

SYNTHETIC AUDIENCE BUILDER CHECKLIST

From audience research to strategic insight. Use this working checklist to design, test, and evaluate synthetic audiences responsibly.

1. Define the Goal

- ☐ Name the business or communications decision to inform.
- ☐ Write the primary research question and assumptions to challenge.
- ☐ Include positive and negative emotional drivers: joy, belonging, pride, trust, frustration, uncertainty.
- ☐ Define what useful insights would change in your strategy.
- ☐ Decide whether simulation is appropriate or direct research is preferable.

Ask: What do we need to understand that we do not already know?

2. Identify and Segment Audiences

- ☐ List the stakeholders affected by the decision.
- ☐ Segment by meaningful experiences, attitudes, behaviors, and needs—not demographics alone.
- ☐ Include advocates, skeptics, and people with mixed feelings.
- ☐ Map what each segment values, hopes to gain, or fears losing.
- ☐ Prioritize the segments most consequential to the decision.

Ask: Are these segments evidence-based, or stereotypes?

3. Source Credible Evidence

- ☐ Gather interviews, focus groups, surveys, customer feedback, reviews, and documented responses.
- ☐ Consider public meetings, relevant interviews, podcasts, talk radio, and video when context and tone matter.
- ☐ Screen online conversations for bots, coordination, and selection bias.
- ☐ Check source recency, relevance, representativeness, permissions, and privacy.
- ☐ Record source provenance and gaps; do not assume online voices represent the whole audience.

Ask: Are we grounding the model in people's real experiences or our assumptions?

4. Build the Simulation

- ☐ Create a structured profile for each audience segment in an approved AI environment.
- ☐ Include supported values, motivations, language patterns, concerns, and sources of trust.
- ☐ Ground the profile in supplied evidence and label assumptions explicitly.
- ☐ Instruct the model not to automatically agree; require uncertainty when evidence is missing.
- ☐ Test consistency and check for invented details and stereotypes.

Ask: Does the result reflect evidence or just a convincing fictional character?

5. Design the Tests

- ☐ Create realistic product, policy, campaign, or reputation scenarios.
- ☐ Capture initial reactions before presenting leading prompts.
- ☐ Test what appeals, what confuses, what concerns, and what builds connection.
- ☐ Compare alternatives and segment-specific responses.
- ☐ Log the prompts, outputs, contradictions, and surprising hypotheses.

Ask: Are we exploring, or seeking approval for a preferred strategy?

6. Stress-Test and Refine

- ☐ Challenge agreeable or generic answers with counterarguments.
- ☐ Repeat tests with different phrasing and competing perspectives.
- ☐ Check whether responses remain consistent with the evidence.
- ☐ Flag stereotypes, unsupported claims, and invented motivations.
- ☐ Document revisions and retest rather than cherry-picking results.

Ask: What would make us reject the model's conclusions?

7. Validate Findings

- ☐ Separate observed research, simulated responses, and interpretation.
- ☐ Identify consequential claims needing real-world validation.
- ☐ Use interviews, surveys, experiments, or existing data to check key hypotheses.
- ☐ Do not treat synthetic responses as population estimates or proof of behavior.
- ☐ Require human review for recommendations affecting real stakeholders.

Ask: What evidence would we need before advising leadership?

8. Turn Insights into Action

- ☐ Summarize promising hypotheses and unresolved uncertainties.
- ☐ Identify messaging, engagement, or strategy changes worth investigating.
- ☐ Recommend follow-up research and human decision checkpoints.
- ☐ Update the simulation when relevant audience conditions change.
- ☐ Document what improved decision-making and what did not.

Ask: What will we do differently—and why?

Choose the right level of effort: Quick exploration (hypotheses only) → research-grounded simulation (documented sources and validation) → advanced program (specialized models, evaluation, updates).

Remember: Strategy before technology. Evidence before personas. Explore joy as well as resistance. Challenge agreement. Validate with real people.

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