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The 4 Magical Demo Questions

by **Nathan Gold**

Excerpts from "The Overnight Guide To Giving Product Demos"

Nathan Gold is the author of *The Overnight Guide to Giving Product Demos* and winner of the coveted DEMOgod™ Award from IDG Executive Forums. This article discusses 4 Magical Questions to ask before you begin a product demo. They are magical because they elicit information from your audience that can insure a great demo.

Question 1: "How much time do you have today for this demo?"

This is one of the most important questions you can ask because audiences' time is more important than your time. If the demo was scheduled for 45 minutes that is exactly the amount of time you can take before your audience begins to feel uncomfortable or run off to another meeting. Knowing that you now only have 45 minutes will give you the chance to modify your demo on the spot, if you are prepared.

Don't run over on the time you have been given. From my experience and personal observations of other speakers, for every minute you run over, you lose about 5 minutes of credibility and rapport. I recommend you stop 10 minutes early, if possible, to give the audience an opportunity to ask questions.

Question 2: "Is there anyone here who would mind if I did not do a canned demo?"

This is a magical question because most people believe that a demo is usually canned and very well rehearsed. When you tell them that you are not going to do a canned demo, you will notice an immediate sigh of relief from your audience because they now believe the demo will be better.

I used to demo an expense report system. I would always tell my audience that if they didn't mind, rather than do a canned demo, I would prefer to show them how I use the product everyday. I would say something like, "I travel for a living and I am constantly filling out expense reports. Rather than waste either of our time, let me show you what I do each evening in my hotel room, waiting for an airplane, or even while on the airplane. That will give you a better demo than a scripted one."

By starting out this way, I have already given them crucial information about the software. The competition did not have an offline client. So, the key message I gave to the audience was the software you are about to see can run online at the office or

while you are away from the office and disconnected. It was subtle but so powerful because this was one of our best features and benefits.

Question 3: "How can I make this demo a memorable experience for the audience?"

This is a silent question that you ask yourself. It is not a question to ask the audience. When you come up with an answer to this question, you will be compelled to give a more enthusiastic and emotional demo. It should become one of your main outcomes from the demo experience. Think long and hard about this one and you will find your time in front of the audience much more enjoyable.

Here's an example to illustrate this point. When working with a company named Liquid Machines, Inc. from Lexington, Massachusetts, we needed to discover an emotional and memorable finish for the demo. We spent several days brainstorming when it hit me square in the eyes.

The concluding statement in their demo was, "Liquid Machines will help prevent the loss or theft of your intellectual property and proprietary information. We stop the leaks!"

So, at the beginning of this statement, the sales person picked up a coffee cup and slowly poured water into the cup and continued until they get to the last word. Just as they said, "...leaks," they would turn over the cup of water and nothing came out!

This is an amazing little trick that magicians use all of the time. But, for Liquid Machines, it became the signature conclusion for their demos that many people talked about for the rest of the day and at the dinner table that night. How about that for a lasting impression?

Question 4: "Are there any specific features or questions that you have about our product before I begin? If so, then I can be sure to address those needs during this demo."

This question can be risky because they may ask you to demo something that you have not tested or worked with in the past. However, if you want to add a little risk to your demos, this question can offer you some very interesting diversions from your normal demos. You may certainly choose to leave this one out.

With this question, you open yourself up to anything, but this is also an opportunity to show the people in the room that you are willing to take a risk. It also shows them that you are a flexible presenter and willing to ask them what's important to them. This builds rapport with any audience so long as it doesn't backfire and cause a huge debate among the audience members.

If you spend half the time talking about features that are meaningless to the viewer, you are losing the power of the process. By spending the time to discover what is important to the viewer you may be able to close the deal sooner because you have answered ALL of their needs, concerns, and requirements without spending the time to demo features that are of no concern to them, but may be to you and your company because you wrote it or built it.

For more tips & tricks on creating, critiquing, and giving demos, please contact Nathan Gold, The Demo Coach, at 510-579-8530 or visit www.thedemocoach.com.

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