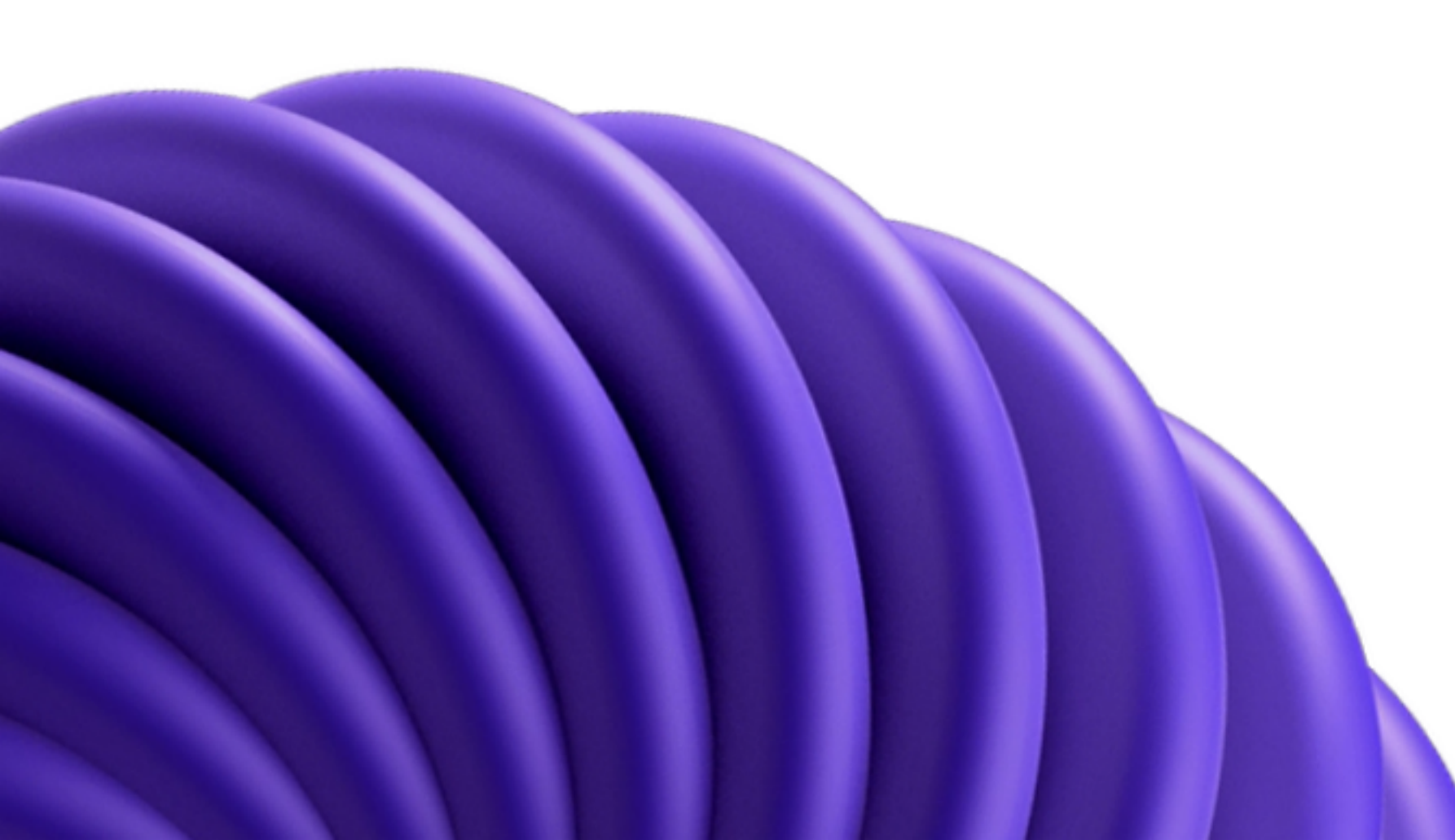
Put simply, if your persona won't like it – don't do it! This will ensure your firm's brand resonates more effectively with your desired audience.

