The Three Hour Demo

Twelve Transformational Tips To Shorten The Demo

"*Hey, I just set up a full morning demo with Acme Rocket Skates next week – are we good to go?*" So many vendors are convinced that they need a full three hour morning or afternoon session to get their message across to the customer. Sure, there are always cases when you may need to do this – but as a general rule leading with a demo, especially a rear-end numbing three hour presentation and demo, is not best practice in any sales methodology I have ever read. In addition, if you are even <u>thinking</u> about delivering a remote webcast style demo lasting longer than 45 minutes pass out the painkillers now.

So how, as a lowly Sales Engineer, can you shrink the three-hour tour into something more focused and engaging – without sacrificing some part of your portfolio?

1. Have You Ever .. sat through a three-hour demo? Put yourself in the customer's position (which is probably uncomfortable, bored or confused) – how did you feel? What got your attention? Think back to that last Sales Training Session or Product Marketing Demo at Kick-Off as an example of what NOT to do.

2. The Last Thing First. In Peter Cohan's must-read Great Demo he makes the case that you should start your demo with that one great "ah-ha" slide, screen, report or diagram that really makes your point. Why hide the "reveal" towards the end of your pitch? You are not being paid to write a whodunit novel. Adopting this approach, which I heartily endorse, can eliminate what an old-time, non-PC, SE of mine used to call lengthy demo foreplay.

3. The 50% Plan. I always had a contingency plan of what to show in case my demo time was cut in half. Sometimes the customers fault, although often the fault of someone else on my team talking too much. If you have a 50% plan – why not start your demo planning with that stripped-down version?

4. The 30-minute CxO. Let us face the fact that although you may be a scintillating SE, the CxO is not going to stay put for 3 hours just to listen to you. What is your plan if the senior executive can only stay for the first 30 minutes? Or if the CIO walks in halfway through? Hmm .. Now you have a 30 minute pitch as well.

5. Justify Your Existence. Run through your three hour demo and ask yourself exactly why every screen or slide is being used. Set up categories such as Competitive, Requirement, Flow, Transition, Cool, Nice-to-Have, Commodity and Noise/Drivel. Now throw out the last four categories. Be brutal.

6. Why am I here? After 25 years of being in the Pre-Sales business I firmly believe that over 75% of all demos happen too soon in the sales cycle. I've been quoted on that many times. Of course, any good SE who has Mastered Technical Sales knows to ask the customer that question, several times, in several ways - plus many other questions, before they set foot on site. **"The more you know, the less you show".**

7. The Hit List. After you have answered the "Why Am I Here", you need to ask "What am I supposed to do?" Get a short list of objectives for the demonstration. If your list is the size of a six-year-old birthday wish list, then you are the victim of an unfocused "We'll show you that in the Demo" salesrep. If your objective is to convince them that you have a viable and functional solution then you are the victim of a "Dash To Demo" salesrep. Neither is a pleasant experience. That is almost as bad as the "Stop Me When You See Something You Like" approach. The magic number for a demo is 2+/-1. That means you must have at least one primary objective, but never more than three. Decide what the 2+/-1 objectives are and then map them to the justification phase (point #5).

8. Pay Attention To Retention. Now that you have done the last thing first, you need to energize the audience every 10-12 minutes, otherwise you will lose them – either physically or mentally. This leads to the conclusion that you need to split your demo into 'chunks', rather than conduct a linear start to finish presentation.

9. This is How You Will Use It. Focus on the user and his/her management chain. Remember you are not being paid to educate the audience; you are being paid to convince them that your solution will alleviate their business pains. In order to do that, forget about features and functions; show them how they would use the software in their everyday life to fix the pains. If you can make them internalize the usage of your solution then you have taken them from current state to desired state.

10. Navigation is Bad. Have someone observe your demonstration and record when and where you use any navigational terms such as "click" , "pull-down" , "selection-list", "menu options", "drill-down" etc. Whenever you use these terms it is highly likely that you are talking about a feature instead of a meaningful advantage or benefit.

11. Tell them a story. You can often by-pass a module of your solution by talking about how some other customer is using that function to solve their business problems.

12. Navigation is Good. People like to know where they are going and how they are going to get there. Instead of taking a feature tour through a screen, report or a menu – tell the audience what you are going to show them after the last thing first piece. As an example, we used to start demoing help-desk software by saying "*OK. For the next four minutes we are going to show you how in real-time you can open a new case, research it, solve the problem and then close the case and any other parallel cases. Later on we'll go through it step-by-step – but I want you to get an idea of just how fast and easy it is.*" No-one ever interrupted us. How can you do that?

Summary

Time is a precious gift, and if you can give a customer 30-45 minutes of his time back because you are focused and on-target then everyone wins. Remember that the demo is just a step in the sales cycle, **not** the pivotal step. Strip out all the extraneous cool features and all the navigation from your demo, and then divide it into 12-15 minute chunks, with the "ah-ha" screen presented up front and at the end. Good luck!

"The only reason for time is so that everything doesn't happen at once."

Albert Einstein, physicist.

"Time is an illusion, lunchtime doubly so"

Douglas Adams, author.

Talking Points is a monthly column authored by John Care, Managing Director of Mastering Technical Sales. For more information on this and other Sales Engineering topics visit the website at www.masteringtechnicalsales.com.

To receive the monthly Talking Points Newsletter, email info@masteringtechnicalsales.com