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Vision Generation Demos - The Crisp Cure for Stunningly Awful Harbor Tours

What is a Vision Generation demo? It is *just enough* demo to generate a vision in the customer's mind that a solution to a business challenge is *possible* – and to enable a Discovery conversation to take place.

A Vision Generation demo should only take a *few* minutes – and may consist entirely of one or two well-chosen screens or screen-shots ("Illustrations" for you Great Demo! practitioners…). Let's explore…

Many software vendors have two types of demos:

1. Overview
2. Deep Dive

Both types, when delivered in the absence of sufficient Discovery information, can lead to stunningly awful results. Generally speaking, "Deep Dive" demos are delivered after a reasonable amount of Discovery has been completed. Most overview demos, however, are inflicted with little or no Discovery information in place (and qualification questions alone are *not* sufficient!).

As a result, overview demos have a range of (customer-generated) names, including:

- Show-up and throw-up
- Spray and pray
- Tech splatter
- The IKEA demo
- Living in the Land of Hope
- Whisky-Tango-Foxtrot, and, of course,
- The Harbor Tour

These painful demos often last 30, 45, or 60 minutes – or even longer. I've heard vendors say, "We couldn't possibly do an overview of the system in less than 2 hours…"

Customer recipients during and after these demos are often heard to mutter phrases such as:

"Where is this going?"
"OMG-when-will-this-end?"
"Kill me now…"
"That's an hour I'll never get back…"
"What was the point?"
"Who invited those guys in here?"

Equally bad, vendors know that they are wasting time delivering overview demos that go nowhere… (Not to mention potentially huge travel and opportunity costs, so I won't). What if you could reduce your traditional overview demos from 1 hour down to a few crisp minutes? What could you use that time for, instead?

Clearly, the best solution is to complete sufficient Discovery prior to any substantive demo. However, many customers are either unwilling or unable to provide Discovery information in the absence of a demo. They may even say, “Just show me an overview and I’ll let you know if anything looks interesting…”

How do we solve this conundrum?

One Guideline and Two Ideas

First, consider the following "rule": no demo shall last longer than 4 minutes without receiving sufficient Discovery information. Note that "receiving sufficient Discovery information" can take place during or immediately after those 4 minutes of demo... Think in terms of *quid pro quo* – if I show you something (a brief demo), I expect something in return (some Discovery information).

Second, contemplate the idea of Vision Generation demos: JUST ENOUGH demo to enable a Discovery conversation to take place. In Great Demo! methodology, a Vision Generation demo might include an example Situation Slide ("Here's how we helped other ______ [job title] in _____ [industry]...") followed by a compelling Illustration or two. Total time? About 4 minutes or less...

This highly successful approach is based on reference selling, gently borrowed from a range of sales methodologies (including Challenger, Solution Selling, CustomerCentric Selling, Sandler, SPIN, Miller Heiman, Value, TAS, etc.), and applied specifically when you’ve been asked to present an overview demo. It goes like this:

A customer arranged a demo meeting with you, but has not (yet) agreed to a Discovery conversation. His expectation is that you’ll deliver some kind of “overview” demo… What you know so far is that he is the VP of Sales of a mid-size software company (and you sell sales automation software tools).

You say, “I’m glad we are able to invest this time together today. Before we get into a demo, let me share how we’ve helped *other* VP’s of Sales at similar-sized software organizations address some of their business challenges…” You then present the following slide in PowerPoint:

Situation

Job Title/Industry:	VP Sales, Mid-size Software
Critical Business Issue:	Achieving/exceeding quarterly and annual quota
Problems/Reasons:	Poor insight into pipeline/forecast
Specific Capabilities:	Rapid view of actuals, status, problems
Delta/Value:	$2M incremental revenue

You note that “VP’s of Sales at other, similar software companies shared their concerns about making their quarterly and annual numbers. They said what was holding them back is that they had little or no visibility into their current forecast and pipeline going forward. They said it took way too much time and effort to determine which sales projects were solid, which were at risk, and where there were holes or gaps in their pipelines. They often had to go back and forth with IT, who would run searches on their behalf, but the results were often not what they needed, requiring several iterations of the process – and errors and miscommunication often took place. The result was that it was very difficult to coach the sales team properly and they were often at risk of missing their quarterly numbers.”

You continue, “They said they were looking for some way to access the full forecast and pipeline information, see exactly which deals were in good shape and which needed assistance, and understand exactly where the forward-looking pipeline was strong and where there were gaps. They said they wanted to get this information in a dashboard or similar vehicle that they themselves could query and drill down for details, without any need for IT.”

