

***i. CREATE A SOFTWARE DEMO PRESENTATION THAT
WOWS PROSPECTS: 5 MISTAKES TO AVOID***

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Annotation

This paper explores the key elements of delivering an effective software demo presentation and highlights five critical mistakes that often hinder success. A well-crafted demo can be the turning point in converting prospects into customers, especially in competitive markets. However, many presenters fall into common traps—such as focusing too much on features rather than benefits, failing to understand the audience's needs, overcomplicating the interface, neglecting storytelling, or not rehearsing the demo properly. Through analysis of expert advice, case studies, and best practices, this work provides actionable strategies for avoiding these pitfalls and creating demos that are clear, engaging, and persuasive. The goal is to equip software sales teams, product managers, and marketers with practical tools to leave a lasting impression and significantly improve conversion rates.

"Most demos take 20 minutes or 40 minutes or - God help you - longer to get to the point" says Peter Cohan, Founder and Principal of The Second Derivative, a company that helps organizations such as Ariba and Business Objects improve the success of their business software demos.

Whether you're creating a demo to teach your sales force about a new product or for their use in the field, most marketers fall into the pit of five worst practices that leave viewers snoring.

1. Presenting a linear demo from beginning to end
2. Failing to focus on customer needs
3. Showing feature after feature
4. The one-demo-fits-all practice
5. Death by corporate overview

So, how do you put together a demo that works? Here are some presentation notes from

Cohan.

Move your corporate overview to the very end. Do your presentations start with "First, let

me tell you a little about us"? Then ruthless editing is in order. First you have to establish credibility as a trusted resource by providing info that's incredibly relevant and interesting to the prospect.

So, the demo should begin with the sales situation, not the corporate overview. Save that for the end as icing on the cake.

Once you have shown that you have capabilities that can help the customer address their business issues, then the customers will begin to ask questions about your company and the corporate overview slide will be relevant.

Start with a five-point intro slide by persona

If it's not about your lovely corporate overview, who is the demo about? The viewer of course. Cohan recommends you research the end demographic (your most likely buyer) carefully and then create a powerful slide that addresses that persona directly.

The point of this slide is to quickly say, "We understand the specific pain you are in, and we can help you solve it." It's a head-nodder and trust-builder that then leads to more detailed slides explaining the details.

If you have more than one type of buyer (different industries, size companies or job functions) create one of these slides for each to be used by sales as needed. This immediately personalizes the presentation and assures the prospect it's not a generic one-size-fits-all demo.

The five points to be included on each persona slide are:

1. Title and industry. If this is a demo to your sales force, show the title and industry of their highest quality prospect.
2. Most critical business issue (your product can help with). Example: Concern about achieving forecasted revenues.
3. Quick reasons for the problem. Example: Forecast data sits in local, regional spreadsheets, requiring hours of manual "roll-up" work from reps, regional heads and administration staff each time the forecast is updated.
4. Specific capabilities needed to solve problem. Example: A way to aggregate the disparate data and generate up-to-date reports, on demand, right from the VP Sales' laptop computer.
5. Delta/ROI. Example: 18 person-days saved each time the forecast is updated. Note: This can be replaced by an actual client's case study result, if you have one to share that's highly relevant for that particular persona.

Next, show an actual result

Now that you've gained some interest in the demo, show the viewer what they stand to gain if they continue.

If your audience is your sales team, show them projected sales. Example: We expect to sell 200 licenses to our new Forecaster product, plus services, for a total order of \$575,000.

If it's not a brand new product, and you have real sales figures, amend the language to say, "We sold..." rather than "We expect to sell."

"Product managers are in two forms of competition," says Cohan. "They're competing with other vendors, but they're also often competing for share of mind with other product managers." When a sales person has three or four product lines to sell, they're going to sell the ones that are easiest to sell and that generate the biggest margin. Build the perception that selling your product is going to make them successful.

If your audience is actual prospects, show them the end deliverable product as an illustration. This doesn't mean showing them each step of how to use your software -- quite the reverse in fact. Start by showing them the best final feature of the software as it delivers the information the prospect wants.

In the above case, the end deliverable might be an excel spreadsheet that is an actual, rolled-up sales forecast complete with information by regions, sales reps, etc.

Note: Sometimes this slide is even more effective if you bring an actual piece of paper (when applicable) to hold in your hand. If your meeting is in person, hold up the printout of the actual sales forecast. "What you're looking at here is the rolled-up forecast complete with forecasts by regions and sales reps. And you can produce this from your computer in a few clicks. Are you interested in seeing how to do this?"

If you've taken the right angle on the high-probability sales situation, says Cohan, the audience will not only say "Yes," they'll say, "Yes, please."

Keep clicks to a minimum. Once you've shown the end-deliverable, use the software to show, in as few clicks as possible, how you got there. Do not use this step to show all the features of the software and all the wonderful things it can do. Instead, continue honing in on the single most important factor: the end deliverable.

Critical: With every single extra click you will lose some of your audience's interest. Software demos are a lot like ecommerce shopping carts where with each additional page a shopper has to go through, there's a higher abandonment rate.

So, once you've honed your demo to the minimum clicks, count them and rethink. Is there a click you could lose? Often you'll find you can cut even more of them.

Make detailed Q&A 75%-80% of your demo time

Now is the opportunity to show off all the features. If you've gotten to the key deliverable of the software within a short amount of time (five to 10 minutes), you will have excited your audience and they will be ready to ask questions, such as:

- Can you sort that by state?
- Can you filter out all the reps who haven't made their quota?
- Can you change the headers to blue?

You can answer their questions by showing them how to do it, simultaneously showing off the features of the software. This allows you to peel back from the end deliverable to reveal the layers of complexity depending on the audience depth and level of interest.

You may wind up creating many slides for this time that are not used or that are used in a very different order than you had anticipated. In effect, you've given the demo driving wheel over to the prospects. And, if you've done a good job of setup with the intro, they're loving it.

References:

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