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The Menu Approach – A Truly Terrific Demo Self-Rescue Technique

Have you ever been in a situation where:

- a. You find yourself in front of an audience about which you know nothing of their needs or interests – and they’ve been promised a demo...
- b. You are asked to join a web session, right now, and the sales person says, “They asked to see a demo...” (again, you have zero information about the customer)...
- c. Someone walks up to you at a trade-show booth and says, “What do you guys do?” or “Show me a demo...”

Are you interested in a delightful self-rescue technique for situations like these? It’s called The Menu Approach – and it is a logical, simple and surprisingly effective method for dealing with situations where your audience is partly or largely undiscovered.

Hungry?

Imagine walking into a nice restaurant – and you are quite hungry. You sit down and a few moments later the waiter comes up to you and asks, “What would you like to eat tonight?”

You have no idea what they offer, so you respond, “What do you have?” The waiter says, “Well, we have lots of items – appetizers, main dishes, side dishes, desserts – what would you like?”

Very frustrating...! Clearly, you are both making no progress – and it is very much the same situation as requests for demos where neither party has a clear idea of the other’s desires or capabilities.

A solution? For our restaurant scenario, the waiter says, “Here, let me get you a menu...”

The menu provides a rapid method for the customer to assess what is possible, what sounds good, and what items or combination of dishes to order. A menu presents a high-level listing of the range of offerings – and we can apply the same principle to the wonderful world of demos.

The Menu Approach

Back to situation “a.” at the top of page 1, above... You are in front of a group of 12 people, about which you know very little – and you’ve been asked to present a demo. Instead of taking the customer on a painful and boring “Harbor Tour”, you start by presenting a list of topics that you believe may be of interest. For a Great Demo! Workshop, a typical list might look like:

- Remote Demos – Generating Interactivity
- Making Demos *Remarkable*
- RFP’s and Scripted Demos
- Storytelling and Demos
- Managing and Out-flanking Competition
- Managing Questions and Time
- POC’s, POV’s, and Sandboxes Tools and Strategies

You say, “Here is a list of some topics we could cover. Let me describe each one briefly and then I’ll ask for a show of hands – and each of you can vote for as many topics as you wish¹.”

At the end of the exercise, your list now might look like:

- Remote Demos – Generating Interactivity - 10
- Making Demos *Remarkable* - 11
- RFP’s and Scripted Demos - 5
- Storytelling and Demos - 3
- Managing and Out-flanking Competition - 9
- Managing Questions and Time - 2
- POC’s, POV’s, and Sandboxes Tools and Strategies - 5

You then re-order, to yield a list that is rank-prioritized in accord with customer interest:

- Making Demos *Remarkable* - 11
- Remote Demos – Generating Interactivity - 10
- Managing and Out-flanking Competition - 9
- RFP’s and Scripted Demos - 5
- POC’s, POV’s, and Sandboxes Tools and Strategies - 5
- Storytelling and Demos - 3
- Managing Questions and Time - 2

Wow! You now have accomplished several, truly terrific things:

1. You’ve uncovered the customer’s most important issues (they’re at the top of the list)
2. You have a road-map for the balance of the demo
3. You can organize your time to ensure you address the high-importance topics – and it’s OK if you don’t have time to cover everything on the list.

Additionally, you may have also expanded the customer's vision of what solutions and solution areas your organization provides, as it is possible that the customer was previously unaware that you have offerings across this range of topics.

A Few Subtleties...

When counting votes, remember that businesses are not necessarily democracies – and all votes are not necessarily equal. For example, if there is one C-level person in the room, and she is the *only* one who wants “Managing Questions and Time”, that topic moves (magically and mystically) to the top of the list.

Similarly, you can choose to bias the presentation (and subsequent scoring) of topics up or down in accord with your current understanding of the customer's situation – “Many of the *other* customers we've worked with in *very* similar situations to what you've shared with us so far found that the topic on managing POC's was most important – they were able to save months of otherwise wasted effort as a result of what they learned... How many of you are interested in this?”

Finally, when you complete a topic, you can use ~~strike-through~~ text to show that it has been completed, giving you (and the customer) a written record of what was completed and what is still open:

- ~~— Making Demos Remarkable — 11~~
- ~~— Remote Demos — Generating Interactivity — 10~~
- ~~— Managing and Out-flanking Competition — 9~~
- RFP's and Scripted Demos - 5
- POC's, POV's, and Sandboxes Tools and Strategies - 5
- Storytelling and Demos - 3
- Managing Questions and Time - 2

“Show Me A Demo...”

If you have ever worked a demo station at a trade-show, you are familiar with the prospect who walks up to you and says, “What do you guys do?” or simply, “Show me a demo...” (Clearly, they know not what they ask!).

A solution? Use The Menu Approach. You can have your list of topics available on your demo computer or tablet – or consider having a list produced as a poster, laminated, and attached to the wall of your demo's station. You can then simply point to your Menu and begin the same process as above:

“Here is a list of some of the things we do – let me describe each briefly and then you can let me know which one(s) are most interesting to you.”

Delightful!

Many Great Demo! Workshop participants have reported that The Menu Approach is one of the most effective tools they have used. The Menu Approach – a truly terrific demo self-rescue tool for situations where your audience is partly or largely undiscovered.

¹Often referred to as a “Chicago-style” vote...

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