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Surprisingly Delectable Demos – Delightful Dining Analogies

What could we possibly learn from the realm of restaurants and food that we can apply to the wonderful world of demos? Much more than that one might guess!

Restaurants are all about Vision Generation – and tasting is Technical Proof...

From the moment we enter an elegant restaurant to when we pay the check at the end of a marvelous meal we are engaged in a surprising number of procedures and processes – all designed to heighten our dining experience and to generate incremental revenue for the restaurant.

Here are a few examples to whet your appetite...

Preparation, Preparation, Preparation

The restaurant opens. The first wave of diners arrives and is seated. Intriguing scents are in the air: freshly baked bread, garlic, herbs, spices, butter, and a wonderful aroma of umami pervades throughout. Appetites rise in anticipation.

The kitchen is prepared; ingredients have been shopped for and purchased, sauces simmered, soups thickened, fruits peeled, spices crushed, vegetables carefully trimmed and cut, racks roasted, brisket braised, fish filleted, and garnishes readied.

So, too, the dining room is prepared; linen laid out, napkins neatly creased, tableware aligned, glasses inspected, candles lit, and tonight's "specials" menus have been printed.

Most importantly, the staff met, before the doors opened, to review the plan for the evening. Any new dishes or wines? Everyone clear on the descriptions of the menu offerings? What is the flow of reservations this evening? Any expected theatre-goers or others with time constraints? Any particularly important guests or reviewers expected? What should we push and promote tonight? Any issues or problems?

Restaurateurs work all day to prepare for their lunch and dinner customers. As much as possible has been prepared and is in place before the doors open – and plans are readied to handle expected challenges: "Sorry to say we had a run on the swordfish and we just served the last plate, but the sturgeon is fabulous and frankly is my favorite...!"

Similarly, Great Demos are all about preparation. Doing sufficient Discovery, preparing (and testing) the infrastructure, discussing and generating Situation Slides and Illustrations,

organizing the “chunks” and choreography, agreeing on what *will* be shown and what will *not* be presented – all should be complete before the demo is scheduled to begin.

Imagine sitting down at a restaurant, ordering the trout with hollandaise sauce and being told, “It’ll just be a few minutes: the chef is out in the stream angling for your trout and the chickens are being urged to hurry it up with the eggs....!”

First Impressions

As customers, our first impressions are critical when we arrive and are seated. We notice the fresh flowers and lit candle on the table, the feel of the linens, the ambiance. We even note, perhaps unconsciously, the difference between menus already piled on the table vs. being presented an opened menu by the waiter personally.

Fresh water is poured (with a hint of lemon), warm bread and butter follow, and we are already enjoying the experience as we peruse our menus and explore the wine list.

Similar first impressions are (clearly) equally important at the start of demo meetings. If taking place at your offices or Executive Briefing Center, the meeting room should be prepared for the customers’ arrival: white-boards clean, cabling organized, lighting, projector and screen set up, refreshments prepared, etc. As in a restaurant, details make a difference!

When meetings takes place at the customers’ sites, arrive sufficiently early to clean, organize and prepare *their* conference rooms!

The Menu

Have you ever been in a situation where:

- a. You find yourself in front of an audience about which you know nothing of their needs or interests – and they’ve been promised a demo...
- b. You are asked to join a web session, right now, and the sales person says, “They asked to see a demo...” (Again, you have zero information about the customer...)
- c. Someone walks up to you at a trade-show booth and says, “What do you guys do?” or “Show me a demo...”

Are you interested in a delightful self-rescue technique for situations like these? It’s called The Menu Approach – and it is a logical, simple and surprisingly effective method for dealing with situations where your audience is partly or largely undiscovered.

Imagine walking into a nice restaurant – and you are quite hungry. You sit down and a few moments later the waiter comes up to you and asks, “What would you like to eat tonight?”

You have no idea what they offer, so you respond, “What do you have?” The waiter says, “Well, we have an extensive set of offerings – appetizers, main dishes, side dishes, desserts – what would you like?”

Very frustrating (and what a wonderful analogy)...! Both of you are making no progress – and it is very much the same situation as requests for demos where neither party has a clear idea of the other’s desires or capabilities.

A solution? Back in our restaurant, the waiter says, “Here, let me get you a menu...”

The menu provides a rapid method for the customer to assess what is *possible* – and to select what is most *desirable*. A menu presents a high-level listing of the range of offerings – and we can apply the same principle to the wonderful world of demos. [See the article entitled *The Menu Approach – A Truly Terrific Demo Self-Rescue Technique* on our website at www.SecondDerivative.com/Articles.html for further details on applying this terrific tool.]

