

Breastcancer.org: Personas and Scenarios

Breastcancer.org is an online portal, the goal of which is to provide thorough trustworthy information for people who have questions about breast cancer. The audience of the website includes women diagnosed with breast cancer, their family members and friends, medical professionals, as well as women who would like to learn more about breast cancer but do not have personal involvement with the disease. In addition to providing factual clinical information, the website offers support to those who need it – visitors can join forum or chat online and get real-time feedback from people who share their problems and concerns.

The following personas cover three potential users of the website: a social worker who provides support to breast cancer patients, a breast cancer survivor, and a nurse who works with cancer patients in a county hospital.

Amanda Higgins

Amanda graduated from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign with a Master's degree in social work a year ago. She is a young energetic woman who is eager to help people around her. When she was little, her mother was diagnosed with breast cancer and had to have surgery as well as several rounds of chemotherapy. Amanda doesn't remember much of it, other than that her mom was really sick for a long time.



She took a class on public health during her Master's program and realized that she wanted to work with people coping with a serious illness. She was lucky enough to find a job with a non-profit support group for women diagnosed with breast cancer after she graduated. She loves her job, but since the organization is understaffed, she gets to wear a lot of different hats. Some of her responsibilities include counseling breast cancer patients in the local hospital and their family members throughout the course of the treatment, walking through different treatment options with women who were just diagnosed, developing awareness programs, managing volunteers and more.

Amanda does not have a medical background so she works closely with a nurse practitioner in the hospital who can answer most of her questions. However, when she needs to get specific answers quickly or just wants to learn more about a certain treatment, she often looks up information online – either on cancer.org or breastcancer.org.

Demographics:

- Female, 27 years old, not married.
- Has recently bought a two-bedroom house in the suburbs of Urbana-Champaign.
- Makes \$44,000 a year as a social worker for a non-profit.

Personal information:

- Health conscious – vegetarian, jogs every morning.
- Enjoys tennis and horse-riding, but doesn't have much time for it.
- Has been dating Jon Colbert, a guy from her class at UIUC, for the last two years.
- Keeps in touch with a lot of people from her class and tries to go out with the ones who are still around at least twice a month; emails and calls the ones who moved away.
- As a new home-owner, she loves to do work around her house.
- Tried to create a flower-bed in her front yard, but she doesn't have a green thumb.

Technology background:

- Had to use computers a lot when she was in school so she bought a laptop 2.5 years ago.
- Comfortable with Windows, office applications, email, and Internet; has cable connection at home and DSL at work.
- Has an older desktop in her office, which she uses sometimes for research, but she meets with people outside her office a lot and usually uses her laptop.
- Does not know how to fix computers when something breaks, and is impatient when she is having problems.

Colleen Curtis

Colleen is a lively 57-year old woman who calls herself a “happy old lady.” She’s been working as an administrator at the Computer Science department in Eastern Michigan University for the last 22 years. She is divorced, and her children have grown up and moved away. She visits them a few times a year since she loves to spend time with her grandkids.



Colleen lives alone, but is very social and often meets her friends for lunch or hosts potluck parties at her house. In her spare time she goes to the gym, works in her garden, and quilts. Winters are less exciting since she can’t garden, but she loves reading, and time flies fast when she has a good book and her favorite cat next to her.

Five years ago Colleen was diagnosed with breast cancer. She is a rational decision-maker, so instead of plunging into despair she contacted a reference librarian in the school library and asked for resources on breast cancer treatments. She also prepared a list of questions for her oncologist and talked to her friends who had breast cancer or took care of someone during the illness. Colleen was very determined to get through this tough period and get on with her life, and she has done that. She still looks for information on new treatments or long-term side effects from time to time; since she is fairly comfortable with computers and Internet, Colleen finds answers to her questions online.

Demographics:

- Female, 57 years old, divorced, has two adult children and three grandchildren.
- Has been living in Ann Arbor her whole life.
- Middle-class, but feels that she has all she needs.
- Works as an administrator at EMU.

Personal information:

- Goes to the gym and the pool regularly; considers herself healthy.
- Enjoys spending time with her friends.
- Diagnosed with breast cancer 5 years ago, had surgery, chemotherapy and radiation treatment.

Technology background:

- Has to use computer at work for day-to-day business; uses online systems to look up student information.
- Comfortable with many office applications.
- Has been using email and the Internet for the last 5 years – first, to answer students’ questions, then to buy books online, read news and more. Has dial-up at home which she mostly uses to email her children.

Tammy Jones

Tammy has been working at a hospital in Lexington, KY, for many years. She started as a receptionist, but then went to nursing school, got her R.N., and now she is an nurse manager at the oncology floor. She has to deal with very sick people every day, and she knows very well that they need support as much as they need information.

Tammy is a firm believer in patient education – people don't always get all their questions answered by the doctor, or they are so emotional that they don't remember what they've been told. A few years ago she decided to put together a brochure that addresses at least some of the questions that patients with breast cancer have. It's

a step in the right direction, but she says: "You can't ever do enough to educate people." A lot of patients in the hospital are very uneducated, and if she doesn't give them the information, they will never find it.



