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## Great Demo! Remote Demos Best Practices

Want a horror story?

I'll give you a teaser: The punchline is, "Nope, I'm good..."

I do a lot of "prep" demos with my customers, asking them to present live demos to me over the web. I was working with a customer and had seen demos from two presales folks up to this point and both demos were effectively the same. The only difference was their verbal style of presenting – the content and the sequence of steps in each demo were exactly the same for both.

We had scheduled one more demo from a third presales person. He starts off, over the web, with the classic phrase, "Can you see my screen?" – I reply, "I think so..."

He says, "Great!" and *dives* into his demo – and I realize he's doing exactly the same pathway and talk track as his two predecessors. Eight minutes later he surfaces and asks, "Any questions so far?"

"Nope, I'm good..." is my reply.

He *dives* back into his demo, continues for another eight minutes, then resurfaces and asks, "Any questions so far?"

I respond, "No, it's all clear..." And he *dives* back in...

As many readers know, I time demos. I said to myself, "I have to run this experiment." I grabbed my coffee mug, left my office, went to the kitchen, refreshed my coffee, looked out at the view for a few minutes, relaxed for a bit – and at the 6.5-minute mark I returned to my office. Sure enough, in about one minute, what do you think happened?

He resurfaces and asks, "Any questions so far?"

"Nope, I'm good..." is my response. So, what is the horrifying thing about this?

He was in his talk track, just talking and mousing, mousing and talking; the demo was going *perfectly*, as far as *he* was concerned. But – his audience was *literally gone* – and he had *no clue* I had left the room (and the demo)!

That's one horrifying example – here's another:

*You* are the customer, in this case, and you are watching another vendor's live demo over the web – and you're getting bored. Someone comes into your office – you mute your phone and chat with your colleague for a few minutes. She leaves and you turn back to the demo, still in progress...

After another few minutes of listening listlessly, you receive an email – you read it and respond, then idly review your Inbox – while the demonstrator's voice drones on about, "Another really nice thing about our software is the set-up section – I'll show you now..."

Annnnd you've tuned out... Does this sound familiar? Has the demo made a strong (positive) impression with you? Likely not!

Now let's turn these examples around and imagine that it is *you* or *your* organization delivering these demos to *your* prospects... Ouch! So, what can we do to improve our Remote Demos?

Here are twelve terrific tips:

1. **Apply The Technology:** (And avoid the "Gosh this is boring..." customer perception)

Most vendors assume that delivering a Remote Demo is nothing more than mouse and talk, talk and mouse... But that is insufficient to hold audience attention.

Differentiate – by *using* the tools that the folks at WebEx, Zoom, GoToMeeting, *et al* have implemented to increase interactivity with your customers. Use the annotation tools (including pens, shapes, stamps, arrows and more), chat and Q&A dialog boxes, audience status dashboards, whiteboards, the pause button (*SUCH* a great tool...!), video, giving/taking control, etc.

Start with the annotation tools. The act of a new, unanticipated drawing or graphic appearing on the screen grabs your audience's attention and wakes them up. Try it!

2. **Learn The Technology:** (We rarely try something *new* in front of a customer)

To get comfortable with the tool that you use (and the tools *in* that tool), set up a training session with a colleague from your own company. Invest thirty minutes to investigate and practice using the capabilities available. That way, you will be able to deploy and apply those tools when you are live with a customer on the line, with confidence.

For the first 15 minutes, explore all of the various capabilities and get feedback from your colleague – make it your own personal Harbor Tour...! Then switch and let your coworker explore similarly.

Bonus: Make sure that your colleague's view is full-screen – some web collaboration tools do this automatically, some do not and you have to guide your audience to go full screen. Practice this!

3. **Test The Technology:** (And avoid “Sorry, we can’t seem to join the meeting...”)

Let’s say you scheduled a Remote Demo for 11:00 AM with your customer. Reach out to your key contact, champion, or principal a day or two ahead of the demo and suggest that the two of you start the web session ten minutes before the formal meeting is scheduled to begin.

Use those ten minutes to check the latency, screen resolution, color rendering, sound level and clarity, and font readability – and remember to enter full-screen mode.

For those using VOIP connections and headsets, check to make sure your connection is clear – to avoid garbled sentences, dropped phrases, and chopped words, “Nic op bop tis pref ont sys...!”

This way, everything is tested and working properly when the formal meeting starts, and you won’t suffer the “WebEx Tax” that often consumes the first seven minutes of the session...

4. **Put Some Passion Into Your Delivery:** (And avoid audience “Zzzzzz...”)

Nothing says “boredom” like a flat, passionless voice droning on endlessly...

You may need to compensate for the inability of the audience to see you by injecting more energy and dynamics in your verbal delivery. Some presenters prefer to stand when delivering a web demo to help with this – “push from your diaphragm...”

5. **Video View:** (“Oh, it *is* a real person doing the demo...”)

Learn and practice using video:

ON: During introductions – it helps “personalize” the demo and reduces (a bit) the likelihood of hostile questions. It’s a real person presenting, not a disembodied voice...

OFF: While sharing your software screens – audiences can only watch one thing at time.

ON: For your mid-demo summaries and ON again for your final summary.

And consider what your webcam shows behind you, as well...!

6. **Move Your Mouse Smooooothly And Deliberately:** (Avoid “Zippy Mouse Syndrome...”)

When we mouse for ourselves, the mouse follows where our eyes are looking – resulting, in many cases, in the mouse zooming wildly around the screen. This is actually painful for many viewers...! Similarly, have you ever seen someone circle something endlessly with their mouse...?

Solution? “Move and Stop”.

