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Too Complex – A True Demo Disaster Story

Here's the true story of how a demo directly resulted in the loss of \$245,000 from an order. It's also a stunning example of why not to show all those neat, cool features...

What happened?

The Set-up

A salesperson had done an excellent job qualifying a customer. In the qualification discussion, it became clear that what the customer needed fit beautifully with what the vendor could provide – the specific capabilities the customer wanted were exactly what the vendor's software did best.

The salesperson described these capabilities in the discussion and both parties agreed to schedule a follow-on meeting to see a demonstration of the product. This was to be a Technical Proof demo – the specific capabilities needed by the customer were very clear.

In parallel with planning for the demo meeting, the salesperson worked the customer through the balance of the sales process, including agreeing on quantity, price, licensing, and an implementation plan. The demo meeting was scheduled as the final step before completing the license agreement.

The customer was ready to purchase 50 seats of the vendor's software, on an annual-right-to-use basis of \$5,000 per seat – a \$250,000 per year order.

The salesperson scheduled the demo meeting with a seasoned, veteran sales engineer (SE) as the demonstrator – the salesperson wanted to make sure that the person doing the demo really knew the product well. They discussed the specific capabilities the customer needed and the status of the sales process – they both felt well-prepared.

The customer audience included the “champion” and most of the fifty target end-users. The meeting was scheduled for one hour.

The Disaster

The meeting began on time. After introductions, the SE started right into the demo. In ten minutes, the SE showed all of the specific capabilities the customer had identified. The SE then looked at his watch and noted that he fifty minutes left in the meeting.

He said, “Since we have some additional time, why don’t I show you some of the other capabilities our software offers?” Well-meaning, well-intended...

[I can hear you crying out, Dear Reader, “Don’t do it! Don’t do it!!” By the way, have you ever heard someone on your team say something like this in a similar situation?]

Well, the SE did do it. He spent the next fifty minutes showing that you can do this, you can do that, you can do this other really cool thing... and another really cool thing as well...

At the end of the meeting, the customer champion met with the end-users briefly and then re-joined the salesperson for a wrap-up discussion.

The champion said, “What we’ve decided to do is to purchase a license to a single seat of your software and install it on a power-user’s machine. Everyone else will bring their problems to the power-user to have them worked...”

“Why?” asked the salesperson.

“The users said the software looked too complex – they couldn’t visualize using the tool themselves,” responded the customer champion. “They got confused by all of the various functions and capabilities that were shown during the demo...”

Showing too much in this demo reduced the value of the sale from \$250,000 annually to \$5,000 annually – a negative conversion of \$245,000 per year!

The Moral

Every mouse click, every keystroke, every additional capability, every new screen shown in a demo adds to the perceived complexity in the minds of the audience.

Focus on the specific capabilities needed by the customer to address their business issues – and hold everything else back. The demo should build a vision in the customers’ minds that they can easily visualize using the software themselves.

Focus and execute – and the reward will be the full order!

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