Work keeps Tammy busy, but she finds time to volunteer at her church – she participates in the Fall Festival, volunteer runs, and other events. Every so often Tammy and her husband Tom take a 2-hour drive to see their daughter and their 2-year-old granddaughter, Emily.

When Emily was born, Tom bought a digital camera because he wanted to take pictures of her. They got a desktop computer for Christmas a year before, but haven't used it much. Now Tom learned how to upload photos from the camera to the computer, and Tammy has been trying to figure out how to make posters and invitations for church events using Word. They don't use Internet much at home, but they do have dial-up connection because their daughter emails them photos every once in a while. At work Tammy took computer classes when the hospital introduced an online patient management system. She recently tried finding information online that she can use to update the materials she gives to the patients; however she is not sure how trust-worthy the websites she found are.

Demographics:

- Female, 52 years old, happily married to Tom, who works at an A/C installation company.
- Lives in suburbs of Lexington.
- Works as a nurse manager on the oncology floor at Lexington Memorial Hospital.

Personal information:

- Active in church.
- Likes to spend time with her daughter and grand-daughter.
- Allergic to cats, but adores their golden retriever.

Technology background:

- Took computer classes at work 3 years ago when the hospital switched to online patient management system. Feels confident when she performs familiar tasks.
- Tries to learn how to do more tasks on a computer, even when they are not work-related.
- Uses email to share digital photos with her daughter.
- Recently tried to find medical information online, but doesn't know if she can trust it.

Scenario I: Amanda Higgins

Scenario

Amanda spends Mondays in the hospital counseling women who were just diagnosed with breast cancer or are undergoing treatment. Her first patient today is Marissa, a 46-year-old mother of two, who just got the results of her biopsy back and found out that her tumor was malignant.

Marissa is overwhelmed with emotions – she doesn't know how to tell her family and friends about the cancer, how to make decisions about what type of surgery to go with, what treatment options to choose, and so on. She does not have family history of breast cancer, and none of her friends ever had cancer. She literally does not know where to turn.

Amanda first needs to calm Marissa down and explain to her that she's not the first woman to cope with this problem. She then needs to explain to her everything that the doctor has told her about the surgery, chemotherapy, and radiation therapy. She also wants to talk about potential side effects and quality of life during the treatments. Amanda thinks she is familiar enough with the treatment protocols that the oncologist suggested, but she wants to double-check the information and also to show Marissa where to find more resources if needed.

Needs

- Quickly double-check information on different types of surgery, radiation treatment, and chemotherapy.
- Find information on side-effects of chemo and radiation.
- Finding information should be easy so that Marissa could also do it later.

Feature

- “Treatment” section
- Forum
- Chat
- Dictionary

Behavior

Amanda has been using cancer.org a lot, but she recently discovered breastcancer.org and decided to give it a shot. She is somewhat familiar with the site so she goes straight to “Treatment” category and clicks on Surgery link within the text. From there she proceeds to pages about mastectomy and lumpectomy – she reads some of the information to Marissa, shows her the images that the website has, and answers her questions. She also shows Marissa the “Forum” and “Chat” features of the site – Marissa said she had a computer at home and knew how to access the Internet. She also reinforces the importance of considering the oncologist's advice very seriously.

Since a lot of information on the website sounds very clinical, and some words are unfamiliar to Marissa, Amanda points her to the “Celebrity Dictionary” feature.

Scenario II: Tammy Jones

Scenario

She has been thinking for a while about creating a new brochure for the patients that will answer the questions they have after the treatment is over. She knows that since many of them are uneducated, they won't go to a library or have access to computers. If she doesn't tell them what to expect and how to care for themselves, nobody will.

She has about half-an-hour before her shift is over and decides to go online and see if she can quickly print out some webpages with the information.

Needs

- Find and compile information on post-treatment period for the brochure that she will give out to the patients.
- Information needs to be comprehensive, trustworthy, but also basic enough for less educated people to be able to understand it.
- She does not have enough time to look for this information all over the web.

Feature

- “Recovery and renewal” section
- Dictionary
- “Staying informed” subsection

Behavior

Tammy googles “breast cancer post-treatment,” and breastcancer.org is the first result. However, it says “Sponsored link,” and she is not sure whether she can trust the information on the site. She decides to check it out anyway – she clicks on the link and ends up on “Treatment” page of the site. She looks around the site, reads over “Meet the Experts” section, and decides that the information looks good. She clicks “Recovery and renewal” and is amazed to see that all the information she wanted is there. She is especially interested in “Staying informed” subsection because she hasn't thought about it.

Tammy starts copying and pasting the text into a word document, but quickly realizes that it will take her forever – there's too much text, there are links within the text that she needs to get rid of, and there are quotes on the pages that get copied too. She wishes she could download all the main text at once, or, better, be able to download ready-made brochures or leaflets that she could print out and give to the patients. However, she can't figure out how to do that so she will have to come back when she has more time.