attracting new audiences through deeper insights

An event marketer's guide to audience segmentation and persona development
Marketing, by its very nature, needs an audience.

Every campaign, initiative, and piece of content is designed to be consumed by a market, in the hopes that they'll buy what you're selling. It sounds simple, but surprisingly, it's where many marketers stumble.

Why? Because they fail to emphasize the #1 rule: Know your audience.

Think about how you consume products or services. Are your needs, habits, and motivations the same as your neighbor's? Your coworker's? Your uncle's?

Audiences are not a monolith, and one size fits all is for mittens, not messaging.

While you may already have a grasp on who your audiences are, every marketer can benefit from gaining a deeper understanding of what their audiences want. By first figuring out who you want to talk to and how you need to talk to them, your efforts will resonate with the people who will benefit from what you have to say.

And the better you understand your audiences, their goals, and their concerns, the more likely you are to achieve your objectives and desired outcomes.

How to do this? Audience segmentation.

Jane Culchetch-Beard on how HP creates brand experiences that emotionally engage its audiences.
How Segmentation Can Help Grow Your Audience

For event marketing to be effective, it has to speak to the audience’s unique needs. But how will you know what each audience needs if you don’t have a clear picture of who they are?

Knowing everything about each group you’re targeting is not only vital to developing your marketing campaigns, it’s crucial to understanding how your event should evolve over time. To stay relevant, you must continually identify where business is going and what communities should be targeted to ensure overall program growth. Focusing on priority audiences or new target markets and their unique needs gives you guideposts along this journey, so you can evolve without alienating the very people you wish to attract and engage.

Segmenting your audiences also enables you to:

- Know the level of investment you’ll need relative to the size and value of each target audience
- Strategically justify these investments
- Identify the internal stakeholder resources (financial and otherwise) you’ll need to optimize reach and impact for each target audience
- Develop robust personas to inform your marketing and experience design approach for maximum engagement

---

Audience segmentation studies don't need to be performed annually. Instead, consider completing one every 2-5 years, depending on your industry and the velocity of change within your business.
A Fresh Look At Your Audience

Audience segmentation is a multistep process, going well beyond superficial characterizations. It’s not enough to say your audience is doctors or manufacturers.

Often, large companies develop their own unique customer segmentation studies or taxonomies for each of their major market segments. This approach can tap into sophisticated data analytics to create an algorithm that easily defines audience segments and automatically sorts customers into these segments. Using predetermined segments for events can quantify how the event aligns with the overall priorities of the business. Also, they can help marketers make sure they are attracting the “right” type of attendee.

If your company doesn’t already have customer segmentation studies, you will need to dig into all the attendee data you’ve been collecting to identify the lines that divide your attendees:

- **Demographics:** Data like age and gender are relatively easy to collect. But while they’re important factors to describe your audience, they only scratch the surface of insightful information. Continue to collect this data, but don’t stop there.

- **Generational:** This is technically still demographic data, but it digs a little deeper to provide another piece of the puzzle. After all, a 42-year-old and a 50-year-old may fall into different age categories, but as Gen Xers, they may have more in common than you think. *Examples: Baby Boomer, Gen X, Millennials, Gen Z.*
Want to know what it takes to engage younger audiences?

Check out VidCon.
Cultural: Data on cultural attitudes can be an enormous boon to your marketing efforts. Is your audience mostly conservative thinkers or progressive? How do they view the world? What core beliefs drive their decision-making? And when you go global, this has even deeper ramifications, as you will need to consider cultural preferences such as dietary restrictions; time of day, month, and year; worship needs; and beyond. Examples: conservative, liberal, religion.

Geographic: Knowing where your audience lives (and works!) provides useful insights not only for marketing your event but also for planning the event in a way to maximize engagement and attendance. Will you need to set up hotel blocks for out-of-town visitors, or will you need discounted parking for local attendees? Will you need to provide translators for international travelers who may not speak the native language? Examples: state/province, country, region.

Psychographic: This is the deep dive into the needs, hopes, concerns, and aspirations that underlie every motivation and every action your attendees take. Understanding what makes these people tick is key to making sure your event and your marketing address their pain points. Examples: lifestyle choices, personality traits, values, hopes, aspirations.

Interests: Like psychographic data, this is vital information to know. If the audience you have in mind just isn't interested in what you have to offer, it's time to take a good look at the people who are interested and how you can speak to them instead. Examples: running, education, travel.
Industry: If your event aims to attract businesses (as opposed to consumers), it's important to know which types of businesses your attendees belong to. Some events clearly target a specific vertical, while others (office technology, for example) may attract a wide range of potential customers. So, where do your attendees work? Examples: healthcare, technology, manufacturing.

Other segmentation ideas:

- **Life stages:** Such as young professional, getting married, having children, close to retirement, etc.
- **Seasonal:** What are their concerns at different times of the year? For example, many companies focus on budgeting in the fall.
- **Brand affinity:** How much do they like your brand compared to another? How can you use that information to your advantage?

