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Stunningly Awful Demos

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The Great Demo! Top Ten List of What NOT to Do

Here's a collection of poor tactics, bad errors and faulty steps you can take to increase the likelihood that your demo will be a *failure.* We recommend that you avoid doing these things!

If your organization's demos are not as successful as you might wish, consider using this list as an assessment tool. If these items are occurring in your real-life demos then you may want to contemplate making some changes…

The Stunningly Awful Demos ("SAD") Top Ten List:

1. Be unclear on the **Customer's Needs**: "The Harbor Tour"

Offer and deliver a demo in the hope that your customer will see something of interest, eventually. This is a case of using Hope as a Strategy…! Customers refer to these long, tortured demos as:

- 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 ("Oh God, it's the Harbor Tour Demo…" they board the boat, get driven around the harbor for three hours while being asked, "Have you seen anything you like so far?" – and they can't get off the boat until the end of the ride…!).

Inexperienced salespeople often inflict these demos on their customers as a replacement for doing Discovery. Jaded presales folks offer these demos when they receive little or no pre-demo information from their sales colleagues.

2. Present a **Linear Demo** from beginning to end: "Where is this going…?"

Have you ever been watching someone else's demo and, a few minutes into the process, you start wondering, "Where is this going…?"

You can ensure the same awful fate for your customers by delivering long, linear demos that start at the beginning of a workflow and take forty, fifty or sixty minutes (or longer!) to finally reach the big pay-off screen. Follow this tactic to ensure that:

- Your audience is half-asleep by the time you reach the important take-away message and key pay-off screen. (In some geographies your audience may actually *be* asleep).
- The most important people in the audience leave the room while you are still introducing the module names and key navigation features…
- The customer is so numbed by the time that you do reach your big message that they cannot remember it after the demo is over.

Bonus: Be sure to show how to set things up – tasks that would likely only be done once (and are often done by a professional services team during implementation) to ensure that you squander more time with unimportant items…

Double Bonus: With practice, you should be able to consume all of the available time allotted to the demo with set-up and workflow – and run out of time before you get to the "best stuff"!

3.   Start with a **Corporate Overview**: "Death by Corporate Overview…"

Make Number 2, above, even worse by starting the meeting with twenty minutes of your corporate overview. Regale your audience with your mission statement (yawn), your company's formation and history (yawn), your revenues-over-time, office locations, markets, products, and that smorgasbord of customer logos (yawn, yawn, yawn, snooze…).

This strategy will ensure that (1) the most important people leave even *before* you can start the demo and (2) everyone is already bored and losing attention when you do deliver your demo. Doing this also sets you up nicely for item Number 4…

4.   Don't reconfirm the **Time Constraints** for the meeting: "Sorry, we're out of time…"

You'd planned on two hours with the customer when you set up the meeting three weeks ago. Is there any reason this might have changed?

You arrive at 10:00 AM and dive into your agenda. Your team delivers your Corporate Overview presentation followed (after twenty minutes) by a long, linear demo…

Things are going as planned when suddenly your host looks at his watch and says, "Um, can you please wrap things up in the next five minutes? We have an all-hands meeting scheduled at 11:00…" You have to end the demo without ever reaching your big pay-off screen and have to ask to schedule another meeting.

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Bonus: Similarly, don't reconfirm the list of customer participants or their objectives. It is always a delight to walk into a room of 20 people when you were expecting 2 (and haven't had a chance to do Discovery with any of the new folks). Which takes us back to Number 1, again…!

5.   Show as many **Features and Functions** as possible: "…And *another* thing you can do is…"

Want to make your software appear as confusing and complicated as possible? Want more ways to bore and torture your audience? Want to help your customer reduce the price they pay for your software? It's easy: show as many features and capabilities that you possibly can!

A simple way to achieve these negative results is to present your demo as if you are doing product training – "let me show you how to do this, and that, and this other thing…" To really inflict pain, make sure to show and explain all of the menu options, tabs, navigation tools and, of course, all of the file types you can handle. Be sure to include all of the "if", "or" and "also" cases for each option. These simple steps will make your demo truly Stunningly Awful.

6.   Show the same demo, regardless of the **Customer's Depth of Interest**: "One for all…"

Ignore the fact that the VP in the room only wants a top-level overview of your offering and that the managers in the room are interested only in their portion of the process. Instead, choose the lowest-level users' scenario for your demo, such as an end-user "day-in-the-life" saga – or for more pain, start by walking through how to set things up – tasks done only once.

