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Disasters Neatly Averted – Dealing with “Day-in-the-Life” Demos

A colleague once cynically commented, in response to a request for a “day-in-the-life” demo, “Give me a week and I can show you a day-in-the-life...” Very clever, but still painful! Day-in-the-life demos are challenging, so here are some Great Demo! principles you can apply to increase your success rates.

A Task-in-the-Day (vs. a Day-in-the-Life)

Why do customers ask for a day-in-the-life demo experience? Two reasons, typically:

1. Reduce risk: They need to make sure that the vendor’s software will work with their people, processes and workflows (and their *perceived uniqueness* of their people, processes and workflows...).
2. Vendor expectations: vendors have been offering day-in-the-life demos since the first two rocks were pounded together to create COBOL. We, as vendors, have trained our customers to *expect* long, boring, painful day-in-the-life demos.

One way to begin to reduce the risk, complexity and torture of a day-in-the-life demo is to break it down into smaller segments: A Task in the Day. Here are some ideas that will help...

Basic Great Demo! Principles

First, if you have a mixed audience consisting (for example) of high-ranking executives, middle managers and staffers, DO NOT start with a day-in-the-life from the staffers’ perspective. Why? Execs will (quietly) walk out and middle managers will visualize your software as complicated.

Follow Great Demo! methodology and present to the execs first, then the managers – and *then* the staffers, after the higher-ranking folks are satisfied. (You can use the concept of “teasers” to let each group know what Good Things are in store for them as the overall meeting progresses.)

Next, Situation Slides and Illustrations very much still apply. Using a Situation Slide to confirm the customer’s situation (and desired gains and outcomes) is an excellent starting point for any day-in-the-life (or task-in-the-day) demo segment. Illustrations can and should be used to summarize and/or confirm the desired outcome(s) and deliverables from these workflows.

A Terrific Top Ten List

Now consider the following top ten ideas (OK, there are 11 – you get a bonus best practice, no charge):

0. Do the Last Thing First: Demos don’t need to be long, painful and boring. Do the Last Thing First and turn your traditional demo upside down.

Start by presenting the highest impact, most compelling screen relevant to the audience at hand, then “Peel Back the Layers” in accord with your audience’s depth level of interest. This will make your demos more engaging, more interactive, and *surprisingly* compelling.

1. Fewest number of clicks: ALWAYS applicable. Nobody wants their day-in-the-life to take a week! Apply personal discipline to show *only* what is required to complete the task.

Execute all demo pathways using the fewest number of clicks. Your objective is to make your offering appear as easy to use as possible (and not complicated). Each click and each additional option that is shown increases perceived complexity in the minds of the audience members.

2. Break things into “chunks”. Just as people take breaks throughout a workday, you should break the overall workflow up into logical chunks as well.

How long can an adult human pay attention before needing to be “refreshed” in some way? About 10 minutes. If you have a 2-hour demo meeting planned, you had better find ways to restructure it into (at minimum) 12 chunks. Each should have a clear beginning and a summary at the end.

3. Use a Roadmap/agenda to help manage the process, keep the audience (and you) organized, and to enable you to “chunk” with discrete beginnings and ends to tasks and subtasks.
4. Introduce the segment at the beginning; remember to summarize at the end.

Tell them what you are going to tell them; present the segment (tell them); summarize at the end (tell them what you just told them). The act of summarizing effectively closes a chunk and alerts the audience that it is their turn to ask questions, and acts as an audience “refresh”.

5. Avoid using “If”, “Or”, and “Also” – these words branch your demo and make it MUCH longer than it needs to be... Avoid “buying it back” by showing capabilities the customer doesn’t feel they need (or want to pay for).
6. Instead, let the audience ask, “Can it do xxx?” and “How do you do yyy?” Turn the demo into a conversation, vs. a firehose frantically flinging features and functions (frankly frightening)!
7. Use a Menu to prioritize chunks and portions of the workflow(s), when possible. No need to squander 50 minutes at the beginning with a segment that is of *least* interest to the audience.
8. When possible, take a lesson from Julia Child and show the end product (the fabulous roast turkey/beef/lamb/pork/tofu, ready to be carved) to get the audience’s juices flowing, then start the workflow and follow it for a few steps (get the roast into the oven) – and then jump towards the end to finish the workflow. You may not need to show all the intermediate steps (do you really want to watch a turkey roast for 6 hours?).
9. Mouse smooooooooooooothly and deliiiiiiiberately. Avoid Zippy Mouse Syndrome (unless you really want to make your software look confusing and complicated).
10. Let a member of the audience drive, under your guidance. This will help to prove ease-of-use and make the segment much more engaging...! (You might practice this ahead of time...)

Julia Child – What Can We Learn from Cooking Shows?

Julia Child brought French cooking dishes and methods into American households in the last century (1963-1973 or thereabouts) in her entertaining and educational cooking shows (see this [link](#) for an example). We can take away several clever ideas from cooking shows that can be applied to the wonderful world of demos.

Do the Last Thing First: Go find a recipe for Boeuf Bourguignon and DON'T look at the picture. Instead, read through the recipe instructions and try to decide if the recipe looks interesting. Then, look at the picture of the completed dish (try to avoid peeking...). Which approach is more compelling?

Cooking shows typically start by showing the completed dish, plated and ready to be served – beautifully delicious. They are showing us “what” the recipe will result in, to invite us to want to learn “how” it is done. The balance of the show takes us back to a (logical) beginning and then guides us through the steps to complete preparation and plating of that appealing, delicious dish.

We can apply the same idea to day-in-the-life demos through the use of Illustrations (the “wow!” or pay-off screens) to whet the audience’s appetite...

Prepare sub-segments ahead of time – and/or verbally describe them as opposed to showing the gory, intimate details of a long workflow. You never see the chef chop onions on-screen! Instead, all the ingredients have been prepared ahead of time (likely by some poor underling) and placed ready-to-use in bowls, etc. You can apply the same principle to many demo segments, similarly.

Warp time. Julie Child (and other cooking show chefs) use two ovens or pots (and two instances of the recipe) to warp time. Prepare the dish, using the pre-prepped ingredients, and show starting the cooking process. Then move to the nearly done instance, finish it, plate and enjoy!

Plate your dish elegantly. In nice restaurants, a dish is plated carefully, to make it look as delicious and appetizing as possible – and the waiter “sells” it when he presents it to the customer. “Madame, here you have your free-range, organic, macro-chaotic, non-EIEIO young salad greens; they were grown in our own special garden, nurtured daily with lute music and gentle leaf massages; tenderly and lovingly selected, picked, washed in pure Tahitian rain-water... Enjoy!”

The waiter is making the dish look as delicious as possible – we can (and should) similarly “sell” the key screens and deliverables (the Illustrations) from our software to make them look as appealing and valuable as possible. Yum!

I hope these tips help you turn an otherwise traditional, long, boring, and painful day-in-the-life demo into a click-and-you’re-done delight – bon appétit!

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