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Stunningly Awful Remote Demos
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The Top Ten List of Inflicting Pain at a Distance

Would you like a horror story?

I do a lot of "prep" demos with my customers, asking them to present live demos to me, over the web. I had been 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 differences were their styles of presenting – the content and the sequence of steps were exactly the same for both.

We had organized another 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 the same pathway and talk track as his two predecessors. Ten minutes later he surfaces and asks, "Any questions so far?"

I answer, "Nope, I'm good…"

He dives back into his demo, continues for another ten 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 the experiment." I grabbed my coffee, 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 nine-minute mark I returned to my office. Sure enough, in about 45 seconds, what do you think happened?

 He resurfaces with, "Any questions so far?"

"Nope, I'm good…" is my reply.

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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 *gone* – and he had *no* clue I had left the room (and the demo)!

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

You are watching a vendor's demo, over the web, and you are 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, and un-mute the phone…

After another few minutes of listening listlessly, you receive an email – you read and respond to it, then you idly review your Inbox – while the demonstrator's voice drones on about, "Another really nice thing about our software is the preferences options. Let me show you…"

Does this sound familiar? Has the demo made a strong (positive) impression with you? Likely not!

Now turn the both of these examples around and imagine that it is *you* or *your* organization delivering the demo to one of *your* prospects… Ouch!

If your Remote Demonstrations are not as successful as you wish, consider using this list as an assessment tool. If these items "ring too true" then you may want to contemplate some changes…

The Stunningly Awful Demos ("SAD") Remote Demos Top Ten List:

1. **Don't Learn the Technology**: "Gosh this is boring…"

   Assume that delivering a Remote Demo should be nothing more than mouse and talk, mouse and talk... Ignore all of the tools and capabilities that the folks at WebEx, GoToMeeting, Zoom, *et al* have implemented to enable you to increase the level of interactivity with your customers.

   By all means, do *not* set up a session ahead of time with a colleague from your own company to try out and learn the capabilities in your web tool. Ignore the possibilities for driving interactivity offered by the various pointers, annotation tools, sharing options, whiteboards, video, chat, etc.

   Instead, simply assume that your audience is paying rapt attention as you describe the seven layers of set-up preferences in your application…

2. **Don't Test the Technology** ahead of time: "Sorry, we can't seem to join the meeting…"

   Schedule a Remote Demo for, say, 11:00 AM with the customer – preferably with a large audience – and spend the first 15 minutes "joining" the web session. This will ensure that your audience is bored and already contemplating leaving for another meeting or back to their desks to "get some real work done…"

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To maximize the potential negative impact, don't have your customer test their firewall or network/computing infrastructure to make sure that the collaboration software will work in their environment. Leave this until the start of the meeting to increase the probability of technical challenges. After all, IT groups are absolutely delighted to see their end-users downloading unknown components onto corporate machines…!

Along the same lines, pay no attention to checking screen resolution, color rendering, sound level and clarity, font readability, full-screen mode and, of course, latency. It is best to find out that the audience can only see a fraction of your screen fifty minutes into the demo. Bonus points if they can't hear you adequately…!

3. **Use a Fading Headset, Speakerphone or VOIP**: "What…? Huh…?"

   Speaking of audio (pun intended), to maximize miscommunication, use a headset with old, dying batteries or VOIP with a poor connection on your end – or (gasp!) a speakerphone.

   With a speakerphone, you can appear to be yelling into the phone when you are speaking directly into it – and your voice will fade to a mumbling whisper when you turn back to your screen during the demo.   Bonus points for imitating the sound in a tunnel…

   For those using VOIP with non-terrific connections, welcome to the land of dropped phrases, words and syllables, "Nic op bop tis pref ont sys…!"

4. **Present to a Large, Unqualified Audience**: "Why are we here…?"

   Dramatically decrease your success rates by presenting demos to large, unqualified audiences – even better, encourage your customer to include people from multiple, disparate sites and time-zones. For the greatest (negative) impact, launch right into your demo without any mutual introductions, review of objectives or any brief qualification or Discovery with any new players (particularly high-ranking folks – best to fly blind and hope for a positive outcome…!).