It's not enough to know who your audience segments are; you also need to know how best to reach them. One of the benefits of segmentation work is that you can also develop a road map that aligns to each audience's specific communication preferences and platforms. Where do they go to look for information? What social media platforms (if any) do they use? What media sources do they read or listen to?

This information will enable you to streamline your communication strategy, so you can be everywhere you need to be, without wasting time and budget trying to build a presence in channels your target audience doesn't use.
Getting Started With Audience Segmentation and Persona Development

Knowing everything there is to know about your audiences is the crucial first step. Next, it’s time to figure out who they are and which of them are most important to your success.

To segment an audience, you divide the audience into groups that share similar characteristics. Identifying these groups, prioritizing them, and then fleshing them out into insightful audience personas is a significant undertaking, but one that reaps significant rewards.

There is a wealth of data sources you can use for audience segmentation. Here are just a few examples.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Audience Attraction</strong></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WEB (GOOGLE ANALYTICS)</td>
<td>Who visited, length of stay, and platforms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EMAIL</td>
<td>Click-through, open, and bounce rates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOCIAL MEDIA ACTIVITY</td>
<td>Level and reach of Facebook, LinkedIn, and other social media interaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REGISTRATION</td>
<td>Attendee identification, event activities, demographic profile, and buying interests</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>On-site engagement</strong></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MOBILE APPS</td>
<td>Who’s engaged and in what</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SECOND SCREEN</td>
<td>Real-time session and keynote data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BEACON</td>
<td>Context-aware messaging and offers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEAD RETRIEVAL</td>
<td>Level of interest and location in the buying cycle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RFID</td>
<td>Attendee activities and behaviors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Post-show follow-up</strong></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SURVEYS</td>
<td>Sentiments, opinions, and trends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EVENT MANAGEMENT</td>
<td>Costs, budget, and acquisition and retention of sponsors and attendees</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Overall show assessment</strong></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AUXILIARY DATA</td>
<td>Event experience, and marketing and business impact results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EXISTING DATA</td>
<td>CRM, sales, customer, and membership data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOCIAL MEDIA CONTENT</td>
<td>Trending topics, attendee and sponsor satisfaction, attendee interests and behaviors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
But it doesn’t have to be scary. Here, the process is broken down into bite-sized, manageable chunks using the fictional Awesome Marketing Technology Company as an example.

**Step 1 Data Review**
As director of events at Awesome Marketing Technology Company, it’s your job to organize a large marketing conference every year. You have data about your attendees, so now it’s time to start looking for patterns.

Gather your stakeholder team to review data from surveys as well as other sources and sort people into groups.

This is a great opportunity to take a closer look at any survey data you have. After all, there is no better way to get to know your audiences better than to hear directly from them.

For example, after performing this exercise for an event that targets the marketing industry, you might see that your event attracts the following groups:

- Marketing agency owners in their 40s and 50s who work with a lot of B2B clients, live in midsized to larger cities, are progressive thinkers, and are trying to grow their business and achieve success for their clients.
- One-person in-house marketing specialists who are in their 20s, work for midsized companies, are active on social media, and whose marketing knowledge is still entry level.
- Individual representatives for marketing software companies who are exhibiting at the event, hoping to gather new leads and get their company’s name out there.

From there, you can set basic milestones: What audience groups come to your event, what percentage of the audience does each segment make up, and how high a priority is each segment to the success of your event?

At this point, many event marketers call it a job well done. But there is so much more to know about these segments! Uncovering this information will be crucial to your success.
A **cluster analysis** is a common analytical technique to group data and observations in a few segments. This technique ensures that data points within a segment are similar, while data points across segments are different. Consider using this approach if you are interested in a full-blown segmentation study.
Step 2 Persona Development

Rather than stopping at Step 1, dive deep into your personas to figure out what makes them tick. Gathering data around what they do, how old they are, and what media they consume will tell you who they are, but what about figuring out what they want?

Gather as much information as possible, whether it's internal information that you already have or new research and interviews with these groups, to find the answers to the following broad questions, or brainstorm a list more specific to your organization:

- Has their attendance gone up or down?
- How engaged are they?
- What are their barriers to attending?
- What are their pain points related to the event?
- What are they looking for in an event?
- What might encourage them to attend?
Step 3 Messaging

Armed with information or ideas about what influences their decision-making process, you can now flesh out your audience segments into full-fledged buyer personas. A buyer persona is a semi-fictional representation of a typical member of an audience segment.

Using the information gathered in Steps 1 and 2, write a story for each persona. Your story should detail things like:

- Job role
- Age
- Top professional challenges
- What success looks like to them
- How they access new information
- What they want from your event
- What might stop them from coming
- What they wish you’d do differently
- Who they’d love to meet or see

Make sure you identify the messages and value propositions that each persona needs to hear.

