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Stunningly Awful Sales Kickoff Demos
Selling to Your Sales Force – The Toughest Customer of All!

Cries of "Who cares?", "So what?" and "What's this *good* for?" issue from the more vocal members of the audience – and everyone else appears to be apathetic. Bad news!

The situation? You are demonstrating your new, earth-shattering, game-changing product at the annual sales kickoff meeting – but it is *not* going well. This is your big opportunity to "sell to sales" and put your new product foremost in the minds of the sales team – and they're not responding as you'd hoped.

Most demos to the sales force of new products, and new releases of existing products, are uncompelling, unconvincing and fail to generate the desired excitement.

What's going wrong and what can you do?

Here's a rapid answer: capture and communicate Customer Success Stories to generate a vision of how your customers will benefit from using your new offering. Start with your customers' business issues, present these up-front and then map the balance of the demo to the specific capabilities customers need to solve their business problems.

The result? You gain sales force "Share-of-mind" – and achieve your roll-out objectives!

A Lack of Vision

Most demos of new products are all about certain *key* features – key features, that is, from the perspective of marketing. Most demos of new releases are all about the *new* features.

Product Marketing and Product Managers live and breathe their new products over a period of months or years. They know their new offerings intimately – every new feature, every bug, every blemish – and, of course, the missing major feature or two they couldn't get into the release (sadly, these are often important dashboards or reports, the very deliverables most desired by customers!).

Marketing generally has a strong vision of how customers *should* use the new offering in their minds. The question is: does this vision coincide with reality?

When marketing folks demo their new products, they tend to focus on the key and new features, describe the underlying technology, show how they work and all the cool options available. However, they often fail to build a vision with their salespeople of *what good things* these new features will enable for the *customers* – and that is the critical element missing in their demos.

The key to a successful product launch or new release demo is *Vision Generation* for the sales team. You must build a vision in your salespeople's minds of how your offering will help your customers solve their business problems. The new offering needs to be perceived by the team as "Easy to sell, easy to buy".

Vision Clearing…

Why do you build and sell software? Two answers:

1. To make a profit.
2. To help your customers solve their business problems.

When you "sell" to the sales force you need to keep both of these in mind. Your sales people will preferentially sell the products that are easiest to sell and easiest for their customers to buy. Most typically, new products are *not* the easiest to sell, in comparison with existing offerings.

Salespeople know that new products will often have bugs and may lack important functionality. New products also often suffer from the challenges of "Crossing the Chasm" – they may have a limited initial audience of interest in the customer base. Salespeople may choose to keep on selling existing, proven products, in order to make their quotas comfortably and predictably.

Put yourself in their shoes: you are in the audience and another product manager is demoing his new product. Over a period of 50 minutes he shows a pile of "really cool" features and options. He used a set of fictional characters, "Susan, the Manager", "John, the user" and "Bob, the IT guy" to tell a story. By the end of the 50 minutes you've seen a lot of screens, options and dialog boxes, but you are more confused (or bored!) than excited.

The new offering looks complicated and confusing – and you are not sure which customers to approach or how to present the product. "Let someone *else* waste time with this," you think.

Vision Clarified

Now contemplate the following scenario: move the clock forward one year. You are listening to a sales success story for your recently released "TurboForecasterPro" product at the next year's sales kickoff meeting. The successful sales person is relating why the customer made the purchase and presents a slide with the following information:

Job Title and Industry:	VP of Sales, Acme Software
Critical Business Issue:	Concerned about achieving forecasted revenues
Problems/Reasons:	Forecast data sits in local, regional spreadsheets, requiring hours of manual "roll-up" work from reps, regional heads, and admin staff each time the forecast is updated. Lots of errors, takes too long, always late. Unable to see which projects need attention, which are likely end as "no decision", difficult to assign resources wisely.
Specific Capabilities:	A way to aggregate the data from the sales offices around the world and generate real-time reports showing forecast and pipeline, on-demand, right from the VP of Sales' laptop computer; identify key opportunities to address and coach; deploy appropriate resources effectively.
Delta:	$30M in incremental revenue; redeploy 4 sales operations FTE to more productive tasks.
Critical Date:	In place to roll-out at sales kickoff meeting January 20, 2019.
We Sold:	200 licenses of TurboForcasterPro, plus services, totaling $575,000.

The other salespeople in the room get excited and start asking for more details. Why? Because they have similar customers with similar situations and rapidly realize that your product can provide the capabilities these customers need. They realize that the slide is a terrific Customer Success Story, a compelling and successful way to introduce the new product to *their* customers – it is a template that can be applied right away.

