Death to Personas!
Long Live Personas!
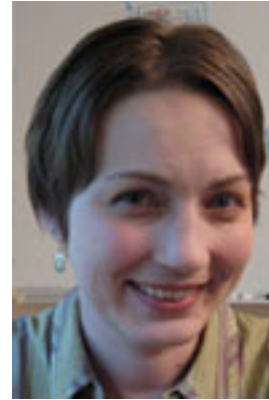
Elizabeth Bacon & Steve Calde
Catalyze, July 23, 2008

Your Presenters

Steve Calde

1992-1994 **Rational Software**

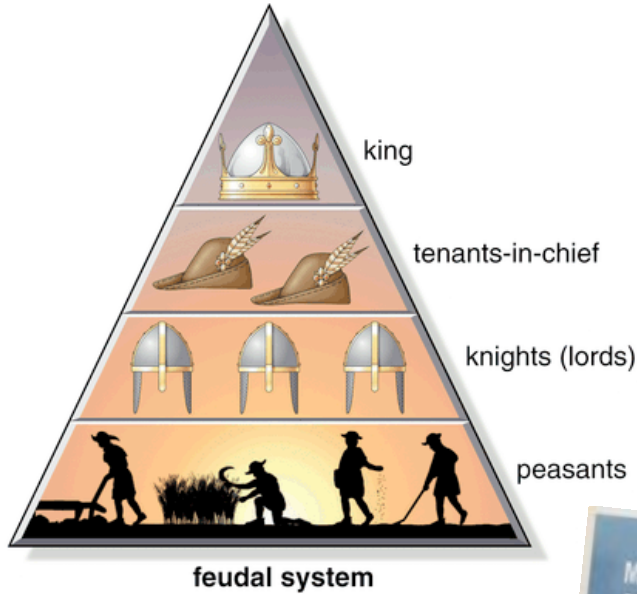1994-1998 **GW Associates, Inc.**

1998-today **Cooper**

Liz Bacon

1998-1999 dba **MuseAll**

1999-2002 **Cooper**

2002-2007 **St. Jude Medical**

2007-today **Devise**

+ Vice-President, **IxDA**

Our talk today covers:

Reasons to dismiss personas—and why those reasons might be missing the point

Tips for successfully using personas

Not all good ideas are made to last

feudal system

The EDSEL LOOK is here to stay —and 1959 cars will prove it!

ALL OVER AMERICA... MORE SCIENTISTS AND EDUCATORS SMOKE KENT with the MICRONITE FILTER

For good smoking taste, it makes good sense to smoke KENT

Jay Adachi,
Call Center Agent

What's a persona?

Profile of an archetypal user

Represents the needs of many

Based on research

Tom Brodie,
Shop Manager

Tom's Goals:
- Keep the cars coming.
- Reduce labor percentages without sacrificing customer service.
- Meet or exceed last year's numbers for this month.

"Sometimes I'm so busy fighting alligators that I forget about draining the swamp."

Persona copyright ISI, Inc.

Origins of personas

Invented at Cooper

Publicized in Alan Cooper's "The Inmates are Running the Asylum" (SAMS, 1999)

What some people are saying about personas

"Forget about personas."
- Don Norman

"We don't use personas. We use ourselves."
- 37signals

"What is actionable about a persona?"
- Robert Hoekman Jr

"Personas are user-centered bullshit."
- Steve Portigal

The question:

Do we really need to create personas to design fantastic, innovative, user-centered solutions?

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Of course not!

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Of course not!

But they sure can help…

Why people hate personas

- Personas are **fluffy!**

- Personas are **expensive!**

- Personas **don't design my product** for me; they aren't actionable

- Personas really **cramp my style**; I just want to design what I like

- How is understanding **today's users** going to help me **innovate** a new product?

Fluffy

Fluffy

Personas are fluffy!

Barbie® is a property of Mattel, Inc.

Death to Personas! Long Live Personas!

Bad personas are fluffy

"Bad" personas are fluffy.

And yes, fluffy personas aren't helpful for doing design or making decisions.

Fluffy personas aren't really personas

Demographic info, photographs, and representative quotes are just small parts of a persona description.

Personas are based on real data

"Real" personas are not:

- Made up
- Job roles
- Statistical averages
- Based on one person
- Use case actors
- Market segments

Traceable details

By definition (well, ours at least) personas are based on data that design researchers heard or observed firsthand.

Good descriptions

Personas should capture:

- Attitudes

- Work or activity flows

- Environmental factors

- Skill level

- Current frustrations

- **Goals**

Let's read a persona description…

Tom Brodie

Tom Brodie,
Shop Manager

"Sometimes I'm so busy fighting alligators that I forget about draining the swamp."