Most accounting firms that have been through our brand strategy process will have two or three buyer personas mapped out. They're sometimes quite different but more often than not are complementary or overlapping.

The exercises we use to define personas in workshop settings are ideal but you can run your own version of that workshop or do a paper-based version at your desk.

A GOOD BUYER PERSONA WILL INCLUDE:

- name
- job title
- age
- gender
- size of their business.



Fiona
Give your persona a name

About
Age, gender, occupation, income, status, lifetime value, etc.

- *Female, 35-45 y. o.,*
- *Charity CEO with 100k income,*
- *Lifetime value – 5 years*

Values
The core values this person believes in

- *Being open and connected to the community*
- *Helping others to improve the quality of live*

Personality
What is this person like?

Old School Techy

Focus: ROI Focus: risk

Utilitarian Personal touch

Rational Instinctive

Needs help Understands finances

Goals
The objectives this person wants to achieve

- *Business growth*
- *Staff retention*
- *Reputation improvement*

Frustrations
The pain points this person would like to avoid

- *Time stress*
- *Lack of business skills*

Notes
Any relevant information

Not-for-profit sector

Sometimes, that' s enough – “Would Chris the finance director find this useful?” – but it' s even better if you can take it to the next level.

- Are they conservative or progressive? Tech savvy or tech resistant? Confident or anxious?

The list of questions to ask yourself when developing personas can be virtually endless. The following five points should help get you started:

1. Name

Naming your personas helps bring them to life and humanise your content.

2. Occupation

Giving your personas a role is likely to significantly influence your content.

3. Age

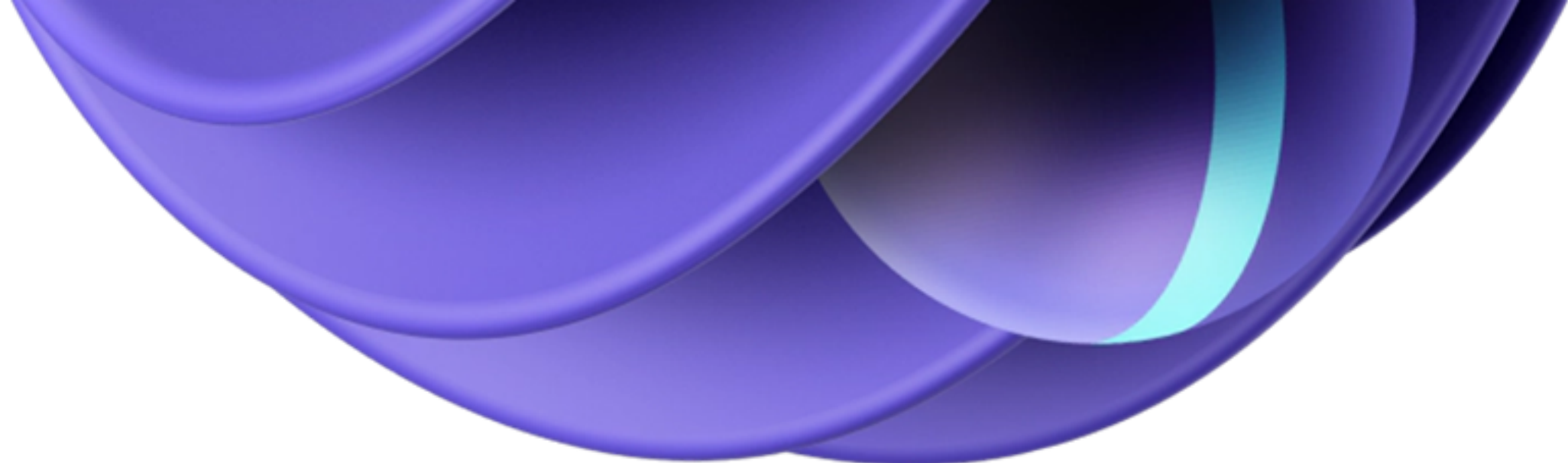
Is your persona younger and starting a business or older and looking towards succession planning?

4. Gender

Could gender affect how you communicate, or would it not change things at all?

5. Income

Greater income requires more specialist services and provides a greater revenue opportunity.



