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Stunningly Awful Demos - The Relative Irrelevance of Set-Up Mode

It's Monday morning and you've just arrived in your office – what is the first thing you do?

- A) Build a brand new dashboard or report
- B) Set up your user account and preferences for software you already use everyday
- C) Configure the options for another software tool you use everyday
- D) Browse your web favorites and bookmarks
- E) Check your email...

For most people, the answers are as follows:

- A) Nope
- B) Nope
- C) Nope
- D) Likely
- E) Highly likely

What do *you* do when you start your business day on Monday morning?

In Great Demo! Workshops, we often introduce the idea of “Daily-Use Mode” vs. “Set-Up Mode” – where Daily-Use Mode is what most users do frequently in their day-to-day work and Set-Up Mode is what people (administrators, in many cases) do once, rarely or infrequently.

An example of Set-Up Mode is creating a dashboard or report – something that is typically done only *once* for that specific dashboard or report. Daily-Use Mode is when users *consume* the previously-created dashboard or report in their day-to-day work – which might happen daily, weekly, monthly or on some other cadence.

Sadly, many traditional demos squander far too much time (and audience attention) in Set-Up Mode showing how to build these dashboards and reports, versus showing how these deliverables can be easily consumed.

Monday Morning Revisited

A terrific way to think about Daily-Use Mode is to contemplate “Monday morning”.

What do most people do when they arrive at their desks on Monday morning? They check email. (Yes, and some browse their favorites/bookmarked websites – and *then* they check email...!)

So, consider starting the Daily-Use Mode portion of your demos *in* email, if possible. For example, start by saying, “It’s Monday morning and you’ve just arrived in your office...” You then show an “unopened” message, open it to reveal a link, then click the link to launch a browser that takes the user to the dashboard or report. The user then consumes the dashboard or report, looking for problems, trends, or opportunities in accord with what your software enables.

That’s the way most people start their day – why not map to it?

For Great Demo! practitioners, the above pathway of starting in email and proceeding to the dashboard or report is a truly terrific “Do It” pathway, leading crisply back to a compelling “Illustration”. Delightful!

“Let me show you how to set this up...”

I was recently watching a series of recorded demos presented by a vendor to their customers and noted two rather astonishing things:

Astonishing Thing Number 1:

Approximately 50% of the elapsed time of the demo was done showing Set-Up Mode items (setting up the environment, configuring the application, creating and editing templates, forms, reports and dashboards, etc.). [These demos ranged 60-90 minutes long overall.]

Astonishing Thing Number 2:

At the end of all this Set-Up Mode activity, the vendor noted, “Of course, you won’t have to do any of this – we take care of it during implementation, done by our Professional Services team...”

Wait... What did you say? You just spent 35 minutes showing stuff the customer will *never* need to use? [Enter appropriate exclamation of surprise and astonishment here _____.]

Rhetorical Question Number 1:

Why did they show the Set-Up Mode items at all?

Rhetorical Answer Number 1:

Because they (and we) are Victims of Momentum – we tend to do the same things the same way over and over, unless someone gives us a serious shove in a new direction.

Rhetorical Question Number 2:

What is the impact on the customer of seeing all of the that Set-Up Mode stuff?

Rhetorical Answer Number 2:

It makes the software look waaaaaay too complicated.

Cynical Rhetorical Question:

I'll bet you've never heard that phrase before, from a customer...!

Recommendation: Put the Set-Up Mode portions of your demos “behind your back” – have the answers ready, but only bring them out in response to specific questions from your customer. Focus first on Daily-Use Mode interactions, presenting the key deliverables and the business value those deliverables provide your customer (“Illustrations” and “Do It” pathways, in Great Demo! vocabulary). Intriguingly, it is likely that you can answer most Set-Up Mode questions verbally, without ever moving your mouse, for most audience members.

Question For You:

How much of your current demos are spent showing Set-Up Mode?

“It’s all configuration...”

Many vendors tout how their software can be easily configured vs. requiring extensive (and likely expensive) customization. This is wonderful and can be an enormous advantage. However, many vendors also *show* all the nuances of their extensive configuration capabilities early in a demo – which is typically entirely out of alignment with audience interests at that point in time.

First show Daily-Use Mode; *then* show Set-Up Mode, if desired by the customer.

For vendors where configuration capabilities are critical strengths, introduce those ideas during Discovery with your customer so that those capabilities become part of the list of Specific Capabilities your customer wants to see in the demo (but shown at the appropriate time).

Consider the following four constituencies:

- Senior Management
- Middle Management

- End Users
- IT and/or Administrators

Which of these groups *cares about* and *needs to see* configuration capabilities (or other Set-Up Mode items)?

- Senior Management – does care about, but does *not* want to see
- Middle Management – may care about, but likely does *not* need to see much
- End Users – does *not* care about and does *not* want to see
- IT or Administrators – does care about and does want to see

Who will likely be making the decision whether or not to buy – and how important is their opinion?

- Senior Management – extremely high and has the authority to buy
- Middle Management – may make the decision to recommend (but often does not have the authority to buy)
- End Users – may be asked for an opinion that is taken into account
- IT or Administrators – ditto

Based on this, I recommend satisfying these constituencies in that same corresponding order:

- Senior Management – show relevant Daily-Use Mode items; be prepared to answer questions about Set-Up Mode items (likely verbally, only).
- Middle Management – ditto; may need to show small amounts of Set-Up Mode.
- End Users – likely *only* interested in Daily-Use Mode as it applies to them.
- IT or Administrators – be prepared to show relevant Set-Up Mode items.

Turn Your Demo Upside Down

For many software vendors, their perception of a “logical progression” for their demos is to start by showing how to configure their system, followed by setting up forms, reports, dashboards, templates, workflows and alerts, followed by running those workflows and – if they don’t run out of time – showing the reports and dashboards. End result? Long, complicated, and confusing.

Recommendation? Turn your demos upside down.

Start with a Daily-Use Mode example that is relevant and desired for the specific constituency you are presenting to – and represents a high-probability Daily-Use Mode scenario – *then* follow with answers to Set-Up Mode questions, but only if your audience *asks* them...!

The result will be crisper, more aligned, *surprisingly* compelling demos that map delightfully to audience interests, delivered in a logical order in accord with audience authority.

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