

User Scenario / Persona: How detail-oriented people use information to buy personal technology

Summary

Kevin is a detail-oriented person. His process of buying personal technology takes significantly longer than average. However, he will end up persuading at least 5 other people to purchase what he did, which will have a distributed impact to even more people. The design strategy that will best accommodate Kevin's interaction style includes the following elements:

- An easy-to-find path that drills out of the marketing puffery to the facts
- Concise tables of key product attributes, preferably with comparisons to other similar models
- Bullets with the data points that differentiate this product from competitors
- Link to details about how much the product will cost to own
- Link to details about special rules and cases
- Customer service that is knowledgeable and offering facts without adding lots of peripheral comments
- Motivation to close the deal without seeming pushy
- Kevin's motto: "Give me quick access to relevant data points and I will decide"

User Scenario

Kevin is warehouse manager for a small publisher. He lives in Brooklyn with his wife and 4 children. Kevin pays attention to details in everything he does. He is meticulous in his research about purchases he plans to make. It takes Kevin a long time to finally decide what to buy, because he always feels like there's more information out there that could throw the balance in the other direction.

Once Kevin finally buys a product or service, the people around him seek his advice. They don't really want all the details. They just want Kevin to give them the bottom line.

Kevin's old PDA is starting to fail at inconvenient times. He has lost important data twice. He's considering the purchase of a combination PDA/cellphone.

As always, Kevin begins the purchase process by gathering data. He looks online for comparisons and ratings. He understands that his criteria may be different from those of the reviewers, so after he understands what the basic criteria of quality are, he writes down what he's looking for.

He wants something fairly small. It needs to be able to receive both company and personal email. He would rather that it receive email automatically rather than having to check it constantly. On the phone side, Kevin wants something that's a little upscale, so he can look more like a manager to the warehouse guys that work for him. Kevin doesn't write that criteria down, because it's not a rational data point in his comparison, but he'll know it when he sees it.

Kevin begins looking at the online buyer's guides. He gets an idea of his price range and the kinds of features he can expect to get for that price. He scans the articles for any kind of red flags that would make him not want a particular model. For example, he doesn't want a PDA that can't read common email attachments. After a few weeks of researching online, he's satisfied that he understands the range of models and features.

Because the PDA he is looking for is likely to do double duty as a phone, he checks the major cellphone carriers to determine which carrier supports the devices he's interested in. Some of the

carriers make him dig for this information. They offer lots of free models, with complex systems of rebates. But he tries to shove past all these promotions to find the real phones. He eventually gets the information he needs.

Kevin considers going into the retail stores of the carriers that have service for the phones he's interested in, but avoids it until he's sure of his top choice. He doesn't like going into those stores, because his experience is that they will not engage long enough for meaningful fact-finding. After a couple of questions, the salesperson realizes that this conversation is going to take a while, and leaves Kevin to go help another customer. This is a scenario that has been repeated many times in many types of stores. So, Kevin wants to get all the facts before setting foot in the store. He will however go to the store once his choices are narrowed down, in order to actually feel the product and get a sense of the overall "fit."

Next, Kevin checks the web sites of the companies who manufacture the PDA's Kevin is interested in. He is very put off by all the marketing puffery. He doesn't care what the person looks like who is holding the phone on the Home Page. He doesn't identify with them, and actually feels like they are put there to distract him from his main objective, which is making a logical choice based on his criteria. He is interested in rebates, but only pays attention to actual prices to get a general idea of the pricing tiers vs. feature sets that the manufacturer has built into its product mix.

Kevin digs around trying to find a matrix of data that he can download and save for future reference. He likes the kind of table that shows competitive products, although he knows the data points selected will be biased to the manufacturer who created the table. Still, they provide useful information. Kevin is annoyed when it takes a long time to find the details about his first choice. Kevin does find an important rebate, and it locks down his frontrunner choice.

Kevin finally goes into a retail outlet for the carrier he would need to switch to if he buys the phone he is leaning towards buying. It is as he expected: crowded. He listens in on the salespeople, so he can try to identify an expert that may be willing to spend a little extra time with him either confirming or negating what he has read about this model. The salesperson who finally helps him doesn't know nearly as much as Kevin does. That frustrates him. But he does get a chance to hold the device, and gets a feeling for what it will be like to type on the keyboard. Once Kevin is satisfied with the tactile feedback of the model, he leaves the store. The salesperson looks up and asks if he wants to buy it, and he says, "Not today, thanks."

Now he needs to get the details about phone plans so he can really figure out the best initial price and the monthly charges. Kevin returns to the cellphone carrier's site to get these details. He pays attention to how the minutes are counted, and what happens when he is in certain call areas. The details are sketchy, so he calls the 1-800 number. He is surprised by the customer service rep, who sounds very knowledgeable and gives him more detail than he asks for. He's decided now.

Kevin goes to a different store for the same carrier, hoping he will get someone who can confirm all of his data. He goes in the middle of the day, so that he can try to catch the manager. He does, the data all checks out, and he makes his purchase. On the way home he's excited, but he does feel some pangs of remorse. That was a lot of money he just committed to. Well, he did his homework, and what he ended up with will probably be at least as good as any other option out there.

About the Author

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About Usography

Usography is a design strategy firm located near Atlanta, Georgia (USA). Usography services include: design strategy workshops; user interface (UI) design requirements gathering; development of user scenarios and personas; information architecture (wireframes, site maps, interaction design, process maps); and usability assessments (heuristic evaluations, expert reviews, user testing) of prototypes and existing design work.