The next five questions will provide some insight, although exploring the background of your persona further will enable you to understand what makes them tick:

6. JOB DETAILS

What are the ins and outs of their role? Are they decision-makers or hands-on?

7. FAMILY

How many children your personas have will affect their finances.

8. CAREER PATH

Is your persona starting their career or winding down towards retirement?

9. Demeanour

Think about your personas' main attributes in the workplace, their strengths and weaknesses.

10. COMMUNICATION

Do your personas prefer phone calls, email or face-to-face contact?

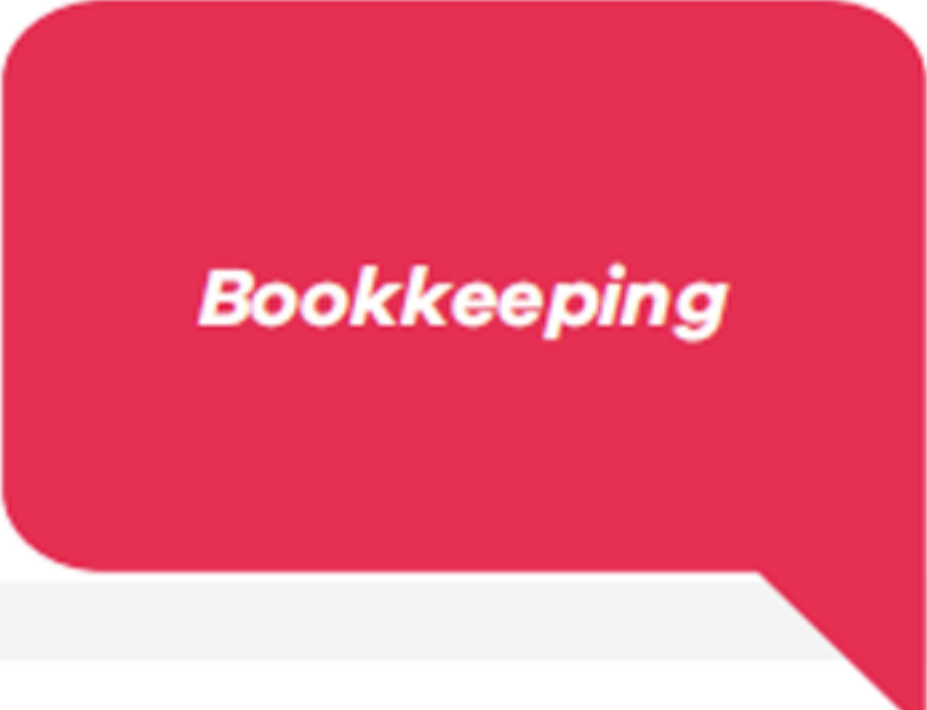
Defining a buyer journey for your personas is also helpful: as they go from awareness of your firm to making a final decision to purchase, what's going through their minds?

How do your target clients buy your services?

By targeting defined personas, you can more effectively tap into the emotional benefits relevant to your audience.

