

One Knight in Product - E152 - Adrienne Barnes

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SPEAKERS

Jason Knight, Adrienne Barnes



Jason Knight 00:00

Hello and welcome to the show and an episode where we do our best air crash investigations impression and dig into the scary sounding world of growth stalls. Speaking of growth, this episode is sponsored by product people. So listen up. If you're a company founder or product leader needs to get a product management team up and running quickly or cover parental leave, check out product people. They've got a thriving community in 14th, house product managers, product ops, pros and product leaders, they onboard fast aligned teams and deliver outcomes. You can check out one night in product.com/product people to book a free intro chat, quote code, okay to get a 5% discount. That's one night in product.com/product. People could check the show notes for more details. All right back to the episode. Growth is obviously always on the minds of startup founders and ultimately should be with everyone within the company, but it's so often isn't. So if you want to find out some of the key factors driving growth doors and how you might pull out of them. Fasten your seat belts, make sure your tray tables are stowed and let's fly with one product.



Jason Knight 01:11

So my guest tonight is Adrian Barnes adrianza former freelance writer and avid newbie farmer who lives on 100 acre pecan farm. And Zuma has recently forcibly retired her husband to be a full time farmer. Hey, Jen wants to tell all of us pesky bits that she doesn't leave on a pecan farm at all, but have become fun. But sorry, Adrian, my show my balls. But in either case, she's here to tell us she's absolutely nuts about user research, jobs to be done. And buyer personas wants to help us all generate insights to impact our product builds. Hi, Jen, how are you tonight?



Adrienne Barnes 01:40

Hi, Jason. I am very well thank you love the intro. And I would like to just like put it to bed and on the record from a experienced I am a third generation pecan farmer. So that is the correct pronunciation no questions asked. story like folded done the end.



Jason Knight 02:01

This feels almost like another American revolution going on. You've come to throw all of our pecans into the harbour.



Adrienne Barnes 02:10

Yes, exactly. They just throw them into well, I'd be closer to the Gulf of Mexico than the harbour. But yeah, there we go.



Jason Knight 02:17

Well, fair enough. I stand corrected. But let's get down to business. You are the founder of Best buyer persona, which I'm assuming is nothing to do with Best Buy. But what problem are you solving for the world with best buyer persona? Yeah,



Adrienne Barnes 02:31

so I am the founder of Best buyer persona, a consultancy of one at the moment. And what we do is we help b2b SaaS companies push past growth stalls very much what it turned out that the buyer personas ended up being a lot more than what a standard persona was what people expected from a persona, because of the process that we have. And so we were really able to start identifying mismatches in customer segments, mismatches with customer needs to the product solution, and even misalignment internally with team members and knowledge gaps and silos and information. What really started as a solid research methodology has turned into something even bigger than what I anticipated after doing our own jobs to be done research. But yeah, best buyer persona, which is shifting actually right now in the process of not even being centred or positioned around personas anymore, but it's definitely one of those things that once I started doing the research and doing them for clients and getting feedback, realise that this was very useful and beneficial for the companies and clients I work with.



Jason Knight 03:44

Well, there you go, as all consultants should be but what are you going to do with the company name though? If you're shifting away from personas, you're gonna have to have a big expensive rebrand get some consultants into your new Lego.



Adrienne Barnes 03:55

Hmm, okay, so being a consultant myself, I want to start with like, low lift first. So I when I like you mentioned, I started off as a freelance writer, and I bought the domain Adrian Nicole, which is my middle name, which was spelt really weird, thanks to my hippie mom. And so it is. And so I thought you know what, I think I'm just gonna easy lift, roll it all into there, talk about what I

do on my break my name branded website and see if it catches on see if it actually does the job that I'm thinking it will do rather than spending \$25,000 on rebranding and all the things like you know, let's just let's test the market, see what's out there and get some some good clients and help some good people before we really put money into it.



Jason Knight 04:39

Ya know, fair enough, testing learn, but who is your target market then? Are you working with a lot of early stage founders scale up big companies? All of the above? None of the above?



