Peter E. Cohan
The Second Derivative
1532 Scenic Drive
Trinidad, CA 95570
T: +1 650 631 3694
E: PCohan@SecondDerivative.com
W: https://GreatDemo.com

Stunningly Awful Web "Overview" Demos –

The Gruesome Anatomy of a 1-Hour Web Overview

[Warning – graphic and potentially painful content…]

1-Hour Web "Overview" Demo Timeline

There's a rough but strangely consistent timeline for a web-delivered "1 hour overview demo" that seems to go like this [starting time for each element on the left side]:

00:00: Fumbling with WebEx/GoToMeeting/Live Meeting – "Did you get the link? Can you see my screen?" (This consumption of time has been delightfully called the "WebEx/GoToMeeting/Live Meeting Tax").

00:04: Semi-mutual 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 – and no request to do discovery on the part of the vendor

00:08: Corporate overview presentation (gag…)

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. 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, generally appear at the *end* and are typically skipped over "because we are short on time…" (too bad – real case studies would be the most interesting part of the overview)

00:28: "Actual" demo, including

a. Opening statement that "we need to compress the planned 45 minute demo into 30 minutes "so we'll have to go real fast…"
b. Request that "this be interactive, so please stop me if you have any questions…", followed by a fire-hose-like delivery with no time for meaningful questions
c. Re-introduction of the offering (again, even though it was covered in the product overview presentation)
d. Brief introduction of the for plan for a "story" and 3 fictional characters whose "day in the life" will be followed in the demo
e. Overview of navigation elements…
f. Introduction and definitions of key vendor jargon, acronyms and product names
g. Explanation of how to set up and configure the application, which then consumes most of the remaining time (even though this task is typically done once, when first implemented, and then rarely ever after)
h. A walk-through of the workflow (a run-through, in fact, since time is really getting short)
i. A rapid, largely verbal description of the canned and custom reporting capabilities (often including the claim that "we have over 600 canned reports…" of which a typical user might consume only 1 or 2…!)
j. Comment that "we didn't have enough time to show you everything…"

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

00:60: Wrap-up with no action items

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.

But Wait – It's Even Worse…

The pain often starts earlier – and ends later. Many presales people find they have scheduled (or have been scheduled by someone else) to deliver two or more demos back-to-back. For teams in highly "transactional" sales situations this can run all day…!

Far too often, one demo runs beyond the time allocated – causing the presales person to be late joining the next web session ("Sorry I'm late…") and allowing no time to prepare.

Similarly, there's no time at the end of the demo to document questions, issues or impressions for the presales person before having to dive into the next demo session. It only takes a few of these in a row to reduce whatever notes *might* have been captured to a few, often erroneous items!

A Few Recommendations

(Note – these are not necessarily mutually exclusive! One or more of these ideas can be combined)

0. Set the WebEx/GoToMeeting/Live Meeting session to begin 10 minutes before the "real" meeting is scheduled to start (not applicable if multiple customer participants are connecting from several remote locations, but truly terrific if the customer participants are in a single conference room).
1. If you *must* do a corporate overview, reduce it to one slide.
2. Turn the call into a Discovery session, if possible (and appropriate).
3. Reduce the product overview presentation to just the case study slides. Case studies can be a wonderful way to move the customer into doing Discovery – "here's an example of how other, similar customers have used our capabilities to solve specific business challenges – how does what they faced compare with your situation?"
4. Use the Menu Approach (a terrific self-rescue technique), if the audience is a group and/or if your software addresses a range of problem areas. [See my article entitled, *The Menu Approach – a Truly Terrific Demo Self-Rescue Technique f*or more details.]
5. Organize the demo itself in chunks – similar to how newspapers and web news services present news articles. [See my article entitled, *Why Structure a Demo Like a News Article f*or more details.]

And, for those who often are currently scheduled to do multiple demos back-to-back, consider blocking the 15 minutes before and 15 minutes after each demo as "Prep" and "Clean-Up" time on your calendar – give yourself a fighting chance!

For more articles on demonstration effectiveness skills and methods, visit our website at https://greatdemo.com/. For demo tips, best practices, tools and techniques, join the Great Demo! LinkedIn Group or explore our blog at https://greatdemo.com/blog/.