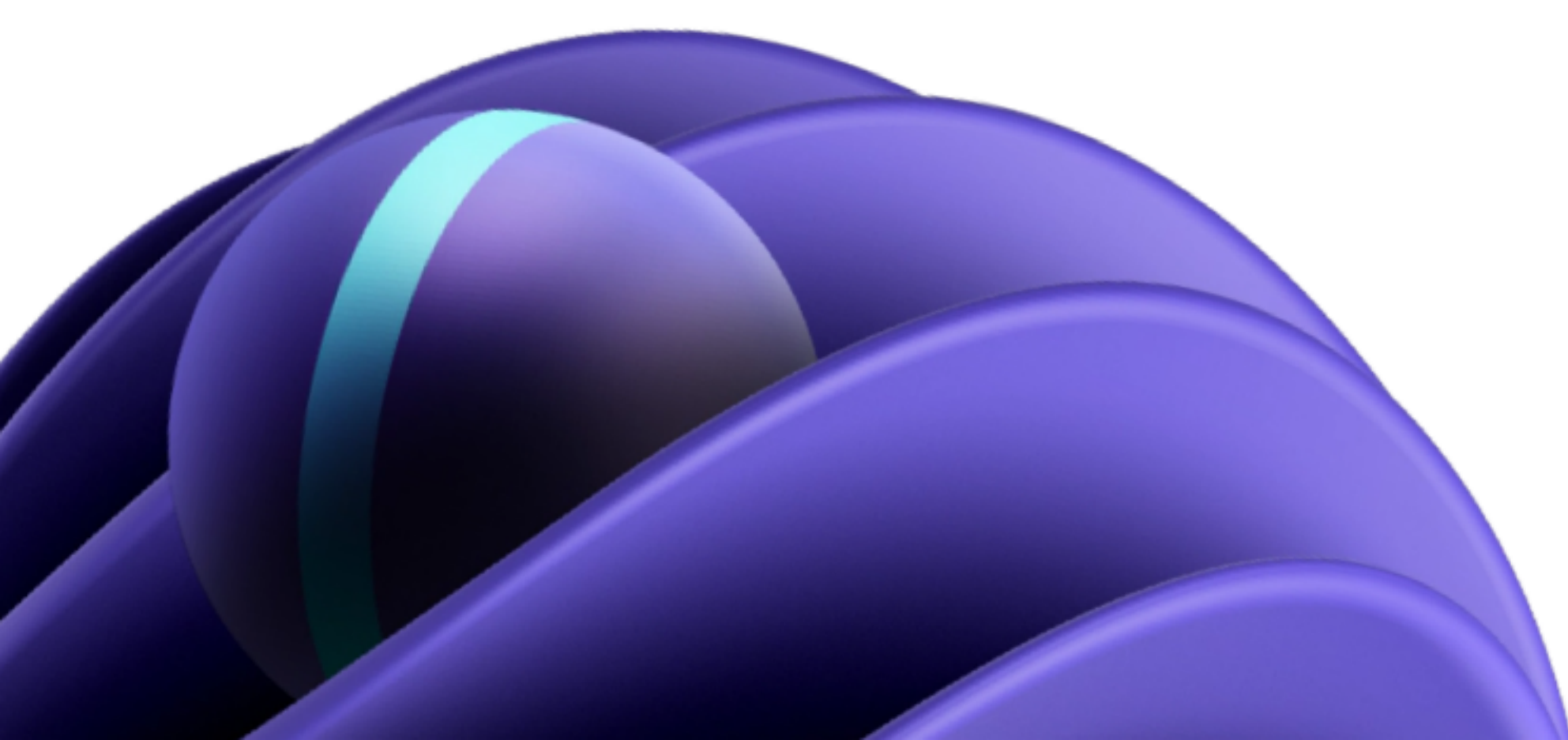
Now that you have identified who you want to attract and what the characteristics are, you are ready to ask:


- What are your target clients are thinking at each stage of the buying journey?
- What are their challenges at each stage AKA their pain points?
- What are they doing at each stage?

Stage	Awareness	Consideration	Decision	Retention
Doing:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Searching online • Asking peers and friends • Talking to business mentor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Search online • Assessing firms and book-keepers • Phone calls and emails • Asking peers and friends 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shortlist • Social proof • Phone calls and emails • Reading proposals • Buy service 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing information • Getting ongoing advice
Thinking:		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I need professional advice • What's the customer service like? • How much is it going to cost? • Do they understand my needs? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worried about getting it wrong • Confused about who to go with • Self doubt 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time consuming • Have I made the right choice? • My needs have changed
Pain points:	<p><i>I need help with staying on top of the money coming in and out of the business</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Too much choice in the market • Information overload 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are they trustworthy? • Can I build a relationship with them? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I've outgrown my accountant • My accountant is retiring

Aligning our proposed buying stages with your target client, map out what your target clients' challenges and feelings are, along with what they' re doing at each stage of the buying journey.

What are the frustrations, difficulties or uncertainties – AKA pain points – your accountancy practice can resolve?





Is there a major issue they' re struggling with? Maybe their accounting software is out of date, they need more capital to expand, or require guidance around staffing options.

If you have posed the right questions when developing your personas, you will likely have a good insight into your ideal customers and the challenges they may face.