This will ensure that the senior members of the customer's team grow bored and leave the demo early (~fifteen minutes after the meeting began). They'll never see anything that compels their interest, requiring either a second demo meeting (unlikely), a loss to your competitor, or a "No Decision" outcome.

Similarly, the customer managers won't be thrilled with what they see – your software will look too long, too detailed, and too complicated for them to use comfortably.

In the end, you'll have done a fair job training the target end-users, but the training won't be necessary since you won't get the deal! An awful waste of time for everyone involved.

7.   Let **Questions** interrupt and take control of your demo: "But what about…?"

You've started your demo and things are going well when, after five minutes, someone asks a good question. You stop your demo, take a few minutes to answer the question and turn back to your laptop. The customer asks a follow-up question which you dutifully address in more detail, taking another few minutes. The customer considers your answer, then asks for more details… And you are now way off-track, lost in the weeds.

In the meantime, what has happened to the rest of the audience? They've checked-out. They're having side-conversations, checking texts and email on their phones, or are leaving the room – and you've barely gotten started!

Letting questions divert your demo is an excellent way to ensure that you lose the customer's key players early in the meeting and run out of time before you've gotten to your key points.

Another terrific strategy for failure is to allow the Hostiles to take control of the meeting – these are the people who don't like you, don't like your company, or simply believe it is their purpose in life to torture the vendor. Let them take control and you'll enjoy the same negative results… They'll consume the time, bore the balance of the audience, and you'll never get to deliver your message the way you'd desired.

8. Let **Bugs and Technical Issues** consume you: "Gee, it's never done that before…"

Here are three wonderful ways for you to show your software in the worst possible light:

- First, call attention to cosmetic bugs (poor screen repainting, cursor not changing, "graphics garbage", etc.). Make sure to point out, "See that? That shouldn't be there…!"

- Second, when you do run into a bug, say "Gosh, I've never seen that before." Then try the same operation again to ensure that you run into the same bug twice! The wonderfully SAD result will be your audience thinking, "Their software really doesn't work *and* their best technical people don't even know it!" Very convincing.

- Third, call out performance issues by noting, "It's slow today because…". Your audience assumes that your demo environment must be severely hobbled – particularly in comparison to their blisteringly fast network. Good thing this won't raise any concerns that might cause the customer ask for a POC, as a result…

As an added SAD bonus, when a crash or very serious bug has occurred that requires re-starting your software or rebooting, make sure that the balance of your team is sitting in the rear of the room texting or doing email on their phones – or better, out in the hall making calls. This ensures there is no way they can help manage the audience while the demo machine recovers.

Double Bonus: For face-to-face demos, remember to leave the projector cable attached to your laptop so that your audience can watch every exciting moment of you rebooting your machine and troubleshooting the problem… Breathtaking!

9. Limit the time you show your big **Pay-Off Screen**: "Ta-da… Any questions?"

You've been demoing along for forty or fifty minutes and you finally get to your big pay-off screen – the key message. You present it for 50 milliseconds and then move swiftly to a PowerPoint slide that says, "Thank you for your time – Questions?"

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This is a SADly terrific way to ensure that your audience never remembers your key message. While *you* have likely seen that pay-off screen hundreds of times, this is the first time your *audience* has ever seen it. Showing that screen for a fraction of a second puts your message in the long list with all the other 3000 marketing messages your customer will see that same day… Good luck!

Bonus: Include a huge rotating question-mark .gif to completely mesmerize your audience (I've *seen* this…)!

10. Avoid **Summarizing**: "And the next really cool thing I want to show you is…"

Roll along from section to section, through segment after segment, in a continuous verbal assault. Leave no pauses, offer no introductions and, by all means, don't summarize after you complete an important segment. You want your delivery to be perceived as a firehose, furiously flinging features and functions frantically at your audience (frightening, frankly).

This SAD tactic contributes wonderfully to grow confusion, add complexity, and generally bore the tears out of your audience.

For maximum SAD effect, use this tactic in conjunction with long, linear, non-componentized, multiple-player, multi-product, multi-hour demos. You'll have your audience examining their phones or the insides of their eyelids in no time!

Following these "Top Ten" SAD guidelines will certainly increase the probability that your demos will *not* help you achieve your goals. When you do these ten simple things, you should expect your audience to say, "Ugh… That was a Stunningly Awful Demo!"

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