Adrienne Barnes 04:48

Yeah, it turns out best fit clients for at this stage. They found product market fit. So it's b2b SaaS, right? And they are usually the lowest I've kind of seen where they found this They're starting to struggle with growth stalls is like 25 million a year, the average is like 50 to 75 million arr. And usually it comes after a huge spike in growth. So they grew very quickly, all of a sudden, and then growth just plummets. And that's what the research is showing as well. I'm really deep into growth stole research stuff from DEREK VAN beaver from Harvard. And it's the data that they did, they pulled like 500, fortune 100, top Fortune 100 companies, they discovered that the majority of companies who are in the depths of a growth stall, it happens after a growth spurt. So usually from my range, you know, if you're still trying to find out who your best customers are, if you don't have a lot of customers yet, that's not really where I can come in and help a lot. These are for people who've had good revenue, they've had good growth, and then all of a sudden, it stops. And so I was like, Wait, why? What's going on?



Jason Knight 05:57

Yeah, I mean, it's funny, though, because actually, I've spoken to a lot of people that have kind of lost that growth, even sooner than that, like they've been around, maybe the somewhere between the five to 15. And it kind of feels almost like they either know, especially in b2b SaaS, they'll find like one or two kind of foundational customers, they'll sell to them, they'll get some really early interest, or maybe even start building some additional functionality around those early customers needs. And then all of a sudden, they realise that, actually, those early customers needs weren't really generic enough at all, to go anywhere, and and they just build an entire business around almost like a false product market fit. Have you kind of gone into some of those earlier companies from time to time? Or is it generally the bigger ones that you get called in and maybe someone else goes to help the early ones?



Adrienne Barnes 06:43

Yeah, I do get called in a lot to the early companies. And the reason is, because I love founders, I love people who build stuff, they and they just inspire me, and they they just, I love working with them. So often, I will start to work with them. But the truth of the matter is, every time that turns out to be a lot more complicated, and complex, and what they need is different help than what I usually offer. So if if you're still struggling to figure out who a potential customer is, you're going to have a hard time finding out who your best customer is. And that's what best

buyer persona does is it finds out who those best buyers are. And then really gives you the in depth in detail persona and profile of those people. If you haven't found them yet. We struggle a little bit at the front.



Jason Knight 07:30

That's fair enough. But you said recently, before this, that you were shifting to more of an agency model and learning a lot about how to do that. How will you set up before you start to shift into more of an agency model?



Adrienne Barnes 07:43

Yeah, so I've always kind of been a freelancer, essentially, like, the way I saw my work. And the way it translated was as a freelancer, I started freelance writing in 2016. So and I was working with b2b SaaS companies. And that very quickly transferred into me realising that people didn't know really good quality information about their buyers, maybe they had like top level demographic information, or they had, you know, marry the marketer type personas, but nothing that they could hand me. And I could understand like, Okay, here's 12 pieces of assets we can create from this, like, there was nothing tactical to use. And so that's where best buyer persona came into, I started like developing something that would help meet that need. And then once specifier persona, like I would use contractors to help me maybe do the research interviews, or some of the data analysis, that kind of stuff. But really what I want to see and where I see the future of this is where it's semi agency, semi consultancy, kind of setup, where I've got key people who are experts in their field, know their stuff, and we come in as a team. And everybody knows their part. So it's semi product dice, because it kind of we have a system, but it's also customised to the client's needs, right? So the little details and the how maybe what they need, how things are done, changes and shifts to the clients need. But the exact overall hierarchy kind of process of what we've got stays the same. So that's kind of the shifts that I'm looking at making and how I'm thinking about growing this business in the future.



Jason Knight 09:25

And so you've been learning a lot. So what are some of the early takeaways from that? Or maybe challenges that you've had moving into that model?



Adrienne Barnes 09:31

Yeah, so it's definitely struggling to find a fitting demand and need at the same time. So getting the people the demand in order to pay for the people is different than having all of the people in place so that we can just go and meet the demand. So that balance is tricky, trying to figure that out, which is why we've been working with contractors that I can just kind of call in when necessary and needed. Yeah. Yeah, and finding In really good people, like finding people is the struggle right now for just about anybody in any field I've ever talked to, like, all my founders are struggling with it. It's just hard to find the people who are passionate experts, and then

also, like trustworthy and can do what they say they're gonna do. Like, that's really where you know what I want to see. So those are the main struggles I'm seeing right now. And, you know, hopefully learning and just time they'll they'll come together.