An example of a pain point for the buyer journey shown below is –
“I need help with staying on top of the money coming in and out of the business, with this comes the need in this case for a bookkeeper.”

Some of the questions around this can be seen here:

- ② Do they understand us and our challenge?
- ② What' s the customer service like?
- ② What advice is out there?
- ② What software should I use?
- ② What services are there?
- ② How much is it going to cost?

Your content needs to speak to those questions.

You need to build empathy and demonstrate you get this person' s challenges and can help. This is where building an emotional connection with your target clients is key.

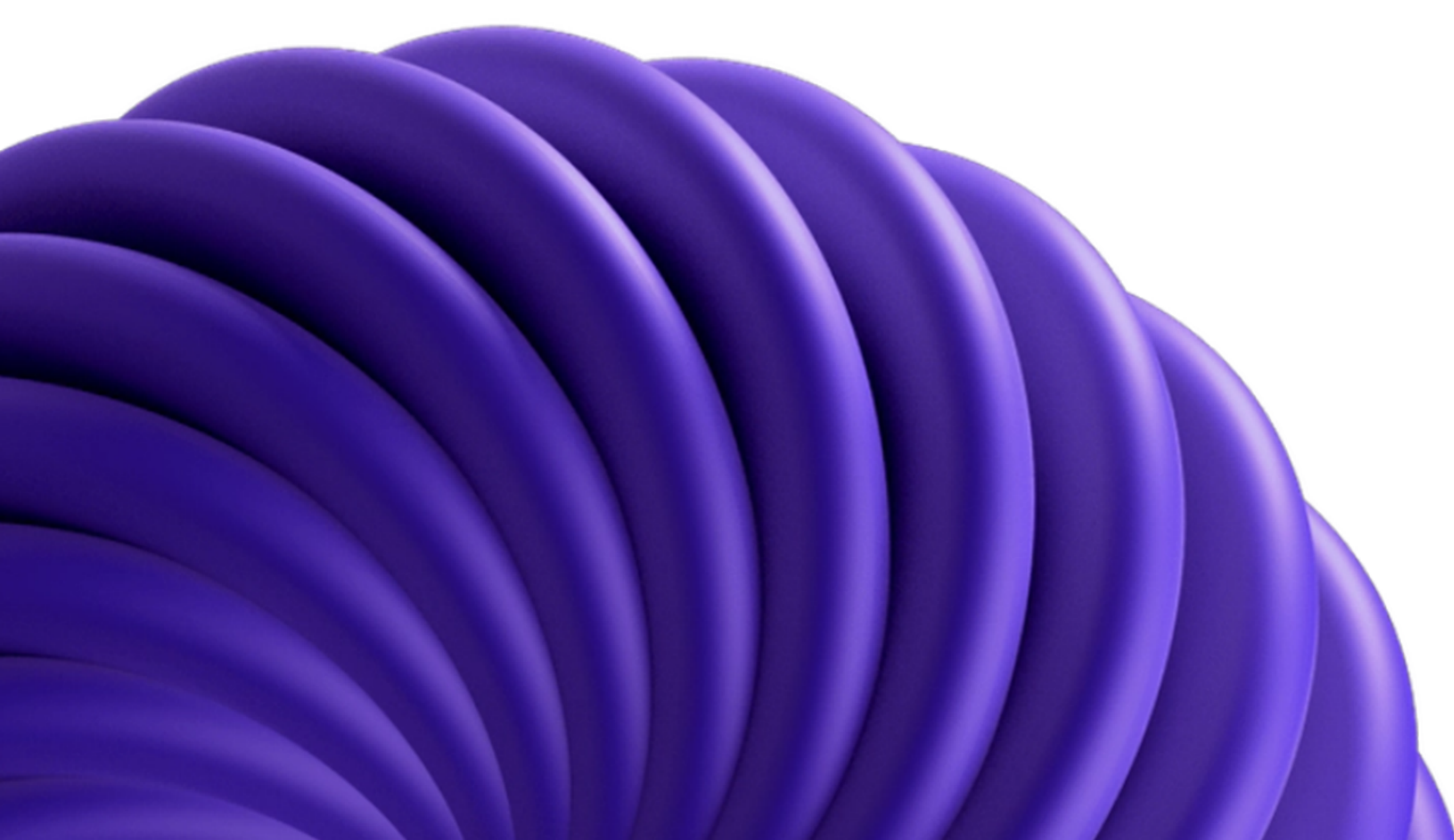
Simply listing out services at this point won' t meet their expectations or answer their needs. If you want to get even more granular, then start to think about the sectors you focus on and tailor some of the content around those.

