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Why Should a Demo Be Like a News Article?

Pick up this morning's newspaper or scan today's web news and consider two things:

1. How you select which articles to read
2. How the articles are written

News organizations have been presenting information for several hundreds of years, in print and now via the web, and they have learned some highly effective practices that we can employ in demonstrating software.

Consider organizing your demonstrations like a news article. Here's why:

Imagine you've just picked up today's newspaper. What section do you turn to first? In many cases, people immediately select the sports section, or finance, or entertainment. Readers explore that section is as much depth as desired, then turn to the next section of interest.

Newspapers (and news websites) organize information in a *hierarchy of consumable components* – components that can be accessed rapidly, explored as deeply as desired, and the exited at any point to move to the next component. The top level of the news hierarchy is the section – sports, finance, international, entertainment, comics…

Next, how do you choose which article you want to read? Typically, you scan for headlines that catch your interest. For many articles, you may only read the headline and move on rapidly – you're not interested in the topic. Other articles engage your attention sufficiently to review the first few paragraphs, after which you stop and move on. Some articles you read all the way through, because they address a topic of real interest to you.

Each individual article is cleverly organized to enable readers to make rapid decisions about their depth of interest. The headline presents the topic – providing a binary opportunity for readers to pursue it or move on. The first one or two paragraphs of the article summarize the story, concisely. Many readers are completely satisfied with this level of information and read no further, returning to scan other headlines.

The subsequent paragraphs drill deeper and explore the story in more detail. Readers who are truly interested in the topic are the typical consumers of this level of information.

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This organization and presentation of information is sometimes referred to as the "inverted pyramid" style of writing. It presents the most important information right at the beginning, in the first few paragraphs. Material in subsequent paragraphs is more and more detailed and of less importance.

In the bad old days of paper and ink, newspaper editors were able to cut articles to fit the space available – by cutting from the bottom of the article upwards. That way they knew they'd be removing the *least* important information.

News organizations have evolved this "inverted pyramid" method of presenting information over literally hundreds of years. Why not take advantage of this learning?

Consider organizing your demonstrations like a news article. Present a "headline" succinctly and rapidly. In Great Demo! methodology we call this an Illustration.

Assuming your audience is interested, present the key capabilities using a minimum of mouse clicks – like reading the first one or two paragraphs in a news article. The audience just wants a summary at this point – not all of the details! This corresponds to the Great Demo! "Do It" pathway.

Finally, for audiences that are really interested, you can dig deeper and explore the breadth and depth of the relevant capabilities – similar to those who wish to read more of the article. In Great Demo! we call this "Do It Again" or "Peel Back the Layers".

Interestingly, also note that there are *very* few readers of the news who read *everything* in a newspaper or news website – similarly, you are *not* obligated to present everything that your software can do...!

News organizations present information in a hierarchy of consumable components – why not apply the same ideas to your demos?

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