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Stunningly Awful Web "Overview" Demos –

The Gruesome Anatomy of a Traditional 1-Hour Web Overview Demonstration

In which we identify a number of common challenges with "overview" demos – and offer solutions.

[Warning – graphic and potentially painful content ahead…!]

1-Hour Web "Overview" Demo Timeline

Here's the rough but strangely consistent timeline for most web-delivered "1 hour overview demos":

[Starting time for each element on the left side]:

00:00: Fumbling with Zoom/WebEx/GoToMeeting/Teams –
"Looks like John/Sue/Page/whoever is just joining now…"
"Can you see my screen?"
"Looks like you're muted…"
"We're hearing a really bad echo…"
(This consumption of time is delightfully known as the "WebEx Tax").

00:04: Introductions, but generally one-sided –
Introductions and brief personal history of each of the vendor participants, but limited
information requested or offered regarding customer participants before diving in…

00:06: Corporate overview presentation (gag…), often including
  1. Mission statement
  2. Products and services (high level – see next section at 00.18 for the gory details)
  3. Product history and milestones
  4. Founders and origins story
  5. The Team
  6. Revenue history and financials

7. Office locations
8. Obligatory logos slide(s) (with logos that often have nothing to do with *this* customer's market)
9. Customer testimonials (actually the *most* useful part of corporate overview presentations, but often ignored by the vendor... Why?)

00:18: Product overview presentation (yawn), including
1. Obligatory architecture slide(s), with equally obligatory rectangles and cylinders representing software and database components (how novel...)
2. Equally obligatory product-centric slide (showing company's product in the center of a circle of other things (e.g., users, other applications, process steps, you name it – so novel, once again!)
3. Key "differentiators", presented without context to the customer's needs or specific situation (and largely forgotten by the customer, since they haven't yet seen a solution that makes remembering anything relevant)
4. Case studies, if any, that are typically skipped over "because we're short on time..." (too bad – real case studies would be the most interesting section)

00:26: "Actual" demo, including
1. Slide that says, "Demo" (which lets the audience know that everything from this point forward is "fake"...)
2. Opening statement that "We planned on 45 minutes for the demo, but we only have 30 minutes remaining, so we'll have to go really fast..."
3. Followed immediately by, "But we'd like this be interactive, so please stop me if you have any questions..." (while the presenter is actually thinking, "But please don't stop me because I've got *so* much to cover and you'll interrupt my flow...!")
4. Brief introduction of the plan for a "story" and 5 fictional characters whose "day in the life" will be followed in the demo
5. Followed by a firehose-like delivery with the presenter speaking non-stop for 4, 6, or 8 minutes or longer (I just saw an overview demo where the presenter went on for 40 minutes non-stop!)
   a) Interspersed with the obligatory, "Any questions so far?"
      - Customer response? "Nope, we're good..."
   b) Or "Does that make sense?"
      - Customer response? "Um, yes..." (What else *could* the customer say to that?)
6. Overview of navigation elements...
7. Introduction and definitions of vendor jargon, acronyms and product names (e.g., "What we call a _____...")
8. Repeated comment that everything is configurable
9. Repeated comment that everything can drill-down to the underlying data
10. Details on how to set up the application, (even though this task is typically done only once, when first implemented, and often by the vendor's implementation team)
11. A walk-through of the workflow (a run-through, in fact, since time is really getting short)
    a) Exploration of as many "if", "or", and "also" options as possible
    b) Frequent references to, "Remember when I..." (that aren't remembered by the audience)
    c) Zippy-Mouse-Syndrome mouse movements exacerbated by a tiny mouse cursor that can barely be seen with the naked eye

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d) Made even worse through the lack of use of annotation tools
e) Made yet worse by the vendor presenting from a high-resolution monitor to audience members laptops ("I can't read the text…")
12. The occasional "piling on" of a feature description by the salesperson, immediately after a perfectly adequate explanation by the presenter…
13. Pre-answering questions that you've heard frequently (but weren't asked)
14. Being driven "into the weeds" by a random question from a low-level customer team member
15. Cutting off customer questions before the customer finishes (because you've heard the question so many times before…)
16. Not confirming that you actually *answered* the customer's question, before moving on…
17. A rapid verbal description of the canned and custom reporting and dashboard capabilities:
    a) Often including the claim that "we have over 600 canned reports/dashboards…" of which a typical user might only consume a few…!
    b) Discussion of broad report and dashboard editing and creation capabilities
    c) Repeated comment that everything can drill-down to the underlying data
18. Showing data that is obviously fake and/or lacks problems to solve, opportunities to exploit, or exceptions to investigate
19. Comment that "we didn't have enough time to show you everything…"
20. No summaries whatsoever – just a firehose furiously flinging features, functions, and facts
21. No analogies or metaphors to improve memory retention for the audience
22. No stories to cement memories, either
23. And, of course, absolutely no communication of value…

00:58   Salesperson summary, with marketing platitude "value proposition" statements (that have little or limited bearing on the customer's specific situation)

00:60   Salesperson suggests scheduling a "deep dive" demo or offers a POC…
   -   Customer reaction of, "Thanks – we'll get back to you…"

Frightening, gruesome and remarkably common!

If the objective was to "show the customer a demo" then *that* objective was achieved – but it is very doubtful that other tangible progress was made in the sale.

Very sad; and largely a waste of time for all involved.

Assessment Time – Prepare Yourself…!

Play a few recordings of *your* organization's overview demos and see how many of the items identified above you or your team does today. Score 1 point for each item committed above.

[If the recording shows that each item above was exhibited, then your score is (sadly) ~50 – the good news is you have LOTS of room for improvement!]

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Now for grading – how did you do?