Think about the user intent as well. Someone looking for general advice isn' t as 'ready' to buy as someone looking at prices or onboarding.

By targeting defined personas, you can more effectively tap into the emotional benefits relevant to your audience. This offers opportunities for you to connect with your clients and prospects, and you can use case studies to highlight the benefits of why they should choose your services over those of a competitor.

Put yourself into the shoes of your customer personas for a moment and consider where they could be in their buying process and the different type of support they may need from you.

An emotional connection with a business startup owner who is looking for their first accountant will be quite different to that with a multi-million-pound business tycoon nearing retirement. Present content which connects with your audience, explains the benefits of your service and how you can help them.



Why should they choose you?

Your personas should be used to shape your value proposition, so it addresses the challenges and objectives which were identified.

Now you're addressing the needs of your persona with relevant content, there's greater potential for quality engagement – and this is where your value proposition comes in.

Your value statement is a promise of the value clients can expect from you. It should take the form of a clear statement, which explains how your services:

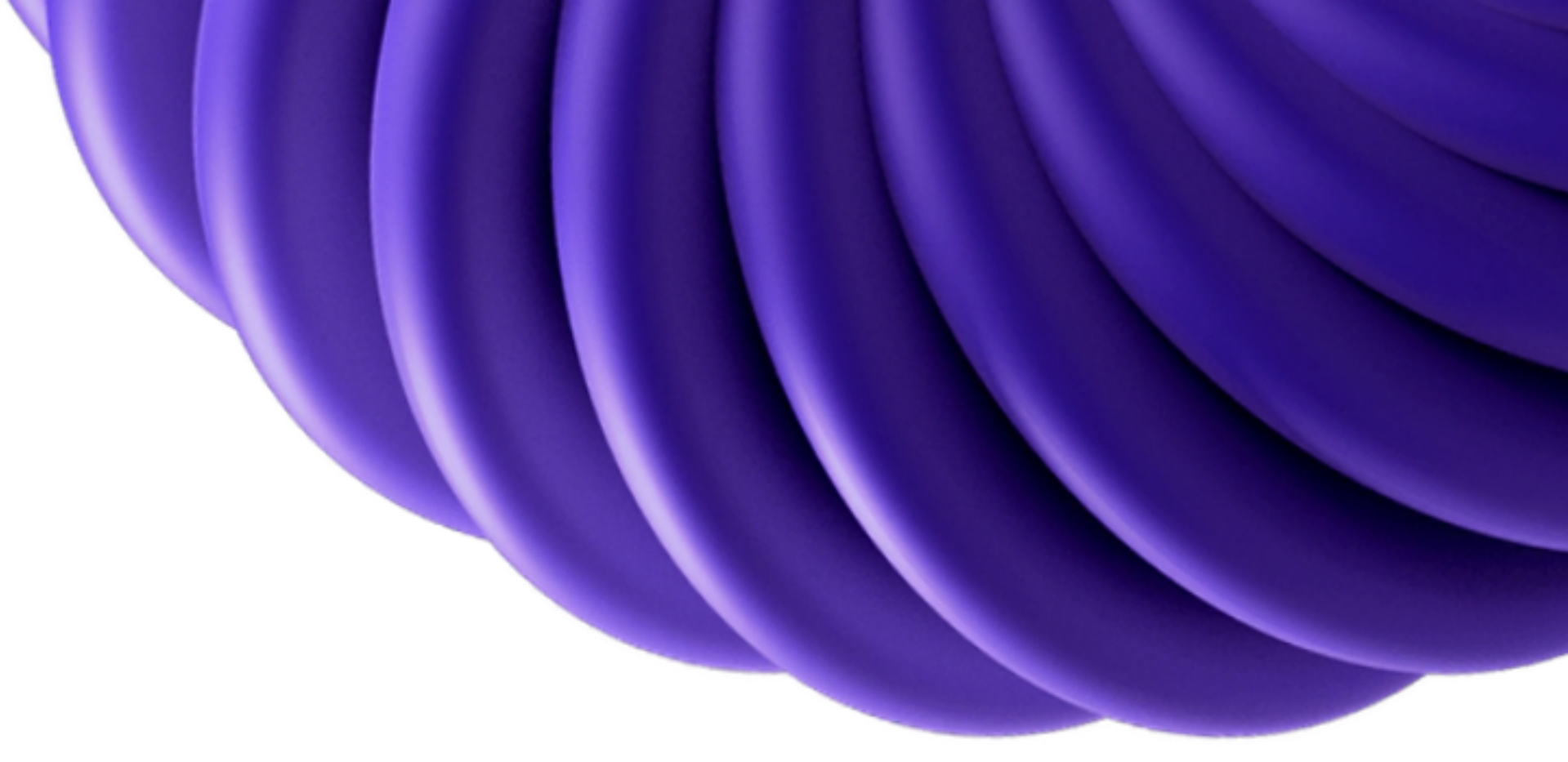
- solve problems for your clients and prospects
- support their objectives
- deliver clearly defined benefits for choosing you over a competitor.