Tom has 8 years of experience in lube shop operations. He's married with two young kids, and his wife jokes that the last time his hands were completely free of grease was on his honeymoon 5 years ago. At the shop he manages, Tom constantly puts out little fires. He works on the floor most of the day, trying to be everywhere at the same time although he prefers to act as greeter and cashier.

Most shop trends get measured on a monthly basis, since Tom has to meet sales targets defined by the owner, Eddie, in order to get his manager's bonus. On a daily basis, Tom frequently monitors car counts, ticket average and employee productivity (especially individual service statistics). Sometimes his team needs a kick in the pants, but he tries to lead by example.

Tom's Goals:
- **Keep the cars coming.** Tom has to rely on Eddie's marketing efforts but car count is his make-or-break figure; he focuses on customer service to generate repeat customers.
- **Reduce labor percentages without sacrificing customer service.** Staffing is a tricky balance between keeping the shop's labor costs down while ensuring employees get enough hours and bay times stay low.
- **Meet or exceed last year's numbers for this month.** The Owner's sales targets aim for year-on-year increases across the board, but in the current business climate Tom is happy simply meeting last year's numbers.

Devise

Goal-Directed Design

Cooper's methodology drives product definition through **persona goals**.

Goals have three flavors:

- End goals

- Experience goals

- Life goals

Power of human faces

We respond viscerally to the human face in ways that we do not respond to other images.

Expensive

Personas are expensive!

The cost of creating personas

The real questions to ask are:

1. Is it worth interviewing and observing users as part of product research?

2. How much will research in the field cost?

3. What are viable alternatives?

Is it worth spending time with users?

Whether you create personas or not, spending time with users:

- reveals current behaviors and priorities

- challenges—or validates—internal assumptions

How much does research cost?

Considerations include:

- **Numbers of participants**

- **Research techniques**

- **Travel**

- **Other expenses**

How long does persona creation take?

After identifying your key findings, it should take **a few days** to create a robust set of personas.

Field Research	Analysis
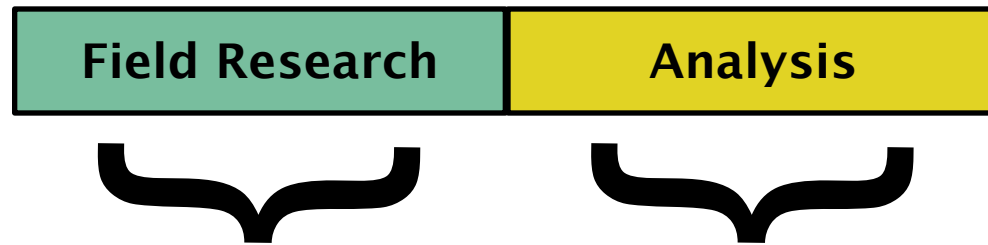
Approximately equal duration

What cost not doing research?

The cost really depends on how good a guesser you are...

What are our alternatives?

Try to establish a shared understanding of users with your product development team

Provisional personas

"**Provisional**" **personas** are a way to capture & communicate shared assumptions about users so everyone stays on the same page.

Mark

40s

Financial analyst

Don't Design Products

Personas don't design my product for me

We understand our users.

Now what?

Personas aren't actionable

Personas are not actionable by themselves.

Now what?
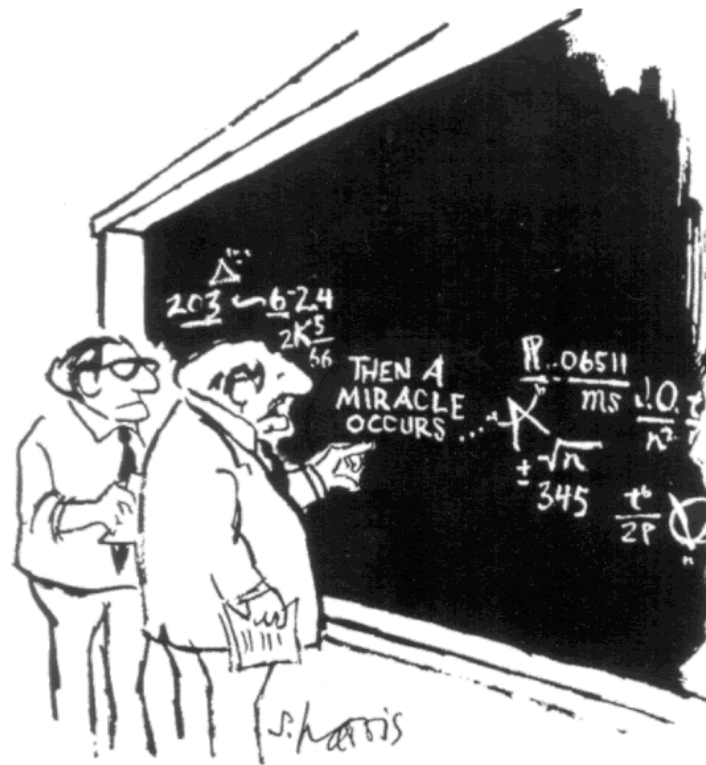
"I think you should be more explicit here in step two."

