

HOW TO RECOVER FROM A DISASTER DEMONSTRATION

IN FIVE EASY STEPS

By Steve Weinberg

How many of you have had the experience of a demonstration “blowing up” in front of a prospect? Perhaps there was an internet connection problem, or there was a technical issue or a feature that you wanted to highlight did not work as you expected. Maybe some of the invitees had trouble accessing the videoconference over the internet. Or, you were unable to use the videoconferencing software and the demonstration failed. That is more common now in the COVID-19 pandemic quarantine era.

The product that you told the prospect was “easy to use” seemed anything but easy. When this happens you are embarrassed, and the prospect begins to question the viability of your solution – as well as the competence of your account team. Since this happens more often than we would want it to, you must understand how to recover from disrupted demonstrations. Here are 5 recommended steps on how you can recover:

1. Do not try to deny what has happened. The prospect has seen it. **Own it!** It has happened before to you and probably to them. Be transparent and explain what happened, if you know. Do not blame it on another of your team members. That makes it even worse, in the mind of your prospect and your own company.
2. Apologize for the inconvenience this has caused. Be sincere.
3. Ask for a second chance – on a different day, when you are not rattled. Do not extend the frustration of trying to get it to work today. It didn't. You are not in a good frame of mind and neither is the prospect. It is time to shut it down and come back another time.
4. Be sure to emphasize the benefit to the prospect of a second demonstration. You must assure the audience that the demonstration will provide visibility into how easy the product or service is – when operating correctly. Some people that attended the poor demonstration may not be back for the second try. If so, you should reach out to them separately and ask if you can schedule one specifically for them. Ascertain which people are involved in the decision or are influencers and convince them that it is worth their while to attend. If many of them have schedule conflicts, ask for a different time. (This can be difficult to do when one is requesting a second chance, but it is sub-optimal to do the demonstration without the important people in attendance.) My experience is that most prospects will allow a “do-over.”
5. Assure that the second demonstration will be “bulletproof.” In addition to additional testing, have a backup, and a backup to the backup, in case you encounter the same problem. Test this outside your office at a place that approximates where the demonstration will take place. If there will be a company firewall in place try to find a similar technical environment for your testing. It is not adequate to test in your technical environment, where the demonstration was developed.

There are some rare times where the prospect will not grant the second demonstration because they believe they do not want to allocate the time or if they believe it may give you an unfair advantage over your competitors. This may happen when there is a Request for a Proposal (RFP) or when procurement

is controlling a formal process. If that happens there is not much one can do, except hope that you are selected for the second round and have another chance at that time. Emphasize how your value proposition provides them with significant benefits, especially one that contains a substantial return on investment (ROI) or fills a critical strategic need, such as accelerating a supply chain need or entering a new market.

It might also be a good idea to bring food or candy, such as donuts and coffee or chocolates, to the second demonstration to show your appreciation for the additional time that they are giving to you.

Once the second demonstration is complete it is not appropriate to gloat, but merely to thank the prospect again for the opportunity to correct the earlier (technical) failure. One cannot undo the damage or perception they may have from the first demonstration, but the prospect probably understands that these sometimes happen.

An important takeaway is this – don't panic! As the British say:



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