Your personas should be used to shape your value proposition, so it addresses the challenges and objectives which were identified.

With your personas in mind, this may also be a good point to consider what your existing clients may have said to you in the past about their goals.

Think about how you may have addressed them and whether you can be more effective at communicating your firm's ability to meet those needs with new customers in the future.

Likewise, think about the common objections you may have heard as to why they wouldn't buy your services. Would your new value proposition help to overcome those reservations?



In defining your firm's value proposition, you need to provide a high level overview of your sweet spot, what you are deeply passionate about as a company, what advantage you feel you have over competitors and your firm's key characteristics.

When put together, these make up your brand and personality. By defining the below questions in your teams, this will enable you to ensure the impression you want clients to have of your brand shines through across all our project activity:

- **VALUE**

What does the client value?

- **SERVICES**

What are your core services?

- **PASSION**

What are you passionate about?

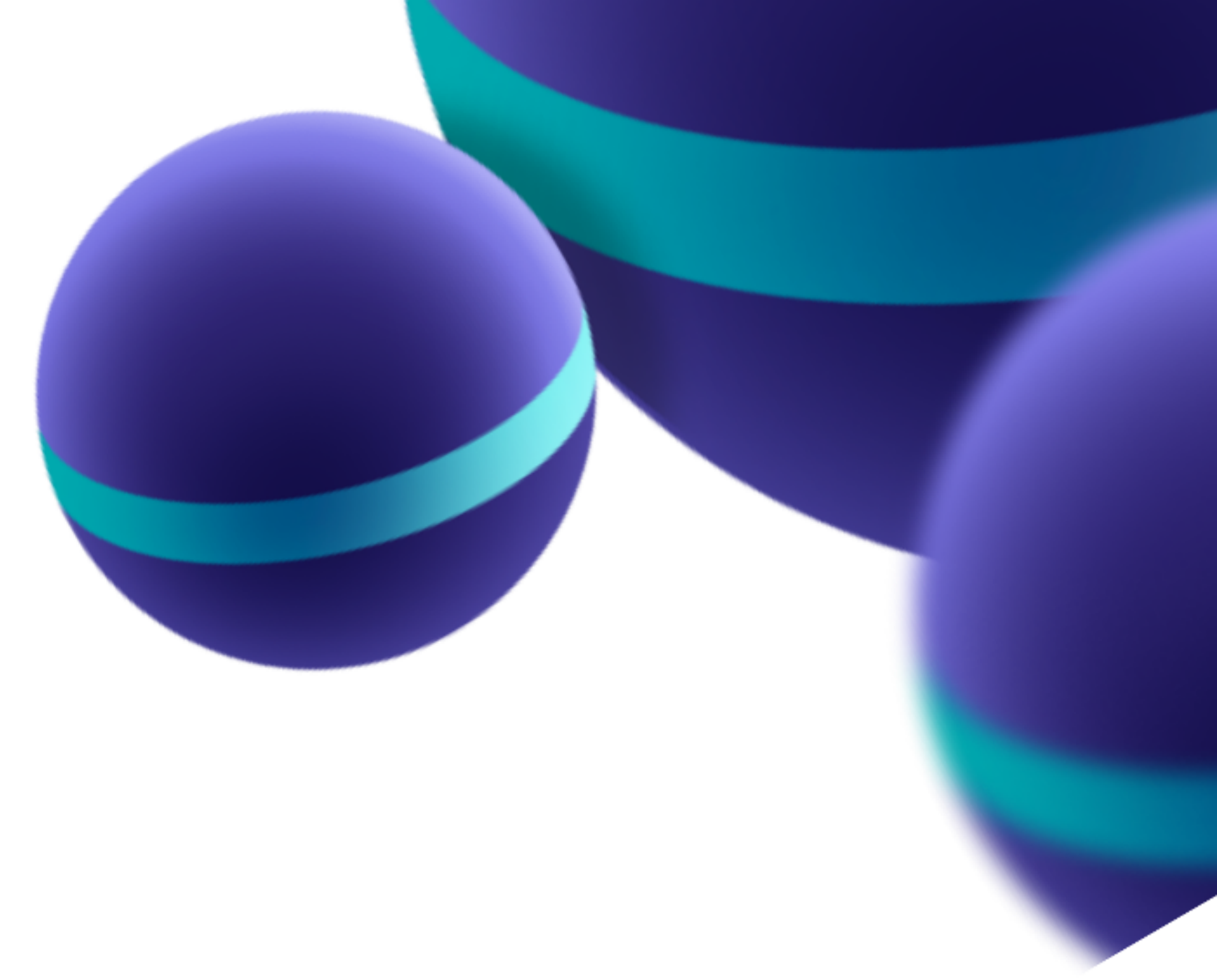
- **DIFFERENTIATOR**

What makes you unique?

Internally communicate your new value proposition. Once your value proposition has been refined and you have ensured any shifts in messaging are reflected in all marketing efforts, it's important to communicate the approach across your whole organisation.

This is not something to be 'owned' solely by the marketing function or by the sales team, although they are perhaps the most vital cogs in external communication.

Instead, it should be understood across the business so it enters the DNA of your firm and all employees are delivering the same powerful message.



What happens next?

We' ve reviewed the purpose and value of personas, explained how to develop them and identified their challenges and objectives.

