

CASE STUDY · RESEARCH PROGRAM

The Lifeway Customer Research System

*11 behavioral personas grounded in analytics, usability research,
and journey mapping — built to inform product, marketing, and sales.*

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11

personas built

8

behavioral archetypes

3 teams reached
UX · Marketing · Sales

The Problem

The situation at Lifeway

Lifeway serves a diverse faith-based customer base — pastors, ministry leaders, Sunday School teachers, volunteers, church administrators — each with distinct goals, behaviors, and barriers to purchase.

Product, marketing, and sales teams were all making decisions about this audience — but without a shared, research-grounded understanding of who the customers actually were or how they behaved.

There was no common user language. No behavioral data tied to segments. No framework teams could align around.

What we needed

- A research-grounded model of every major customer segment
- Behavioral data — not just demographic assumptions
- Actionable output reaching product, marketing, AND sales
- A system built to last, not a one-time deliverable

The research question: Who are Lifeway's customers, and how do they discover, evaluate, and purchase?

Research Foundation

These are not assumptions-based personas. Every segment is grounded in observed behavioral data triangulated with qualitative research.

1 Behavioral Analytics

On-site clickstream data, search term analysis, filter usage patterns, funnel analysis, and conversion pathway characteristics — broken down per segment.

*Search behavior · Filter combos ·
Conversion paths · Session patterns*

2 Usability Research

Moderated and unmoderated studies revealing how customers evaluate products, navigate the site, and make purchase decisions across each segment.

*Comprehension · Navigation · Decision
friction · Cart behavior*

3 Journey Mapping

Full 7-stage journey maps per persona — from need recognition through post-purchase — identifying friction points and opportunities at each stage.

*Need → Entry → Search → Evaluate →
Cart → Checkout → Post-purchase*

The System: 11 Personas

Adult Ministry Leader

Efficient Searcher

Efficient Searcher

Church Administrator

Strategic Influencer

Strategic Influencer

Discipleship Group Leader

Efficient Supporter

Efficient Supporter

Kids Ministry Leader

Efficient Searcher

Efficient Searcher

Men's Ministry Leader

Overwhelmed Browser

Overwhelmed
Browser

Pastor

Relational Minimalist

Relational Minimalist

Students Ministry Leader

Overwhelmed Relational Leader

Overwhelmed
Relational

Sunday School Teacher

Efficient Searcher

Efficient Searcher

Volunteer (Non-Staff)

Exploring Search Leader

Exploring Search

Women's Ministry Leader

Organized Browser

Organized Browser

Worship Ministry Leader

Strategic Influencer

Strategic Influencer

Anatomy of a Persona

Each of the 11 personas was built to the same standard — a complete research artifact, not a slide template.

Behavioral Archetype

A named behavioral pattern classifying how this segment discovers and selects products — cross-referenced across all 11 personas.

Motivations, Triggers & Barriers

Why they buy, what prompts a purchase cycle, what stops them from completing it — grounded in research, not assumptions.

Behavioral + Search Data

Observed on-site search terms, filter usage patterns, repeat search behavior, conversion pathway characteristics from analytics.

Demographics + Ministry Profile

Age, education, region, profession, primary ministry focus, top product need, confidence level, discovery channel preference.

Customer Journey Map

Full 7-stage journey (Need → Entry → Search → Evaluate → Cart → Checkout → Post-Purchase) with stage-specific friction points per persona.

Tri-Directional Recommendations

Tiered UX opportunities (High / Medium / Quick Win), Marketing recommendations, and Sales recommendations — one set per persona.

Persona Spotlight: The Pastor



"Show me what's included and let me preview it—then I can confidently recommend the right study."

Pastor

Relational Minimalist

Recommendation-led · Minimalist Selector · Full Decision Maker

Pastors in this segment use search as a primary discovery path and shop most often for Sunday School / discipleship resources. They are generally high-confidence decision makers, but hesitate when what's included and pricing are unclear.