I’ve found the most amazing principle: if you take your hand off of the mouse, it stops moving. Yes! Incredible! Move the mouse to where you want it to be, then take your hand off while you talk... It doesn’t move!

When mousing in a demo, find the target location on the screen with your eyes *before* you move your mouse – then navigate your mouse smoothly to the new location – and then *let go of the mouse!* Do *not* circle the landing location around and around and around and around...

This is the *perfect* time to use an annotation tool to highlight the area on the screen, while you describe the what the capability does, how it helps the customer address their business problems, and the value associated with using the capability.

Bonus: Consider increasing the size of your mouse cursor – and/or exploring filled-in vs. outline. This will make it easier for your audience to see and follow your mouse movements.

7. **Drive Interactivity:** (And avoid the “chirp chirp chirp” sound of crickets in an empty room...)

Most traditional demos try to pack as much into the hour as possible – while simultaneously telling the audience, “Please ask questions along the way to make this as interactive as possible...”

Unfortunately, these two objectives are mutually exclusive – and many demonstrators really *don’t want* any questions, as those questions will consume precious time needed to show the many capabilities in their software. And this gets worse with every release as more features are added.

What’s the rescue for this dilemma? Great Demo! methodology provides some terrific answers:

1. Do the Last Thing First (as opposed to “saving the best for last...”).
2. Use Inverted Pyramid (to ensure you cover the most important things).
3. Apply the Fewest Number of Clicks (to reduce apparent complexity).

A study of demos by Gong.io found that the most successful demos applied these three principles – and the most successful demos had “speaker switches” an average of every 76 seconds. (A “speaker switch” is a change from the vendor talking to the customer speaking and *vice versa*.)

Applying these techniques provides more opportunities to drive interactivity – here are a few suggestions:

- ✓ Summarize frequently – which also cues the audience that it is their turn to ask questions.
- ✓ Check-in frequently – with phrases like, “Comments or questions?” or “What do you think of what you’ve seen so far?” and “Does that address your requirements sufficiently?”
- ✓ Test the latency periodically – here’s a great mid-demo check: Tell your audience, “I’m going to say ‘3-2-1 click’, then please let me know when you see the graphic appear...”

- ✓ Check for specific attention – “Can you see my mouse pointing at the logo?”
- ✓ Use the highlighters, arrows, pens and other annotation tools periodically.
- ✓ Use inverse text (drag across text to reverse highlight) – simple and very effective.
- ✓ Drive interaction with larger audiences – have them raise their virtual hands and use the chat/Q&A dialogs to respond to your questions and enable questions/comments from them.
- ✓ Offer to let someone in the audience “drive” a portion of the demo – your champion is a good choice – this can delightfully change the dynamic of the demo!

8. **Use An Agenda:** (And avoid the customer wondering, “Where is this going...?”)

In Great Demo! methodology, we teach the idea of breaking a demo up into chunks. In a sixty-minute demo you should have (at least!) six chunks – more would be better.

To keep your audience (and yourself) organized, present an agenda at the beginning of the demo. As you finish each chunk, return to your agenda and use it as a vehicle to summarize that segment. This also encourages your audience to ask questions or offer comments.

9. **Use An “Active Conduit”:** (Give yourself eyes in the meeting...)

Designate someone to be your “eyes” for the meeting that you join remotely – an “Active Conduit” providing information to you on what is happening in the meeting room.

In the best case, use your salesperson or other colleague from your company. Next best is your champion or key contact.

Start the session ten minutes early and guide this person to help you with:

- Testing and confirming technology operation – all the checks from Item 3 above.
- Managing introductions – have them go around the room with name, job title and objectives.
- Communicating tone and how things are going.
- Alerting you when new people arrive or folks leave.
- Managing (and repeating) questions for you (this is a really good one...!).
- Alerting you to side-bar discussions or comments that you couldn’t hear.

10. **Clean Up Your Desktop And Alerts:** (And avoid embarrassing, “Ohhhh, my....!” moments)

It can be amusing to audience members to see email previews and other messages appearing on the presenter’s screen during a demo – but it is distracting and can be downright embarrassing!

Want another horror story?

I was watching a remote demo during which one of the customer team members asked a question – and the vendor salesperson then texted the presenter to “Ignore that question – that guy is an idiot” forgetting that this text might appear on the screen for all to see – and it did!

End of demo, end of sales cycle... (And likely end of sales career...)

#### 11. **Manage Questions:** (Parking professionally)

Consider using a Word or Google document to capture unaddressed questions during your demo. Show the audience that you *have* written the question down (remember to share that portion of your screen) – and confirm you have captured it correctly.

Bonus: Use ~~strike-through~~ text to mark questions that you did address in the session. This will give you a written record of which questions you covered and what is still pending.

#### 12. **Get Better:** (“But I *hate* the sound of my own voice...!”)

Consider recording your web sessions (when appropriate) – and play them back. This is a wonderful way to hear what you *actually* said – your “crutch” words, your pace, your tone, your word choices, pauses, and summaries.

How did you manage questions? Did you cut them off? Did you confirm you’d addressed the question adequately?

How was your mousing? Was it smooth and deliberate – or are you still suffering (like me) from Zippy Mouse Syndrome?

### **Twelve Terrific Tips – And More!**

Learning, practicing and applying these twelve tips will (rather markedly) improve the mechanics of your Remote Demos.

Pick one item to try each week – and in a quarter you’ll be *surprisingly* effective...!

Bonus: This list is a good starting point – but there’s more! Explore the other articles on Remote Demos on our [website](#) for more ideas on how to drive interactivity when you can’t see your audience.

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