We' ve considered how to use these insights to ensure you' re better able to address your clients' pain points, and we have also defined your company' s value proposition so that all teams know what makes up your brand and personality.

For many accountancy firms their website is the hub of all marketing efforts and so refreshing the content here is perhaps the best place to begin.

This will almost certainly involve editing or rewriting text to make sure it is suitably targeted, and conveying the right messages. This is also a good chance to reconsider your use of images (add them if you haven' t already) and even the layout or format of pages.

Your new personas should also be considered in your blog posts, any downloadable assets, and social media feeds. But it' s not just your digital activity – offline initiatives such as advertising, printed collateral and events should also reflect the intention to attract your perfect customer.


While it' s wise to revisit persona development from time to time (business objectives and the accountancy landscape can change, after all) just a single process of persona development can have a major impact on your business for years to come.



Time to put it all into practice

Here' s a 10-point checklist of those practical action points:

- ✔ Develop personas which match your ideal customers.
- ✔ Start with name, job title and basic demographics.
- ✔ Consider the finer details of their role.
- ✔ Expand your personas with additional identifiers, such as communication preferences.
- ✔ Understand their goals.
- ✔ Get to know their challenges and how you can help overcome them.
- ✔ Always ask why they should choose you over a rival.
- ✔ Use personas to position your value proposition.
- ✔ Reflect this in all marketing messages and communicate this across your practice.
- ✔ Revisit your personas as your business evolves.



We create digital marketing strategies, insight, high-quality content and websites for ambitious accountants.

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