You explain, “We provided those capabilities – and our customers report that they’ve been able to generate 1-3 million dollars in incremental revenue and redeploy several full-time-equivalents in sales and sales operations to other, more productive tasks.”

You then ask, “How does this compare with *your* situation?”

There are three possible answers from your customer [Quiz – before reading on: what are they?]:

1. “I have that same situation…”
2. “I have a similar situation…”
3. “My situation is different…”

After your customer’s response, you ask, “Tell me about your specific situation…”

Customer says (for example), “Oh, well, I am under pressure to make my numbers – that’s consistent. However, we have pretty good pipeline management capabilities today, but I do have a number of sales people who either sandbag [under-forecast] or who have Happy Ears [over-forecast] and both of these groups need coaching. Right now I don’t have good insight into their projects – our current system doesn’t support this…”

You ask (as you begin to take notes), “What are you using today…?”

What has just taken place? You and your customer have just entered into a Discovery conversation – which is *exactly* what you want. Delightful!

Discovery, Then Demo, Then Discovery…

In the scenario above, it is likely that you continue the Discovery conversation for some time – and you may get to the point where you’ve now learned enough to provide a more substantive, focused demo.

In the spirit of *quid pro quo* it may be your turn to provide information – and a short, focused demo segment based on what you've learned so far may be very reasonable. After that, back to Discovery…

Here's a quick road-map of the process so far:

- Vision Generation Demo (≤4 minutes)
- "How does this compare with your situation?"
- Discovery questions and conversation – 10, 20 or 30 minutes – as long as is comfortable
- Brief focused demo (brief Technical Proof demo, in Great Demo! methodology vocabulary)
- More Discovery questions and conversation
- Another brief focused demo segment, if appropriate
- Repeat as needed…

Your objective is to gain a clear and complete understanding of your customer's situation – partly so that you can put together and deliver a more substantive focused (Technical Proof) demo, if needed – and partly so that your *customer* is comfortable that you have a sufficient understanding of their situation.

Discovery is done partly for you, the vendor – and partly (largely!) for the sake of the customer. Customers are typically unwilling to accept a solution if they feel the vendor has an insufficient understanding of what they believe is their unique, specific situation.

One Guideline and *Two* Ideas?

For those of you who were paying attention and counting, you'll note that I promised one guideline and two ideas – it looks like I owe you one more idea, so…

The Vision Generation demo described above assumes that you have a reasonable understanding of your customer's top challenges before the meeting. However, what if you *don't* have a good idea of your customer's main problem areas?

Consider using the Menu Approach to identify customer challenges and topics of main interest. (The Menu Approach article on my website at www.SecondDerivative.com/Articles.html describes how to put this into practice in detail – you can browse for it or simply send me an email and I'll send you the article.)

The Menu Approach presents the customer with a list of high-probability topics of interest – and invites the customer to choose which topic(s) are of most interest to them. You can then transition to a corresponding Situation Slide and use an appropriate Illustration or two for each topic – delightful!

Note that the Menu Approach can be applied on-the-fly during the meeting – or you can send a Menu of topics (with brief textual description of each topic) to your customer ahead of time and ask them to rank the topics in terms of importance to them: "High", "Medium", or "Low" – and send the list back to you.

This “self-Discovery” exercise enables you to target the “High” importance topics for crisp Vision Generation demos and to drive the Discovery conversation in accord with what is perceived as most important by the customer.

But Wait: There’s More

Finally, here are a few additional ideas you may find useful – or at least amusing!

A colleague of mine, when asked to “just show us an overview demo” by his customers, responds, “I’d be happy to – our overview demo takes about 2 hours for each product – and we have a pile of products. When would you like to schedule this?”

When receiving the same request (“just show me an overview”), another colleague tells the customer, “Oh, do you *really* want me to show-up-and-throw-up? Spray-and-pray? Take you on a tour of an Ikea? You really *want* a Harbor Tour demo?” After the laughter dies away, he says, “I can either torture you for a few hours of overview demo – or we can invest a few minutes of discussion to focus in on what you want. Your choice…!”

Another Great Demo! practitioner described the “Serial Serving” analogy. He told the customer, “Well, asking me to do an overview demo is like asking me as a waiter in a nice restaurant to just start bringing dishes of food to your table – and let me know when you get something you like… *Or*, I can show you a menu of what we offer, so that you can see what is possible for your meal and then *choose* what is most interesting to you!”

Vision Generation – An Encrispened Demo

A Vision Generation demo is designed to provide the customer with *just enough* demo for the customer to be willing to invest more time with you. Four minutes of Vision Generation may be all that is needed to start a substantive conversation.

Just think: if you are able to reduce your traditional overview demos from 1 hour down to 4 minutes, what delightful (and more productive) activities could you use that time for?

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