Jason Knight 10:28

Yeah, well, again, that's just a test to learn, iterate all that good stuff. Yeah. But you've had a variety of roles in your career, you've been a UX researcher, you've been a content writer, as we just talked about, and you've obviously got a load of experience in what you're focused on. Now that's come about for doing that. But yeah, what was it in the first place that made you decide to double down on? Well to start with buyer personas in the first place, and actually go out on your own and try and do that thing? And be so laser focused on doing that stuff?



Adrienne Barnes 10:56

Yeah, I think that laser focused is kind of my superpower. I, you know, there are two different kinds of entrepreneurs, I think there are the people who have really good ideas, and they have a lot of them. Yeah, they just idea idea. I am not that kind of entrepreneur. Like I just I don't have hardly any ideas. But what I do have is grit and determination and just ridiculous amount of stubbornness. I'm really, really stubborn. So when I get an idea, and I have this goal, it's something that I just continuously work towards. So that's where basically when I saw the gap, and I really developed Buspar persona, really early in my freelance writing career, and I launched the website in 2018. And kind of, I published it got some early early interest in leads, and then nothing like nothing happened, nobody signed on the dotted line, it just kind of ran out of steam. And I think what was going on was I just didn't have the maturity in my own business to continue to push through like to know this was a good idea and just keep promoting it and keep talking about it. And then 2020, I changed my mind, I was like, No, this, this is a good idea. This is solid, like, it's definitely a need. So I just started talking about it like nonstop on Twitter, on LinkedIn, if anybody had me on a podcast, and that's basically where the interest came, I didn't stop and people started booking me on their podcasts. And then I started booking clients really solidly at the very beginning of 2021. And then by doing the best buyer persona research, and by doing those engagements, that's what led to see the gap with the growth stalls actually being able to see, okay, this is where I'm actually working on working with CEOs, executives, and helping them see the gaps and where there are things inside their businesses that have just actually gotten them stuck. So it's all kind of built and grown on top of one of each other. No, I



Jason Knight 13:03

mean, that sounds really good, and obviously very inspiring, as well. And I think like you say that kind of grit and stubbornness, and just pushing through and just knowing that there's a goal that you've got to reach is something that a lot of people, I mean, there's obviously, you go too far with that, I guess, as well, like you could go way too far down the rabbit hole. And actually, it's completely the wrong idea. But obviously, in your case, it seems like it's really worked out, which is absolutely fabulous. And I say really inspirational for anyone else that's trying to follow in your stead. But your Twitter profile says that you help people push past growth stalls, which obviously you've talked about earlier on as well. And they keep coming up.

So we should probably talk about, yeah, now I can imagine based on what you said earlier than just the words themselves what a growth stall is. So the growth has been going up. They hit a point, they're not aerodynamically sound anymore, and they start plummeting towards the Earth, with everyone on board screaming and fearing for their lives. Now, I guess we can understand why that happens, potentially. But what are some of the main reasons that you see that causes these growth stores? I mean, is it just buyer personas or are there lots of contributory factors that you can identify upfront?

A

Adrienne Barnes 14:10

Yeah. Okay. This is a good question. So there are actually a lot of factors and they're challenging to talk about because it usually has to do with CEO executive leadership and their strategy.



Jason Knight 14:25

How do you know that old thing?