0-5 Points: A – your demos are delightfully unusual (and you are likely a Great Demo! graduate…!)
6-10 Points: B – your demos could improve…
11-15 Points: C – your demos could *really* improve…
16-20 Points: D – your demos should *seriously* improve…
20+ Points: F – your demos qualify for membership in the "Sales Prevention Team"!

Sadly, most overview demos rate a C grade or worse. If you are comfortable with the results, read no further (and keep your expectations low…!).

However, if you would like to see improvement, here are some ideas. We promised both problem identification *and* solutions – so let's talk about how to address these challenges, in order…

Solutions! (Part 1)

Fumbling with Zoom/WebEx/GoToMeeting/Teams:
- Start your web session 10 minutes early – and see Great Demo! Remote Demos Best Practices for 12 top tips on driving interactivity over the web.

Introductions:
- Sadly, the customer really doesn't typically care about you, the vendor. Instead, ask three simple questions of each customer participant:
    1. What is your name?
    2. What is your job title?
    3. What is your objective for this meeting?

Corporate overview presentation:
- OK, don't. Just don't. The customer wouldn't have agreed to invest an hour with you if they hadn't already vetted you as a vendor.
- But if you *must* (sigh), reduce it to a single slide and limit it to 1 minute.

Product overview presentation:
- Architecture slide(s): Hold in reserve…
- Product-centric slide: Ditto…
- Key "differentiators": insert into your Discovery conversation, using biased questions.
- Case studies: Yes! Present when relevant to your customer's situation.

"Actual" demo:
- Slide that says, "Demo": Remove or replace with slide that says, "Live Software" or similar.
- "We planned on 45 minutes for the demo, but we only have 30 minutes remaining…": Don't. You'll be fine if you apply these ideas.
- "We'd like this be interactive…": Make it so by turning your demo into a conversation.

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- "Day in the life story": Don't. Instead, Do the Last Thing First. Share an agenda to keep everyone aligned – returning to your agenda as you finish each "chunk".
- Firehose-like delivery: Studies show that the most successful demos enjoy "speaker switches" on an average of 76 seconds. If you've been presenting uninterrupted for 3 or 4 minutes (or longer) it is time to summarize and check-in with your audience!
- "Any questions so far?": Consider, "Questions, comments, observations?" as an alternative.
- "Does that make sense?": Try, "How does that resonate with you?" or similar.
- Navigation elements: Nope – that's for training.
- Vendor jargon: Nope – ditto.
- Everything is configurable: Let the customer ask…! (That's how a conversation happens…)
- Drill-down…: Again, let the customer ask.
- Set up mode: Ditto – this is where far too many presenters squander time on things that are done once or are only of interest to the system administrator.
- Workflow walk-through: Reorganize your content so that the most important items are addressed first – like a news article.
- "If", "or", and "also": Each use of these creates a branch in your demo – consuming time and making your offering look more complicated and expensive. Let the customer ask…!
- "Remember when I…": Don't. They won't.
- Zippy-Mouse-Syndrome: Practice smooooooth and deliiiiiiiberate mouse movements.
- Tiny mouse cursor: See our blog post to fix…!
- Text size: See another blog post on how to address this here.
- Salesperson "piling on": Don't. Here's the Role of Sales in Great Demos for guidance.
- Pre-answering Questions: Don't. Also known as "premature elaboration"…!
- Driven "into the weeds": Manage questions with an elegant, professional process.
- Cutting off customer questions: Ditto.
- Closing questions: Ditto, again.
- Reporting and dashboards: These deliverables are often the *most* important elements of your offering – Do the Last Thing First!
- Showing fake or uncompelling data: Check out A Perfect Demo Environment for guidelines.
- "We didn't have enough time…": Now you will.
- Summaries: After every "chunk", followed by a pause to let your audience ask questions.
- Analogies and metaphors: Use 'em…!
- Stories: Real stories are truly terrific!
- Communicating value: At the beginning, at the end, and throughout.
- Prematurely offering a "deep dive": Time for some real Discovery!
- Prematurely offering a POC: Don't. Just don't!
- Salesperson summary: Use a Transition Vision conversation for the best results.

Solutions! (Part 2)

Consider avoiding the "overview" demo entirely, by either replacing it with a Discovery conversation – and/or applying these additional "self-rescue" techniques:

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0. Turn the call into a Discovery session, if possible (and appropriate).

1. Use a [Vision Generation Demo](#) to provide your customer with *just enough* demo to satisfy the desire to "see your offering", while moving them gently (but firmly) into a Discovery conversation. Delightful and surprisingly effective!

    Interestingly, this can reduce a 1-hour overview demo meeting to 15-20 minutes, in the case where your customer is simply interested in exploring (but doesn't have a plan to purchase in the short-term). This gives you 40-45 minutes back in your day for each of these occurrences!

    Equally (or more) interestingly, in cases where your customer is earnestly interested in implementing a solution, you may be able to perform your Vision Generation Demo followed by sufficient Discovery to enable a focused, successful Technical Proof demo all within 1 hour!

2. Use [The Menu Approach](#), if your audience is a group and/or if your software addresses a range of solution or problem areas.

    The Menu Approach is a very simple, very elegant, and extremely effective method managing situations where you have many offerings or sets of solutions to a range of problems (that can be particularly difficult to communicate in an overview demo…). Check it out!

Recommendations (and Shameless Self-Promotion Alert)

We've provided a great set of answers and alternatives to the problems and challenges of traditional overview demos. You are welcome to try the tips above and explore the book, articles and blog posts that we've provided.

But you cannot have a conversation with a book, an article or a post. If you have questions on any of the above, please contact us at Info@GreatDemo.com.

Even better, if you want to apply these ideas to your own demo meetings and put them into daily, successful practice, consider enrolling yourself or your team in a [Great Demo! Workshop](#).

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