In demos, the Menu Approach offers an additional advantage: it (by definition) enables you to control what content can be explored. With a restaurant menu, the range of offerings is typically limited to what is on the menu. This keeps diners “on track” with respect to what the kitchen can prepare and serve. The Great Demo! Menu Approach provides that same control when presenting topics to your audience.

The Wine Menu

“What wine would you recommend...?”

You *know* you are being played when you ask for a wine recommendation to go with your lamb and the waiter immediately suggests the most expensive bottle on the list. Interestingly, many diners head for the shallower waters and choose one of the low price options. Our waiter has failed in this upsell opportunity.

On the other hand, the *savvy* steward offers three recommendations: one at the low end (a modest but earnestly appealing Pinot), a mid-range selection (an attractive Gigondas), and a spectacular Chateau Neuf de Pape (located just across the river from Gigondas, but commanding much higher prices).

Which wine will most people choose? Typically, it is the middle option that is often selected – representing an upsell from what the customer might have originally contemplated spending.

Customers dislike being perceived as “cheap”, both in restaurants and in selecting software. The seasoned sales person presents three similar options when preparing proposals and providing pricing information to prospects...!

“Would you like to try it first?”

Wines, in particular, and beer, to a lesser degree, can be puzzling for many restaurant patrons. We are presented with a wine list that may include dozens of choices – a few we may know; most we likely have never experienced.

We ask the waiter, “What would you recommend with my rack of lamb?” He replies, “Well, a Côte du Rhone is a good choice, a big California Pinot Noir works well, and some of the Aussie Shiraz can be a very good fit...”

But (for many of us) we still lack sufficient data to make an informed decision. In cases where wine is offered by-the-glass (and generally for any draft beer), the wise waiter asks, “Would you like to try a taste?”

95% of the time the customer purchases a glass or bottle of that wine. World’s Best Demo!

A Pause Between Courses

Your waiter has taken your order – appetizer, salad, soup and main course – and you are looking forward to your meal with great anticipation. Ahh, here comes the appetizer and it looks terrific!

Two minutes later the soup arrives, followed swiftly by your salad. You are now a bit confused, trying to decide which to address. Moments later your Beef Bourguignon is presented. Holy cow (no pun intended), the table is packed with dishes and you are overwhelmed. Too much, too fast – you need a break between courses.

Traditional demos suffer from a similar lack of breaks – they are often presented as a constant stream of features and functions flung without a pause or breath of air: “And the *next* really cool thing I want to show you is...”

Like a well-paced meal, Great Demos break up demos into manageable bites – consumable components – that can be introduced and explored in as much depth as the customer has interest.

Appetizers

Appetizers are the *essence* of Vision Generation: often beautiful, intensively appealing, and a portion that is *just* enough to stimulate the appetite further. They provide brief, savory satisfaction without overwhelming and set the stage for the courses that follow.

Great Vision Generation demos follow the same idea: carefully crafted, not too long, *just* enough to pique your customers’ interest. In Great Demo! methodology a beautifully executed Vision Generation demo might last 4-6 minutes and consist of an abbreviated Situation Slide, Illustration, and Do It pathway. Delicious!

Does It Look Good?

Ah... Here comes the main course. We watch the waiter place it carefully in front of us, rotating the plate to a precise presentation position. Fascinating – we can learn two intriguing ideas from this...

First: When we are served a plate of food in a restaurant, we typically assess three things, in the following order:

1. Does it *look* good?
2. Does it *smell* appetizing?
3. How does it *taste*?

Interestingly, as customers, we (often unconsciously) make a very similar assessment when presented with a software screen in a demo: Does it *look* good?

If an initial software screen looks confusing or complicated, we reject it right away (“yuck”) and the balance of the demo will be battling this first impression.

Conversely, if the screen appears to be clear, compelling and logical (“yummy”), we are open to exploring further and (in a virtual sense) “tasting” the software.

This suggests that we should work to make our Illustrations and end deliverables *appear* to be as appetizing as possible!

Interestingly, a number of Great Demo! practitioners have commented that the equivalent of “Does it smell good” is the perception of ease of use... It has been suggested that the number of clicks or taps required to complete a task is the software measurement equivalent of “does it smell good...” The “Do It” pathway is, therefore, one possible indication of whether the software is perceived as easy to use (and thus smells terrific!) – too many clicks, on the other hand, and it stinks!