A

Adrienne Barnes 14:27

Yeah, or lack thereof, strategy and assumptions, the their assumptions? So what the research shows and what I've seen anecdotally in my own business with my own clients, is that the assumption that a company holds dear The thing that I know for a fact I know this 100% This is true. That thing is often the thing that is the reason for the gross stall is the thing that catapults and just kind of drops it and it's hard to see and some of the research shows that most companies don't see it coming. executives don't see it coming, because it's also the thing that caused the the growth, right? Yeah, like we've been doing this, we believe this. We just had, you know, two years ago, we were growing so quickly. So of course, the thing is still true. So there are a few, and I'm coming up with the development for this for kind of a quiz of red flags. Yeah, essentially, for executive teams. If you say things like, well, we have a really mature product, red flag, like, that's a red flag, you've got to pay attention to it. If you say things like, well, this is just the way I've got 30 years of experience, this is how this is done. Red flag, not that you shouldn't know and listen to your experience. But if you only rely on that competitors are going to come up and sneak up and bite you in the ass. Like, they just will. Some other things aren't usually they found that if you're not listening to new hires, and if you're dismissing all of their kind of warnings and the things that they're saying, because you're the one with the experience, red flag. And what the research has shown is that every single time they the research that I referenced is called stole points from DEREK VAN beaver. It's from like, 2008. It's so it's old research, and I'm working on updating it. But they discovered that in all of the companies, and they looked at 500, I believe that's the number. There was someone in the company who was kind of the whistleblower, somebody going, Hey, we should be watching these guys. Hey, so, you know, those are some quick red flags. But really, the growth stalls are not something that are just, it's hard to predict. Right? So the reason I say like growth tactics, the things that you use to pull levers, you know, increase paid ads, or change your website or create more product, create more features, go through an acquisition, those kinds of things are really good at preventing growth stalls. But those preventative measures are not going to be the things that get you out once you're in an actual and true growth stall. And I think you

mentioned like, what is the difference, so there's, you know, you can have a slowdown in growth, and you can have short little stalls that can be, you know, the consequences of maybe making changes or something like that. But a true growth stall where you really need to come in and have some foundational things looked at done is more than just like a quarter, like you're looking at multiple quarters in a row of growth and revenue just not happening. So that's where I come in, I'm the third party, unbiased set of eyes like I don't have any political agenda. I don't have a budget. I'm not trying to, like persuade anyone towards anything. And I come in, I diagnose where are the problems, while also getting you focused on what I call the money making metric? How does your business make money? We got to focus on that one thing real quick.



Jason Knight 17:59

Yeah, I think another very interesting thing, there is this idea that, as you say, the growth just gonna last forever. And just almost I mean, it's funny in a way, because you just talked about it just then this idea about like being stubborn and focused, and just keep going keep going. These people are almost doing the same thing in a way, right? Like, they're, they're sitting there, and they're just refusing to be shaken from the belief that what they know is, right. So when you're dealing with someone like that, when you're going into one of these companies, and when you're maybe trying to diagnose some of the issues and trying to explain some of the things that they might do to get them out of it. I'm assuming that you quite often come up against that kind of intransigence from them as well, because they're sitting there saying, Well, hey, you're just some right? Consult on this come in, like, what are you know, I've been doing this since you were a kid or what, like, how do you fight against that kind of attitude and response?



Adrienne Barnes 18:48

I don't, honestly, I won't, if you have the CEO, and usually it's coming from the CEO at or a very high level executive, that you can't teach me anything, then I am not the consultant that you need. Like I'm not the one that's because what I have to have as a CEO with an open mind, who can say okay, let's question some things. Let's question what we know. Let's put I'm okay with you poking holes and saying, like, where could there be some gaps? No company is perfect. And what the research also shows is that 86% of companies experience of growth stall, and we're not talking like tiny mom and pop shops, we're talking Coca Cola, Levi Strauss, like Apple, Hewlett Packard, huge names that everybody knows and respects. And so it's what I my mission kind of now is to say it's not unusual to go through a growth stall, and it's very challenging to pull yourself out of it. So be okay like asking for help having someone else come in with a like just an unbiased lens and look at things and diagnose what the issues may be. And sometimes, like in my own business, Like you said, really stubborn, I just went through this myself, I was in like an entrepreneurial black hole, I couldn't see my way through these next steps. It was very confusing. I had, I called in a coach, a consultant, we had, you know, a few, like we had a talk that I called in and did some jobs to be done research on my own company. And since those findings, it has just been clear to me what the next steps are. And so that's kind of exactly the same stuff that I'm doing for the CEOs and executives level, just saying, like, you have all the answers, I cannot answer any question you don't already know. But what I can do is come in and ask you the right questions that are going to kind of poke holes in your assumptions and find the place where what you're currently doing is causing the issues.



Jason Knight 20:49

But I'm assuming also that there are going to be some times where you're called in maybe a little bit too late. So like you go in, and the the growth ever plane is almost, it's almost hit the floor. And even if you didn't do anything, or start doing anything, by the time it even had any kind of impact. It's already crashed into the ground and smashed up all the houses that are Why are going with these analogies. But I guess like, are you able to kind of reliably call out upfront, for example, when you're being engaged with the company that sorry, folks, this is just too late? Or have you always been lucky enough to go in and be able to turn everyone around?