Once you have a good handle on your primary personas, you can explore splitting each persona category into subgroups. (For example, Agency Angela may be a longtime attendee, while Agency Adam may be attending for the very first time — how will you engage him differently?)
Applying Your Personas To Your Event

The insights you gain from your buyer personas should shape your entire brand experience strategy. Start by setting a measurable objective for each persona, and build a targeted strategy to achieve the objective.

Perhaps you decide you want to improve early registration numbers for Agency Angela. Great! Because you understand Agency Angela so fully, you can now create campaigns that speak precisely to her needs and motivations, with messaging that will resonate, and in channels that she’ll engage in.

Additionally, use these persona insights to think through the typical audience experience at your event. If Agency Angela is your top-priority attendee, is your event meeting her needs? Where can you improve? How can you personalize it to her?

Let’s say Agency Angela is attending your event hoping to return with ideas on how her small agency can compete for clients in a crowded marketplace.
Think through the entire process for Angela:

**MESSAGING**
Engage her with messaging that responds to her concerns around competition and landing clients as a small business.

**CHANNELS**
As the owner of the agency, she’s most interested in hearing from luminary keynote speakers and education geared toward small businesses. She would also like to meet other agency owners similar to her to be able to pick their brains.

**EXPERIENCE**
Allow Agency Angela to customize her experience by holding VIP Q&A sessions with the keynote speakers, where she can receive tailored answers to her questions and concerns. Create a customized education track for small business owners and host a networking event for them to get to know each other and make valuable connections.

**RESULTS**
Angela was fairly impressed with programming and content. She discovered that there is also an education track for web developers, and web development is a new practice area for her agency. She decided to register herself and her two coders for the event next year to take advantage of the early bird discount.

**DATA**
Survey data proved that Agency Angela loved the VIP Q&A session and the networking opportunities. The small business owner track was given an average rating, with some sessions receiving very low engagement scores via second screen technology data.

**IMPROVEMENT**
Take a look at the session content that scored low. Consider all factors that could impact the low scores. For example, if the majority of the sessions were after lunch, could Angela have been catching up on emails from clients and employees? Perhaps providing this audience segment some additional time to take care of business would create a more enjoyable experience going forward. Of course, you always need to take a thorough look at the session content and speakers to determine if they were a fit for this audience segment. Adjust as needed.
One of the biggest benefits of proper audience segmentation and persona development is that you can now go straight to the source for answers to these critical questions. Because you know which of your attendees fall into each category, you can approach specific individuals and survey them. Use that information not only to fine-tune your personas, but also to make sure every aspect of your event is hitting the mark — bringing every element of your strategy full circle and creating a cycle of continuous event optimization.

"Know your audience" may sound like a marketing cliché, but it is one of the most powerful tools you can use to make your event marketing, and the experience itself, more effective and more efficient.

By understanding and identifying your audience segments and fleshing them out into individual personas, you'll be able to speak to the right people in the right way, resulting in maximized budget and a more engaged experience for every event you plan.
Your Turn: Audience Segmentation Worksheet
**Audience Group 1**
Select three or more ways you want to group your audience from the list below. Jot down the specific characteristics you seek on the blank line.

Demographics: Interests:  
Generational: Industry:  
Cultural: Life Stages:  
Geographic: Seasonal:  
Psychographic: Brand Affinity:  

Use the box below to make note of any specific communication preferences this audience has.

Jot down a few ideas around this segment's relationship to your event  
*ex: repeat attendee, non-attendee*

Name your audience  
*ex: Agency Angela*

Now it's time to get creative! Develop a narrative for this persona segment. Have fun with it!

**Audience Group 2**
Select three or more ways you want to group your audience from the list below. Jot down the specific characteristics you seek on the blank line.

Demographics: Interests:  
Generational: Industry:  
Cultural: Life Stages:  
Geographic: Seasonal:  
Psychographic: Brand Affinity:  

Use the box below to make note of any specific communication preferences this audience has.

Jot down a few ideas around this segment's relationship to your event  
*ex: repeat attendee, non-attendee*

Name your audience  
*ex: Agency Angela*

Now it's time to get creative! Develop a narrative for this persona segment. Have fun with it!

**Audience Group 3**
Select three or more ways you want to group your audience from the list below. Jot down the specific characteristics you seek on the blank line.

Demographics: Interests:  
Generational: Industry:  
Cultural: Life Stages:  
Geographic: Seasonal:  
Psychographic: Brand Affinity:  

Use the box below to make note of any specific communication preferences this audience has.

Jot down a few ideas around this segment's relationship to your event  
*ex: repeat attendee, non-attendee*

Name your audience  
*ex: Agency Angela*

Now it's time to get creative! Develop a narrative for this persona segment. Have fun with it!
Request a consultation to learn how audience segmentation can help grow your audience.

About Freeman
Freeman is the world’s leading brand experience company. We help our clients design, plan, and deliver immersive experiences for their most important audiences. Through comprehensive solutions including strategy, creative, logistics, digital solutions, and event technology, Freeman helps increase engagement and drive business results.