[Meanwhile, I eagerly await the advent of apps and software that provide real-time smell and odor capabilities... Don’t you?]

Second: Remember that our waiter carefully positioned the plate in front of us – presentation is key to helping it look as attractive as possible. Garnish, sauce dots and lines, vertical structures – these all combine to make the food look as interesting and appetizing as it can. But the plate doesn’t have to do all the work on its own: the waiter’s presentation (delivery with a white folded napkin in hand, followed by careful rotation to *just* the perfect angle in front of the customer and the verbal summary of dish...) – all conspire to increase the allure!

Similarly, in software demos, you can bias customer perceptions of the appearance of your software by drawing their attention directly to the key elements on the screen, supported through the use of props, examples and engaging stories.

The Desert Platter

The Menu Approach is a terrific tool to help customers understand what is possible and to choose what seems most interesting – but can we do better? Certainly...!

Which restaurant will sell more desserts: the one that presents diners with the dessert menu, after the main course is finished, or the establishment that has the waiter bring the tray of mouth-watering, irresistible desserts presented with a one-by-one exploration of the delights of each offering?

Tough guess, huh?

Think about it. Restaurants have learned is that the visual combined with the *verbal delivery* describing an offering can make critical differences in perception (and purchase) by customers.

The same principles apply to demos and especially when presenting Illustrations of end results. If a vendor simply shows a screen and says, “So, what do you think?” that vendor is letting the customer come to his or her own conclusions – the customer may not understand the significance of what is being displayed.

On the other hand, pointing specifically to the key elements on the screen while verbally providing commentary designed to underscore the importance and value of those elements – well, that is what our more skilled waiter is doing with the dessert tray (and the augmented bill yields correspondingly larger tips).

Adding Some Bias

Our waiter in the above example does something else that we can learn from and apply to demos. The next time you are in an elegant restaurant and you have the opportunity (and pleasure) to explore the daily specials or the waiter-presented dessert tray, listen carefully to what he or she says.

For example, does the waiter describe all of the dishes equally? Typically not! This one is identified as “the most popular” and that one is his “personal favorite”. He is skillfully biasing your choice towards certain offerings, based (hopefully) on his personal experience or (unfortunately) what the kitchen needs to move that evening...

The end result, generally, is that those dishes and desserts that receive the most positive bias from the waiter will be sold in higher quantities. How might we apply this to demos?

The very same way! When presenting a set of choices (when using a Menu, for example), we can bias audience interest towards any particular item by suggesting a stronger positive angle – or cause other items to sink in ranking by down-playing their importance.

Japanese Restaurant Food Models

Imagine that you are in Japan, on business, and you decide to head out of the hotel for dinner. You walk down the street and all you see is signage in Japanese (let’s assume you don’t speak or read Japanese). What do you do?

Fortunately, many Japanese restaurants have front windows that display a range of delectable offerings on shelves – noodle dishes, soups, fried items – enabling you to quickly decide what looks most appetizing to you. To order, you don't need to know the name of the item or find it on a Japanese text-only menu, you can simply take your waiter to the front window and point – what a delight, as you are really hungry!

A closer look at the dishes in the window shows, however, that they are not real – they are carefully crafted plastic models of individual dishes (which affords great expiration dating, by the way: “Best used by 2815...”).

These models are excellent examples of Great Demo! Illustrations – showing the end result. In this case, the end result is an excellent (plastic) representation of the dish, enabling customers to quickly scan what is possible and choose which item looks most palatable.

Cookbooks – and Pictures

You are paging through a new cookbook, trying to get ideas for an upcoming important meal. Which recipes do you tend to explore – those that are limited to text descriptions or those that also include a photo of the finished dish?

Cookbook publishers know that most readers prefer cookbooks with photos of the finished product. The pictures help readers gain a rapid understanding of what the completed recipe should look like – if it *looks* appetizing, it has a higher likelihood of being pursued.

Not surprisingly, pictures of the completed, plated, presented dish can tell us a great deal:

- What should it look like?
- Does it *look* appetizing?
- What are major ingredients?
- What is the mode of preparation?
- How should it be presented?
- What beverages does it pair well with?
- What are the complementary side dishes?

One picture of a completed dish is easily worth 1000 words of text description – which suggests that one good Illustration of your software should be worth... (wait for it...) 1000 clicks!

What can we learn from the restaurants that we can apply to the wonderful world of demos? Clearly, a veritable buffet of ideas – *bon appétit!*

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