Adrienne Barnes 21:26

Yeah, so their timing is really important. Actually, when you're dealing with these kinds of growth stalls. The earlier you catch it, the better off you are, for instance, if you maybe are struggling and it's been two quarters, three quarters, then you're looking at, you know, a year and a half, two years, and you still haven't discovered the cause of the growth stall. And that so often is just internal strategy, internal people type stuff, then research shows that your stall could actually last decades. Yeah. Yeah. Levi Strauss did one in they were, they had been breached billions of dollars of sales in the 1990s. Like 1996, they just dropped they had a huge growth stall. And this was from the book that I'm reading that stole points. And so they go through their process. Just recently, I looked up and so like, I wonder how Levi Strauss is doing now seeing, they still have not met their height that their 19 \$96 it like in sales? Yeah, the way they were doing. So it's taken them 2530 years to bounce back up. And that's not an unusual, they found that most companies that did not respond quickly struggled for a very, very long time. But the thing is, is it ever too late, I don't think we can get to a point where we'll say, sorry, like, you're it's time to just let's call a funeral. Right? Like you're done. Let's throw in the towel. Yeah, I think it can be important to say, Okay, here's some realistic, though. growth potential, here's some realistic ways that we can grow. Those kinds of conversations sometimes need to be had where it's like, we got to work on operational design, we've got to work on like, really clearly getting our strategy and figuring out how to tie it to performance and how to tie it to frontline folks who are executing on every piece of our process. You know, those kinds of conversations also need to happen. But I don't think I've ever gotten to a point where I'm like, oh, sorry, this is like your last cause.



Jason Knight 23:37

Obviously, you're just so fantastic. You just managed to turn them all around anyway.



Adrienne Barnes 23:40

Oh, goodness, thank you.



Jason Knight 23:44

Because they're like a playbook that you would then start to run through when you get in there -- that you get in there -- you find out that they're having a stage for whatever reason. Now, the

so that you get in there, you find out that they're having a store for whatever reason. Now, I'm sure there are some key reasons that that's going to happen and things that you've identified yourself from all the people that you've worked with, but what's the kind of ABC 123 step that you might go through then to start to identify the causes and start to try and set it right.

A

Adrienne Barnes 24:07

Yeah. So the first thing I do is I take I don't know if you've heard of it, but there's a book called the Northstar metric. Also like the wig, the wildly important goal. Yeah, so in b2b SaaS companies come together and say, Okay, how do we make money? And that answer can be very complex and long and, and things like that. But I'm really trying to narrow it down to its users seats, security, space, data and analytics, like there's some way that people pay for our stuff pay for our software, because we're not handing over physical goods, right. Like there's just a few options that we have. Yeah, there's a lot of ways to make revenue, productized services, professional services, all of those things can be a part of the equation. But when I come in first I want to know what metric can we measure that shows like that is tied to one key to how we make money. So we decide that as the executive everybody's together in the same zoom or the same room, and we say, Okay, this is what we need to find out. How does this company do it? Okay, so by the end of, you know, usually an hour and a half, after going through, I ask series of questions to try to get to really the core of this idea, we've got an answer. And then I say, Okay, for the next eight to 12 weeks, depending upon the company size and things like that every department is focused on this metric. every blog post is helping your customers achieve this, every email newsletter, every ad, every customer support sales call, all of our energy is laser focused now. So rather than going wide and shallow, we're going very narrow and deep, for a short period of time, just a little bit, because what I found is if you can turn the momentum back to growth faster, the more it builds upon itself. Yeah. So yeah, we get that Northstar metric. And then while their team is focused on that, my team comes in, and we're doing the customer development interviews, where we're understanding who your segments are, who your best buyers are, what are their pains, then we get a good idea of their product, what are their products, benefits, features, all of that stuff? Now, do those two things align? Do the pain points and the needs of your customers actually align to the features and the benefits of your product? Sometimes it's yes, sometimes it's like, not quite. Yeah, as you know, I mean, yeah, right and product. Yeah. So then we also are doing internal and stakeholder interviews and surveys. So I'm learning very much like what is the goal of your sales team? What is the goal of your product team? What is the goal of your marketing team and the executive? And what we find often in these companies is that there are very different goals. So I come back. Yeah. And I say, Hey, by the way, your product lead and your sales lead are not on the same page, they are nowhere near together. So we need to get them in alignment and going in the same direction. And that does not happen by me, like harping on people. It happens by becoming together and coming in agreement, essentially. But most people don't ask, I always ask three questions like, What do you absolutely know, today? What do you know? What do you need to know to make the next 12 months successful? And what are you assuming? So those the first and the third question, what do you know? What do you absolutely know? That's my trigger to be like, Okay, what did they think are the facts in this company? Yeah. Because now I gotta go verify that I have to make sure that that's true. And then what are you assuming means they know they haven't tested it, they know, they haven't gone out and double check this in a long time. So I need to go out and actually make sure it's true as well. But that's how it developed just because we were finding that so many of the problems were internal, that people were just not on the same page that people were frustrated. They were like, I don't know what this product does. The sales guys, I would literally

