ENTHUSIASTIC ENDORSEMENTS FROM BOTH FOUNDERS OF THE NIELSEN NORMAN GROUP!

*Personas personified. The definitive word on why personas are better than people in guiding your designs. Filled with case histories, sidebars, and helpful, useful guidelines as well as deep, penetrating analyses. A big book, and for a reason. This book is unique in that it is truly for everyone: the practitioner, the researcher, and the teacher. Did I say this was essential reading? Well, it is: if you use personas, if you have thought about using them, but especially if you don’t even know what they are, this is the book for you.*

—Don Norman, Nielsen Norman group & Northwestern University; author of *Emotional Design*

*Personas are powerful design tools, which are that much more dangerous if they are grounded in weak methodology. Pruitt and Adlin show you how to do personas right and how to base them on real user data. Follow their advice or risk disaster.*

—Jakob Nielsen, Nielsen Norman group, author of *Usability Engineering*
THE PERSONA LIFECYCLE
THE
PERSONA LIFECYCLE

Keeping People in Mind Throughout Product Design

By
JOHN S. PRUITT
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AMSTERDAM • BOSTON • HEIDELBERG • LONDON
NEW YORK • OXFORD • PARIS • SAN DIEGO
SAN FRANCISCO • SINGAPORE • SYDNEY • TOKYO

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DEDICATION

For all the people brave enough to stand up in a room full of smart, powerful people and say, “This doesn’t make sense. Let’s try something new.”

And for all the smart, powerful people brave enough to listen.
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FOREWORD

I’m very pleased to see this book published. Not only is it an effective, useful, and thorough treatment of an exciting and relevant new interaction design tool, but it represents a clear recognition of the profound sea change that has swept through the software industry in the last few years. That change, of course, is the shift from post-facto testing as a means of improving software behavior to pre-facto design.

Through our Cooper U division, my company, Cooper, offers training in persona-based interaction design. At a recent session, a senior usability professional at a major software company—obviously apprehensive about directly questioning me—asked me why I “had changed my opinion regarding the effectiveness of usability.” What she was referring to was my tendency, a decade ago, to publicly describe traditional usability practices as ineffective and irrelevant, and my more recent stance of detent, or even outright enthusiasm for contemporary usability practitioners.

Although my questioner was bravely asking me a tough question—one that she clearly expected to generate some squirming and backpedaling on my part—the question provoked instead a relaxed smile. She was surprised, but not unhappy, to hear my answer. I replied that I had not changed my opinion at all but rather the practice of usability had changed. It no longer consists primarily of user testing of existing products, but instead now focuses on designing software before construction begins.

In effect, the practice of “usability” has transformed into the practice of “interaction design.” In doing so, usability has become far more effective and, as my interlocutor implied, my relationship
to it has changed. It is simply that from her point of view, it looks like I have moved rather than that an entire profession has shifted.

Arguably, what gave the profession the strongest nudge towards its new-found emphasis on design was Chapter Nine of my book, *The Inmates are Running the Asylum*, published in 1999. In that chapter I wrote for the first time about my invention: personas. I had already been using personas to great effect at my company for four years and had been using them in a primitive form for more than a decade before that.

It is immensely gratifying to see the influence one short chapter has had on the software business. The mere fact that personas have been so widely embraced shows just how extensive the pent-up desire was to make the change from merely evaluating software that programmers had designed to a more proactive stance of designing what those programmers should build.

In *The Inmates*, my intent was to write a manifesto for executives, exhorting them to gain control of their businesses by gaining control of the design of their software. It was never intended to be a how-to book of interaction design. The main purpose of describing personas in Chapter Nine was simply to show that my notions of interaction design were far more rigorous than the word “design” might conjure up in the mind of an exec whose only other exposure to the term was in the context of advertising.

Interaction design is a complex and difficult craft and requires good tools like any other. The popularity of personas has exploded because they are the foundational tool upon which the practice of interaction design rests. Interaction design is about making a particular group of humans effective at achieving a narrow set of goals. Because using personas is a remarkably powerful technique for bringing those humans and their objectives into focus, it becomes the most critical tool for designing the behavior of software.

In this volume, John Pruitt and Tamara Adlin give us the most complete description to date of what personas are, along with useful instructions on how to apply them. While other usability textbooks might devote a chapter to personas, this is the first one to give the topic the full attention it deserves. They unstintingly present the strengths and weaknesses of personas, along with detailed descriptions of how to introduce them to your organization, including particular emphasis on overcoming the wave of protest that is to be expected in any high-tech organization when non-programmers introduce a new idea.

Pruitt and Adlin also demonstrate their talent for unearthing real-world stories of how early adopters have applied personas. In this volume they gather together some of the most useful experiences from the field in applying personas, including voices of our most capable practitioners sharing their own wisdom gained in the heat of battle. These stories are presented as easily digestible sidebars scattered throughout the book.
Any usability professional will find this book indispensable, but you don’t have to be a software designer to benefit from its contents. Anybody whose work depends on software quality (and that’s about everyone these days) will find personas—and this book—a useful tool for improving the quality of your software and the success of your business.

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