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The Great Demo! Top Ten List

Here are ten steps you can take to improve the success rate for your demos:

1. Be clear on the Objective for the demonstration.

Why are you doing the demo? Is it Technical Proof or Vision Generation; or is it "Spray and Pray"? Hope is not a strategy! You must know what you want to accomplish before you begin and plan your meeting with that objective in mind.

2. Be clear on your Customer's Needs.

What are the Critical Business Issues, Key Problems, or Objectives your customer wants to address? Incredible as it may seem, your customer may not be as in love with your software as you are! They simply want to solve their business issues. If you don't know your customer's business issues, then you may need to freeze your hand on your mouse and start asking questions before launching into a demo.

3.   Reconfirm the Meeting Objective and Time Constraints at the start of the meeting.

This apparent courtesy serves to manage surprises and help you stay in alignment with your customer. How many times have you started a demo only to learn that you have only half the time you thought you had? How often has the customer brought a larger group of people of see the demo than you expected? Investing a few minutes at the beginning of the meeting to reconfirm the time constrains and review the customer's objectives can help you "rescue" a meeting otherwise headed for disaster!

4. Show the "What" first, then follow with the "How".

Illustrate what good things your offering will do to help the customer address their key issues as the first thing in the demo. Once they see that your offering can potentially help them, then you can reveal how the capabilities in your offering accomplish this. If you spend 30 or 40 minutes telling a story to get to a final "pay-off" screen, you may find your audience has "checked-out" – and that the key people have left before you reached the big benefit message. Instead, show them right up-front what business problems your tools will help your customer address. Your customer will become engaged right away and will drive the demo forward.

5. Show only the Specific Capabilities needed to address the customer's problems.

This is not product training; it is a critical step in the sales process. Don't show all of the file types you can open, nor all of the various search options, or formatting choices. Stick with the directly relevant facts. You can lose business by showing too much or taking too long. Sales have been lost because "the software looked too complicated" in the eyes of the customer.

6. Reveal your capabilities in layers, in accord with the customer's level of interest.

First, show the route to achieve the desired result with the fewest number of mouse clicks (the "Do It" pathway). This proves your capabilities and helps build a vision in your customer's minds: they can visualize themselves using your software. Then, as your customer asks questions, you can drive deeper to show more relevant breadth of the Specific Capabilities desired (the "Peel Back the Layers" pathways). Note that the highest-ranking audience members may only need to see the "Do It" to be convinced.

7. Manage Questions.

Answer Great Questions right away as they move your demo forward and underscore the value your tools provide. Address Good Questions, however, at the end of the demo. Don't let Good Questions or Hostile Questions drive you off track. Queue them up using a "Not Now" list or "Parking Lot" and address them during a Q&A session. Good questions represent one of the greatest risks to an otherwise well-prepared demonstration.

8. Manage Bugs.

The likelihood of a bug appearing is directly proportional to the importance of the demonstration…! Ignore Cosmetic Bugs; it is highly likely that the customer never saw them – so don't call them out! For Serious Bugs, don't repeat them! Don't go back and "try it again", as they will likely repeat! Instead, acknowledge the bug and move beyond it, describing what the audience should have seen. If appropriate or needed, you can try going back to show the capability later. Deal with crashes the same way.

9. Manage your Delivery.

Stay in alignment with your audience's level, interests, and vocabulary. Map your pace and language according to locale, technical acumen, etc. Avoid colloquialisms when out of the country (or in certain parts of the U.S!). Be human and inject humor as appropriate; be as passionate, compelling and remarkable as possible!

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10. Manage your Infrastructure.

Ensure that your equipment, software, and materials are ready to go before you demo. Ensure that anything you need from the customer is ready similarly. You only need to forget an item once…!

Follow these "Top Ten" guidelines to increase the likelihood of achieving your goals with your demos. When you do these ten simple things, you should expect your audience to say, "Wow! That was a Great Demo!"

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