talk to salespeople, and they'd say, I have no clue what this product does. And I'm like that that's an issue, you need to know what you're selling, right there. Like, I've got to pull it, I've got a bullet points of benefits. But beyond that, I can't speak to it. And so that's essentially how we find those kinds of problems. And then the phase three is we work to create like strategy components, we work to create KPIs and teach you how to, like, implement these things, so that your KPIs are clearly translated all the way down to the person answering the phone, right? Like it just gets broken up and broken down to where the entire organisation then understands the high level strategy, understands how their day to day job connects back to that high level strategy. If you've got someone who's on the frontline, who goes, I don't know, I don't know what I'm doing here. I don't know why it matters. I don't know, if I'm making any benefit, then you've not done a really good job of clearly indicating what the strategy is and how they are important. People want to feel useful and make an impact. Yeah. And so that's basically my playbook. That's the process that we go through. It runs, you know, usually nine to 12 months, depending upon the company and the team and if they really need help implementing things, but we get that first one really, really quickly. And that's why I think this is one of the most important things is that in that eight to 12 week time period, we've actually bumped up revenue and growth again, because we focused on that one money making metric.



Jason Knight 29:42

Oh, well, there you go. So that's a lot and probably talked about, I talked about that for several podcasts but but to focus back a little bit on one of the levers for growth, which is I think, where we go back to these buyer personas as well and like kind of the ideal customer profile that you're gonna go out and have the most success with Then obviously, in some places, the ideal customer profile is just everyone, like they just want to sell to everyone they don't target and they kind of spread themselves too thinly and and everybody become anything to anyone. But are you still heavily involved in building out these good buyer personas and helping people to work out who to target as part of that turnaround job?



Adrienne Barnes 30:20

Yeah, absolutely. Because really not understanding your customers, and not understanding your positioning and having knowledge gaps or misalignment internally are the three major reasons for growth stall. Yep. So I want to come in and hit all of those reasons, really getting to know who your customers are, what are their segments? What are their pain points? What is their hierarchy inside their company? Like? Are they a champion? Are they a user? Are they the buyer, the one who can cut the check, getting a really good idea of that picture? All of these things are really important in b2b SaaS companies. Yeah. And they often don't know they're kind of blind to all of that.



Jason Knight 31:03

Well, that's an interesting point about the don't know, right? Because one of my questions was going to be well, is it that people just have rubbish, personas defined already that they kind of just sketch together on the back of a napkin and put into a PowerPoint deck, and that was them? Or is it that they literally just don't have any.