"Show us the demo you used to make this sale," say the other sales folks.

The presales colleague to the successful sales person does so – and takes only eight minutes to show what is needed.

The other sales reps are now excited and ready to go sell your new product. They have a clear vision of:

- ✓ Who are the target customers – by job title and industry
- ✓ What overarching goals or objectives are at risk (Critical Business Issues)
- ✓ The underlying problems and reasons that are keeping these goals and objectives from being achieved – what is getting in the way (Problems/Reasons)
- ✓ The specific capabilities provided by your new product to solve the problems (Specific Capabilities)
- ✓ The value of the solution, in your customers' minds (Delta)
- ✓ Critical dates or events that drove customers' implementation timelines (Critical Date)

- ✓ And: The size of the sale, for the sales people (very important!)

Good stuff! Now, contemplate how you might have *accelerated* the sales of your new product if you'd provided this information at the *first* sales kick-off meeting…

Capturing Customer Success Stories

When presenting and demonstrating to your sales people, you need to make your new product as attractive, as easy to communicate and as easy to sell as possible.

For existing products, Customer Success Stories are often the best way for salespeople to engage and begin a sales process with a customer. However, new products often don't have the benefit of Customer Success Stories – so what do you do?

First, if you have any pre-release customers who used your product, interview them to generate reasonable Success Stories. Ask them:

- [List their job title and industry]
- What goals or objectives are now being achieved as a result of using your new software?
- What were the underlying problems or reasons that made it hard to achieve the desired objectives – what was getting in the way, previously?
- Which specific capabilities are they now using address these problems, from your product?
- What is the value of the solution, from their perspective (in terms of people, time or money saved – tangible real numbers, not platitudes!)?
- Was there a critical date or event that drove a timeline to implement (did they need to have the new solution in place before a specific date – and why)?

- [Then, list the size of the sale or expected sale, based on the scenario]

"Sanitize" as necessary and you have a terrific Customer Success Story for your new product launch.

NOTE: Since you will *not* use the name of the specific customer when presenting to prospects, so you do not need to get legal approval to relate the rest of the information. These are known as "Informal Customer Success Stories" and are the lifeblood of a software organization!

But We Don't Have Any Customers, Yet…

If you don't have any customer experiences that you can harvest, then you need to create fictional or "suppositional" Success Stories. These should be based on your expected customer situations or Use Cases. Create these fictional Success Stories from the following questions:

What are the target job titles and industries? For each specific job title and industry:

- What goals or objectives are likely at risk?

- What underlying problems or reasons do you expect make it hard to achieve the desired objectives?
- Which specific capabilities from your product do you expect will enable the customer to address the problems?
- What is a reasonable expectation of the value of the solution, from the customer's perspective (again in terms of concrete numbers: people, time or money saved)?
- Is there a critical date or event that you expect will drive a need to implement by a specific date?
- [List the size of the expected sale]

This is an effective and compelling starting point to help your salespeople sell your new offering.

Vision Clearly Communicated

Now, back to our sales kickoff meeting… Instead of flogging your sales team with a long, detailed demo of the new product, start with building a crisp vision of likely customer success scenarios.

Accordingly, begin your presentation with a set of existing or fictional Customer Success Stories. These will clearly illustrate the opportunities represented and provide the top-level information to target and qualify customers. You'll want to provide a series of Success Stories like a menu, so that the sales team can see the depth and breadth of the customers the new offering can help.

You then follow with a demo that shows example outcomes for each Customer Success Story, from the customer's perspective. For example, in our VP of Sales case above, you would start your demo by showing the completed forecast and pipeline reports, to prove that they can be done and to generate a vision of the solution right up-front. You then show the specific capabilities needed to roll-up that forecast and pipeline, using the *fewest* number of steps or mouse clicks.

Keep it short, simple, and to the point. In most cases, you can easily relate a complete Customer Success Story and show its accompanying demo in less than *eight minutes*!

Vision Achieved and Amplified

By presenting your new offering in the context of Customer Success Stories, your sales organization can begin to sell your product right away. You've succeeded in communicating how customers can use and get value from your product – via real-life usage situations.

You've amplified your message as well: you've transferred the knowledge of how to communicate your product's key uses from a single person (you) to the entire sales force in a way that is compelling and resonates with the sales people. You've also built a vision of what good things selling your offering will do for the sales folks, themselves!

The result? You've equipped your sales team with the three most important concepts possible:

1. Your new product will be compelling and easy to introduce to their target customers.

2. It will be easy to prove and demonstrate – to move the sales process forward.
3. The sales team sees your new offering as a terrific way to achieve quota.

Easy to sell, easy to buy.

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