AGE: 55 – 64

GENDER: Male

ETHNICITY: White

RESIDENCE: Midwest, Southeast, Southwest

EDUCATION: Bachelor's Degree

PROFESSION: Retired

PRIMARY MINISTRY FOCUS: Sunday School / Discipleship

OVERALL CONFIDENCE: High

TOP PRODUCT NEED: Bible Studies

BIGGEST OPPORTUNITY: More Detailed Product Previews

MOST IMPORTANT PRODUCT DETAIL: Sample Content

SHOPPING PAIN POINT: Hard to Know What's Included

PREFERRED DISCOVERY CHANNEL: Search Bar

WEBSITE PAIN POINT: Pricing Concerns



Devices



Browsers



Operating Systems

MOTIVATIONS

TRIGGERS

SHOPPING PAIN POINTS

WEBSITE PAIN POINTS

BARRIERS

Top Search Terms

"bible studies for life"
"vbs" · "gospel project"
"vbs 2025" · "magnified"

Biggest Friction

Unclear inclusions
Price uncertainty at
checkout
Low filter trust

#1 Opportunity

Prominent "What's
Included"
on product detail pages

Quick Win

At-a-glance PLP/PDP block:
Summary · Audience
Doctrinal cue · Sample

WHAT THE DATA SAID ACROSS ALL 11

Cross-Cutting Insights

Search is universal

The search bar was the #1 discovery channel across all 11 personas — even for segments expected to browse. On-site search is the product's most important interface.

Doctrinal alignment is non-negotiable

Across every segment, confirming doctrinal fit was the most important pre-purchase step. When this signal was absent or unclear, users stalled or exited.

"What's included" is a universal blocker

Every persona listed unclear inclusions as a top shopping pain point. What's in the kit, who it's for, and what format it comes in must be answered before users commit.

Pricing clarity blocks checkout, not price itself

Unclear whether pricing was per-person, per-kit, or digital vs. print caused hesitation even when users were ready to buy.

Tri-Directional Output

Most persona systems produce UX recommendations. This system produced three sets of recommendations per persona — one for each team it needed to reach.

PRODUCT & DESIGN

UX Opportunities

HIGH: Standardize 'What's Included' on PDPs

MEDIUM: Clarify doctrinal-fit cues on product pages

QUICK WIN: Add above-the-fold 'At a Glance' block (summary, audience, duration, sample link)

Example: Pastor persona

MARKETING

Marketing Recommendations

Lead with sample-first messaging to reduce evaluation friction

Build search-aligned landing pages matching top observed search terms

Merchandise Sunday School resources to match search + recommendation discovery patterns

Example: Pastor persona

SALES

Sales Recommendations

Reinforce trust signals that reduce friction: clear summaries, author/brand cues, doctrinal alignment, transparent pricing

Use preview-forward assets to support faster commitment decisions

Example: Pastor persona

Impact

11

personas built

8

behavioral archetypes

3

teams served
(UX · Marketing · Sales)

33+

tiered recommendations
per set of personas

What this system enabled

Organization-wide adoption

The persona system was shared with and used by product, UX, marketing, and sales teams — not siloed within the research function.

A shared user language

Teams across the organization gained a common vocabulary for talking about customers — grounded in research rather than assumption or instinct.

Faster, better-justified decisions

Product and design decisions could be evaluated against named, research-grounded segments — reducing debate and increasing confidence in recommendations.

A living research asset

The system was designed to be updated as new research accumulates, not treated as a one-time deliverable that ages out of use.

Reflection

What worked well

- Grounding every persona in observed behavioral data
- Triangulating quant (analytics) with qual (research) rather than relying on either alone
- Building tri-directional output so the system reached product, marketing, and sales simultaneously
- Using behavioral archetypes to surface patterns across segments, not just describe each one in isolation
- Designing to a consistent template so the system scales when new segments are added

What I'd do differently

- Involve cross-functional stakeholders earlier in defining what 'success' looks like for the system — not just in consuming it
- Build a lightweight validation process for each persona before finalizing — share drafts with internal experts who work closely with these customer segments
- Create a formal update cadence from the start. A research system that isn't maintained loses credibility. I'd build in a scheduled review at the outset.