A

Adrienne Barnes 31:19

So it's both are all it's three things so and the real struggle that I've seen, and this is what I've really tried to break through with best buyer persona, is that you keep your personas in your marketing, your marketing team has a set of personas, your sales team has a set of personas, your user research team has a set of personas, or user personas, your product, like every different department, as I've done, research and talk to different people, every different department has their own set of personas, and they're all a little different, and they're not cohesive. And so that's also why we get people on different pages, because they think they're working and talking to different people, they think their best buyers want and need, and are different segments of people. So the organisation needs one set of personas that we are working for, we need to understand our customers from one layer, it should really the persona process, in my opinion, should really sit at the executive level, and then filter its way throughout the entire organisation, your customer support should clearly know who your personas are, what their pain points are, what their language is, where they show up your social media team, your marketing team, you're paid like everybody, but it ends up everyone needs a persona, everyone needs to understand who their customers are. So they end up siloing the information. And it's got one point of view, it's got my sales point of view, it's got the marketing point of view. So marketing personas are only demographics, right? Like because it's paid media, that's how they use it, they want to buy media, they want to buy ads, so they create demographic type information. Well, that's not good. That doesn't help product. So product ended up doing UX research, which is pretty solid, they do jobs to be done type stuff. But then they don't understand like the larger segments, right? Like they just have kind of like smaller stuff. And then sales, they understand pain points. And they under they have their scripts, right that kind of relate back if they say this, this is how we can respond or this is kind of their sales process. They get that. But I feel like because that information is so siloed, it really does a disservice to the entire organisation.

**Jason Knight 33:30**

Yeah, I think we keep coming back to this idea that without alignment, you've not really got anything, right. And doesn't matter how good the individual bits of work are, if they're all kind of floating around in the ether as far as anyone else is concerned. But when it comes to those buyer personas, then presuming that they do have them, or that you've helped them make some new ones like what are some characteristics of really good solid buyer personas that you could look at, aside from the alignment thing, obviously, where everyone's using the same ones, but like, are there some sort of general pro tips for making good personas?

A

Adrienne Barnes 34:01

Yeah, the first one is, if you haven't talked to customers, you have not created a buyer persona.

**Jason Knight 34:08**

It's just a cartoon character, right?

A

Adrienne Barnes 34:10

Yeah, it is. It's just hands down or it's just full of assumptions. I use a lot of digital intelligence tools. Really, really good ones audience spark Toro SEMrush, brand 24, like, unit talkwalker Brandwatch. You name it. I've been inside the tool. I've understand how to use it and how to find people from it. And they're amazing. They do a really good job. Yeah, yeah. And what they tell us though, is how our audience behaves. They tell us where they show up online. We even can hear words and conversations that they have. We get all of that information from these kinds of tools. What you will never find out from using a digital tool or from a survey is why Yeah, why did you make that choice? Why did you do the thing you did? The only way you can find that is through a conversation. And so I always say we do 20 conversations with customers. That for me personally was where I started to feel like okay, dots are connecting, I've gathered a few different segments, I can see where these people are coming to the product in a different way, have different approaches have different pain points. And then McKinsey actually had a stack where if you talk to 20 customers, you've reached like, a 95% sentiment of your overall audience.



Jason Knight 35:29

Yeah, yeah. So you're talking to some form of contiguous set of people, rather than just random people that you find vote? Because I think that's one of the things is like, I think another thing that I heard was, I can't remember where from like, keep talking to people until you hear the same thing?

A

Adrienne Barnes 35:46

Yeah, yes, that's another good one. Like, if you can just anticipate what their answer is going to be, then you know, you're done. Yeah. Like, that's another good gauge, just for basically being able to package it up and sell it to people so that it's really clear on like, what you're paying for, I always just say, 20 conversations, and we'll go through and look, we want to talk to your like best longest term customers, the ones who just get it, we want to talk to your newest customers. And then I want to talk to the close deals, the ones that didn't convert, but almost it that helps me figure out a lot of the reasons what, what was, what signals are being sent, where it was stuff off, all of that stuff, it really does help to inform a very well rounded customer segment.



Jason Knight 36:31

One thing that I was chatting to someone about earlier and seems pretty relevant to this. So I might as well bring it up here is the situation where you're maybe in a bit of a growth stall, like we've been talking about before. And you're trying to maybe change up a little bit because maybe your old market wasn't particularly attractive, or it's the eyes dying out or whatever, you want to go somewhere else. But you still got a bunch of those customers kicking around. Yeah, still paying a lot of bills. And you're desperately trying to retarget whilst also satisfying the last lot that you kind of got to this point on? Is that something that where you've gone in

and you've had to try to persuade people to maybe leave the old market behind and move into this new area? Or are you able to try and work out a way to kind of attack both hills at the same time?

