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Death by Corporate Overview

We often hear the question, “How much of our company’s corporate overview presentation should we include in customer meetings?” Good question.

The answer: as little as possible!

Many salespeople and technical staff feel comfortable opening a meeting with a “brief” overview of their company. Most customers refer to this as “Death by PowerPoint”!

Why? Because at the beginning of such a meeting, the customer is not interested in the vendor’s history, revenues, or mission statement. The customer is interested in seeing if the vendor can help the customer address their Critical Business Issues (CBI’s) or enable the customer to achieve their objectives. Making the customer wait and listen to 3, 6, 10 or more slides from a standard corporate overview presentation about the vendor is just cruel!

Instead, start the meeting with a “Situation Slide”.

In the case of a follow-up meeting that takes place after an initial meeting, this slide simply recalls the information gathered previously from during qualification/discovery discussion(s). You should list:

- ✓ The customer’s name and job title for each major player or department.
- ✓ The CBI’s, Problems/Reasons, and Specific Capabilities needed for each player or department.
- ✓ The Delta (the Value) for each situation (you may want to create a Situation Slide for each major player or department involved).

The “Critical Business Issue” (CBI) is a problem that the customer sees as important enough to invest resources to address. It is best to use the customer’s words, such as, “I’m concerned about our ability to achieve our forecasted revenues this year”, which might come from a VP of Sales. In your Situation Slide you would re-phrase this as:

Job Title/Industry: VP of Sales, Acme Software
CBI: Concerned about achieving forecasted revenues

A “Problem/Reason” is the issue behind the top-level problem that *makes* it a challenge to achieve his/her objectives. In our example above, a typical Problem/Reason might be expressed by our VP of Sales as, “The reason I’m concerned about making our numbers this year is that we are having difficulty closing the technical sale – there is miscommunication and misalignment between our salespeople and the pre-sales Systems Engineers, and their demos are simply not getting the job done!”

Your growing Situation Slide would then look like this:

Job Title/Industry: VP of Sales, Acme Software
CBI: Concerned about achieving forecasted revenues
Problem/Reason(s): Not closing the technical sale, due to miscommunication and unsuccessful demos

The “Specific Capabilities” are those capabilities expressed by the customer as needed to address the CBI. Our VP of Sales might say, “We need training to improve the communications within the Sales Teams and to enable our demos to generate a ‘Wow!’ response on the part of our customers.” The Situation Slide would reflect this:

Job Title/Industry: VP of Sales, Acme Software
CBI: Concerned about achieving forecasted revenues
Problem/Reason(s): Not closing the technical sale, due to miscommunication and unsuccessful demos
Specific Capabilities: Intra-Sales Team communications and demonstration effectiveness training

Finally, the “Delta” is a measure of the difference between the way things are today vs. with a solution in place. In our example, the VP of Sales might share that, “Right now it looks like we are about \$1,500,000 short of achieving our annual quota.” The complete Situation Slide would then look like:

Job Title/Industry: VP of Sales, Acme Software
CBI: Concerned about achieving forecasted revenues
Problem/Reason(s): Not closing the technical sale, due to miscommunication and unsuccessful demos
Specific Capabilities: Intra-Sales Team communications and demonstration effectiveness training
Delta: \$1,500,000 in annual revenues

Situation Slides enable the sales team to “recall the facts” and start the meeting with the *customer’s* issues. By presenting the Situation Slide, the sales team can confirm that (1) their information is

correct and accurate or (2) determine whether there have been any changes since the last meeting with the customer.

In the case of an introductory meeting, you would use the same format for the Situation Slide, but instead of listing the specific customer's Situation you may need to list another, *similar* customer's situation (known as a "Reference Story" and sanitized to remove any confidential customer information or specific names).

Once the facts have been recalled or the Reference Story presented, you have the choice either to drill deeper into qualification questions (particularly if the meeting is "Vision Generation" in purpose) or proceed directly into a demo or other method of offering proof.

When *should* you present the information in the corporate overview? The answer is when the customer *asks* for it, specifically. Once you have shown that you have capabilities that can help the customer address their business issues, then the customer will begin to ask questions about your company – and, the answers then have relevance.

For example, if the customer is contemplating a deployment into three countries, *then* they may ask, "Do you have sales and support offices in the U.S., Germany, and France?" Providing the answer at the beginning of the meeting makes no sense (particularly if your standard presentation describes showing sales, customer service, customization, and training offices in 54 countries around the world – the customer is only interested in the three regions they occupy).

Most corporate presentations are entirely vendor-focused. As an exercise, review your corporate overview presentation from a customer's perspective. Ask yourself, "What information really captures my interest?" It is likely that the answer will be, "Very little!"

As a final tip, for sales and marketing teams that simply must start with a corporate overview, work to reduce it to a *single* slide that focuses on the top-level business issues that your tools address.

Focus on the customer's interests first – and enjoy the rewards of crisper sales!

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