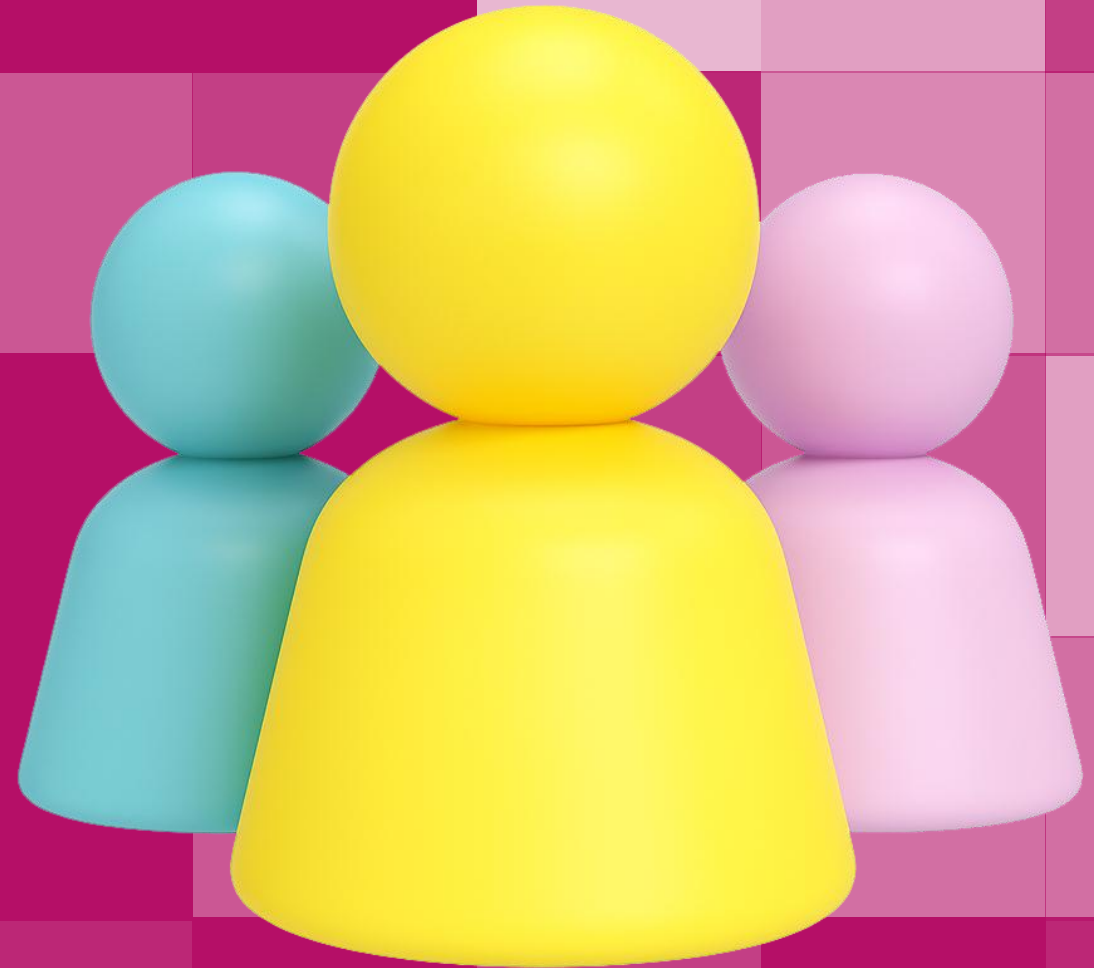


mtm

Introduction to Personas



2025

Why personas still matter

Every few years, someone declares that personas are “dead.” Yet research tells a different story.

Forrester (2024) found that teams using active, research-backed personas are more likely to report better product decisions and stronger cross-functional alignment.

Nielsen Norman Group (2023) describes personas as “connective tissue”, translating user insights into shared understanding across design, marketing, and product strategy.







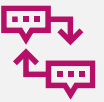



The problem isn’t the concept, it’s the execution. Personas fail when they’re built on assumption, left unrefreshed, or divorced from business outcomes.

Done well, they remain one of the most efficient ways to humanise data, create empathy, and focus teams on what truly matters: designing for real people.







The case for and against personas





Personas amplify empathy, focus, and alignment only when they're research-based, inclusive, and refreshed. Good personas are based on evidence; bad personas are based on assumptions.

| The Case For Personas | | The Case Against Personas | |
|---|--|---|--|
|  | Build Empathy & Shared Understanding Personas turn data into people, helping teams truly internalise user needs |  | The “Made-Up” Problem Unvalidated personas aren't insight, they're assumption in disguise |
|  | Provide Focus & Direction The team's true north: user-first, not feature-driven |  | Stereotyping & Exclusion Weak personas reinforce clichés and erase diversity, leading to exclusionary design |
|  | Aid Decision-Making & Prioritisation A clear primary persona keeps decisions focused, design for someone, not everyone |  | Quickly Outdated Personas age fast. Unrefreshed, they mislead more than they guide |
|  | Enable Communication & Alignment They make research memorable and actionable across teams |  | Persona Sprawl Too many personas dilute focus. Designing for everyone means designing for no one |
|  | Strengthen Culture of Empathy When used frequently, personas can align strategy, design, and empathy |  | Substitute for Real Users Treating personas as the user can stop teams from engaging with real people and fresh data |

What personas are and what they are not

A clear understanding of what personas are (and aren't) is essential before building or using them.

| Personas Are... | |
|--|--|
|  | Syntheses of real motivations, goals, and behaviours |
|  | Decision tools that guide design and messaging |
|  | Anchors for empathy and alignment across teams |
|  | Living models that evolve with new evidence |

| Personas Are Not... | |
|--|--|
|  | Demographic sketches or stereotypes |
|  | Decorative artefacts for presentations |
|  | Substitutes for real user contact |
|  | Static PDFs created once and forgotten |

Where personas came from

Did you know that personas were born from frustration?

In the 1980s, software designer Alan Cooper struggled to build products for a vague, ever-changing “user.”

To focus, he imagined one real person “Kathy” and began asking himself, “What would Kathy do here?”

That question changed design forever.

Cooper’s experiment evolved into Goal-Directed Design, a research-driven method that used personas to replace assumptions with empathy and align teams around real human goals.







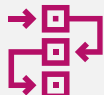



In his 1998 book *The Inmates Are Running the Asylum*, Cooper warned: “We make bad products when we design for ourselves.”

Personas became his fix, a way to stop designing for everyone and start designing for someone real.



Personas and Jobs-to-Be-Done: Complement, Don't Compete

JTBD defines the problem and purpose; personas ensure the solution fits real people and contexts.

| | Jobs-to-Be-Done (JTBD) | Why It Matters |
|------------------------|---|--|
| Core Question |  Why does the user “hire” a product or service? |  Who are we designing for? |
| Primary Purpose |  Define the real problem and desired outcome |  Build empathy and design for human context |
| Focus Area |  Functional progress, triggers, success criteria |  Motivations, behaviours, emotions, environment |
| Best Applied To |  Product strategy, innovation, and prioritisation |  Experience design, content, tone, and messaging |
| Main Strength |  Makes decisions evidence-based and outcome-driven |  Makes users relatable and decisions empathetic |



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