Death to Personas! Long Live Personas!

Personas are a design tool

Personas don't design products; designers do!

Personas help us **create scenarios**

Personas help us **communicate** design solutions

Personas support scenario-based approach to design

Principally, we create personas so that we can build realistic, meaningful scenarios

VIEW SHOP STATUS
PERSONA: Tom (Primary), Manager

Context of use: 10:30 am Tuesday at Eddie's quick-lube shop #3

Key Scenario	Product Requirement
Tom logs in to his Dashboard, where he has access to Manager-level information.	Log-in controls Role-based app display logic
He reviews today's ticket average, in reference to the month's target.	Date Ticket average: today; vs. target
He looks at the monthly running total for car count.	Car count: month-to-date; vs. target
Today's car count is low because cars haven't really started rolling in yet. Maybe the rain will clear up and bring people in?	Shop view: Car count, today Traffic Time Weather
Tom wonders if other stores are also seeing lower volume today, perhaps due to the weather.	Chain view: Car count, today
Tom wonders how impacted his manager's bonus will be this month if the pace remains slow. How'd things fare last year?	Ticket average, car count: year-on-year basis *Future: bonus tracking feature*
Later…	

Scenario copyright ISI, Inc.

Communicate reason

Expressing product imperatives using personas in scenarios allows for clear prioritization of product requirements.

Scenarios with personas:

- maintain context

- make requirements traceable

- represent a persuasive communication

Personas as validation

They minimize risk by letting you know whether your design solutions will be appropriate, disruptive, and/or useful.

The same or similar insights can be had from usability testing.

Cramp My Style

Personas cramp my style!

AP / Paul Sakuma

Death to Personas! Long Live Personas!

Genius design

I just want to design what I like. I know what's best.

Are you a genius? A doctor?

Really ask yourself...are you representative of the *entire* market you are trying to reach?

Maybe you're just making it up

Major buzz-kill time...

The Simpsons were created by Matt Groening

Death to Personas! Long Live Personas!

Today vs. Innovation

How are personas going to help me innovate?

Could personas—which are based on today's users—help me design the next iPod?

iPod/iPod Touch are property of Apple, Inc.

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Uncover contextual implications

Personas describe people's **current** behaviors in the **context** of their lives.

Understanding their context reveals design opportunities and potential for disruption.

Optimize flow

PhotoBook example from Cooper U

Cooper conducted design research for the PhotoBook in 2002, and the research & personas had been used in Cooper U for almost six years.

It felt sort of dated, but…

Real people are consistent.

Technology solutions match or don't match their world.

Personas increase shared team understanding

Personas facilitate **productive brainstorming** for teams comprising various disciplines.

Art within constraints

Design is not art—it happens within constraints.

Personas help to channel your creativity.

Helpful Tips

Writing good descriptions

- Don't focus on controversial tomorrows

- Don't give them funny names

"Jo-Jo Smoker"

Writing good descriptions

- Make a list of all of the attributes your team described for the persona

- Group the attributes under headers

- Craft paragraphs that tie the attributes together

Keep them data-driven

- Conduct design research in the field with users

- Screen persona goals for applicability to product design

Be as informal as needed

- If the word "Personas" gets peoples' backs up, then why not rename them?

- If they're used primarily for your design work, don't make output extremely formal

Work quickly

- Use lightweight recording methods in the field

- After user research, analyze findings and create personas as quickly as possible

Work transparently

- Make the process transparent to your colleagues

- Don't introduce your personas in a vacuum

Maximize usefulness of sets

- Show how the **persona set** describes a range of user behaviors

- Embody context of entire product/service workflow involving separate individuals

Adjustable documentation

- Create several weights of persona descriptions to share in different contexts

Don't stop with descriptions

- Use personas as a tool within a **scenario-based approach to interaction design**

Times not to use personas

- Product space and target users are extremely well understood by you and all of your decision makers

- You're designing for a very narrow group of users to which you have direct & easy access

- Your users are also your stakeholders

Conclusion

A useful tool

Personas are a tool. A useful hammer, but not everything is a nail….

Personas are a means to an end. They are not an end in and of themselves.

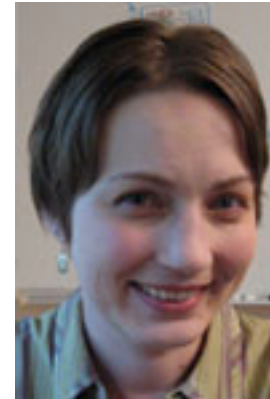# Thank you!

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