A

Adrienne Barnes 37:16

Yeah, so finding a new market is extremely challenging, but can be very beneficial. Yeah. You know, if we want to think about and the one that's most on top of my mind is newspapers, right? Like digital paid, like print media, essentially, if you are in the print media business, it's dying to the point where now it's almost nostalgic, people are almost starting up magazines, not because it's like it's nostalgic to do. It's time to pivot and think about a different way, think about a different approach a new market, I wouldn't say that I help people find and launch into new markets. But it can definitely be through the research that says, hey, this market is no longer. There's no growth here yet. You need to, like try to pivot and to find new customers in a different market. And then recommendations can be made with other contractors and other agencies who are really the experts at doing that. But yeah, it's that's a challenging thing for sure.



Jason Knight 38:13

No, absolutely. I think it's one of those situations, which comes up quite a lot. When you get some of those companies like we were talking about earlier, where they're sitting there, they've kind of almost reached the limits of where they initially targeted at. And they really just only initially targeted at some people that they knew or got little address book out and spoke to some previous contacts or whatever and attacked a very small, not very, very promising market, but they kind of got some early success with it. And then all of a sudden, I don't know what to do next. So let's get super actionable now. Yeah, unnecessary. Assume that some of my listeners listening to this right now maybe don't have buyer personas right now. Or they have some pretty rubbish ones that I don't know what to do with. I don't know where to start with doing this stuff. Right. And you've talked about a lot of your playbook stuff that I've almost like the first actionable step aside from hiring you that someone should do to get kick started along their persona journey.

A

Adrienne Barnes 39:05

Yeah, for personas, the first thing that you want to do is definitely identify who would just honestly getting on the phone with customers. And don't ask them questions like, do you like this? Or what do you think about our product? Or, you know, how often do you buy really nail into their experience, nail into their thought process, cloud buying, all of that is very, very important. And that's going to help you really understand them at a better degree. And then the next step is to record it. Record the conversations, take the notes, put them onto a deck and share it across the organisation. Don't hold it on, you know, the CMOS little Google Drive like make sure it gets seen. For sure.



Jason Knight 39:56

Yeah, well back to the alignment and sharing and coordination piece. So, yes, get someone to

Yeah, well back to the alignment and sharing and coordination piece. So, yes, get someone to look after that as well. So called a chief alignment officer or something like that. Yeah. And where can people find you after this if they want to talk to you about growth stalls or if they want to talk to you about personas, or maybe even see if they can get a few sacks of nuts off your farm?

A

Adrienne Barnes 40:16

Yes. So if you're struggling right now, and you think maybe you're potentially in a growth stall, and you're looking around, and you're not sure why then definitely look me up. I am on LinkedIn. Adrian Barnes, I'm on Twitter at Adrian Nicole, my website is Adrian.nicole.com. And definitely the person to look out for. And if you are like, Hey, we know our personas are rubbish. Let's talk to because this is a great time of year right now. It's October. So we're coming into q4 closing out the year, not sure when it will launch. But similarly, you know, first of the year is always a really good time to nail these things down. So that way, you know you're solid for the whole rest of the year when it comes to, you know, all of your marketing aspects all of your product. And you know, it's a scary time right now, things are slowing down. And we can't afford to waste money on a segment that is not a good buyer, or that doesn't have our strengths or our pain points that we're addressing. So yeah, reach out, and we can definitely get get to some help.



Jason Knight 41:20

All right, well, I made sure to link that all into the show notes. And hopefully you'll get a few people heading your direction to pull them out of their stalls. Yeah. Wow, that's been a fantastic chat. So obviously, really glad that you could spare the time to talk about some really important issues and help us all understand a little bit better how we might get our products growing again. Obviously we'll stay in touch but yeah, that's for now. Thanks for taking time.

A

Adrienne Barnes 41:41

Thank you, Jason. This was amazing. I'm so glad you had me.



Jason Knight 41:46

As always, thanks for listening. I hope you found the episode inspiring and insightful. If you did again, I can only encourage you to hop over to one.night.in.product.com Check out some of my other fantastic guests sign up to the mailing list or subscribe on your favourite podcast app and make sure you share your friends so you and they can never miss another episode again. I'll be back soon with another inspiring guests but as for now, thanks and good nights