5. **Use a Flat, Monotonic, Passionless, Non-Stop Voice Delivery**: "Yawn…"

   You'll have your audience sleeping peacefully in no time with this approach! Nothing says "boredom" like a flat, passionless voice droning on endlessly…

   It is always best to assume that your audience can see your eloquent gestures and hear your subtle changes in tone. And by all means, don't compensate for the inability of the audience to see you by putting more energy and dynamics in your verbal delivery.

6. **Move Your Mouse Rapidly and Continuously**: "Where are the motion-sickness pills…?"

   "Oh my God, he's got 'Zippy Mouse Syndrome'…!" Few things excite an audience as much as trying to track a mouse moving like lightning via a web connection (or a house fly – fast 'n' random) – and

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lightning is a good analogy. The mouse appears briefly, then disappears, only to appear again in a flash somewhere else on the screen. The element of surprise is high, enabling customers to play Mouse Location Bingo. "I wonder where the mouse will appear next?"

Make sure to click much faster than the collaboration software can keep up. This will enable you to finish the demo a good ten minutes before your audience does…!

Finally, remember to use your mouse to circle items on the screen – around and around and around and around…

7. **Eliminate Interactivity**: "Any questions so far…?" [Sound of crickets in an empty room…]

You've only got an hour for this demo – and the first twenty minutes were consumed with people connecting late, introductions and a corporate overview. You now have to pack sixty minutes of demo into the remaining forty left to you. Move quickly! Don't stop! You've got a lot to cover!

This plan will ensure that you minimize any possible interactions with your audience. Don't draw them into the demo, don't make it a conversation, and absolutely don't use any of the tips or tools that might generate real interactivity:

- Don't ask specific questions, such as, "Can you see my mouse pointing at the logo?"
- Don't use the highlighter, arrow, pen or other annotation tools, as they only mess-up an otherwise pristine screen.
- Don't ask the audience to change raise their virtual hands or use the chat dialog – doing so would only interrupt your flow.
- Don't offer to let someone in the audience "drive" – this would be far too exciting for the audience and might risk real engagement.
- Don't ever record and play back your sessions later on – you are already at the top of your game, so there is no reason to improve…

8. **Don't use an Agenda or Roadmap**: "Where is this going…?"

It is best if your audience has no clue as to your overall plan for the demo – that way, every topic will be a wonderful surprise. To ensure this, eliminate presenting an agenda or meeting plan.

Even better, present your demo as a long, complex story, with multiple fictional characters and a storyline that braids together several subplots. Jump back and forth between these characters as you present the benefits to their counterparts in the audience. Make sure to move seamlessly from section to section, module to module, while applying the other techniques in this article.

This strategy should have your audience completely lost by the ten-minute mark. Even better, the lack of any clear demarcations between demo segments (such as returning to an agenda) will ensure that once lost, your audience will never be able to rejoin the story. The good news is that they will be able to use the time in the demo to get their email and web browsing done…!

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9. **Don't Split Your Forces**: "All for one and none for you…"

Don't take advantage of having someone from your company actually in the room at the customer's site (e.g., salesperson). This approach enables you to eliminate distractions, including:

- Managing introductions
- Testing and confirming technology operation
- Communicating tone and how things are going
- Alerting and managing when new people arrive late / leave early
- Managing (and repeating) questions
- Handling side-bars

Similarly, when you are unable to have someone from your company on-site with the customer, don't consider asking your champion or key contact to be your "active conduit" for you. [See my article "Remote Demos – The Role of the Active Conduit" for more details on this…]

10. **Don't Turn Off Email and IM Alerts:** "Ohhhh, my….!"

Few things engage and entertain an audience as completely as seeing compromising email previews and embarrassing instant messages appearing on the presenter's screen during a demo.

It gives the customer a good feeling to see notes between members of the selling team describing certain customer players as "idiots". [Note: real case – I *saw* this!]

Bonus: pay no attention to your webcam and whether it is sharing live video of you…
Double Bonus: dress inappropriately. [Question: is the urban legend true about the web participant with insufficient clothing coverage – who's webcam was on?]

Top Ten – And More!

Practice and perfect the items on this Top Ten List and you'll join the hallowed ranks of the SPT (that's the "Sales Prevention Team") at your organization. In any case, following these guidelines will certainly increase the probability that your demos will *not* help you achieve your goals.

Note: the list above is just a starting point – you can explore the articles on our website at for constructive ideas on how to drive interactivity when you can't see your audience.

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