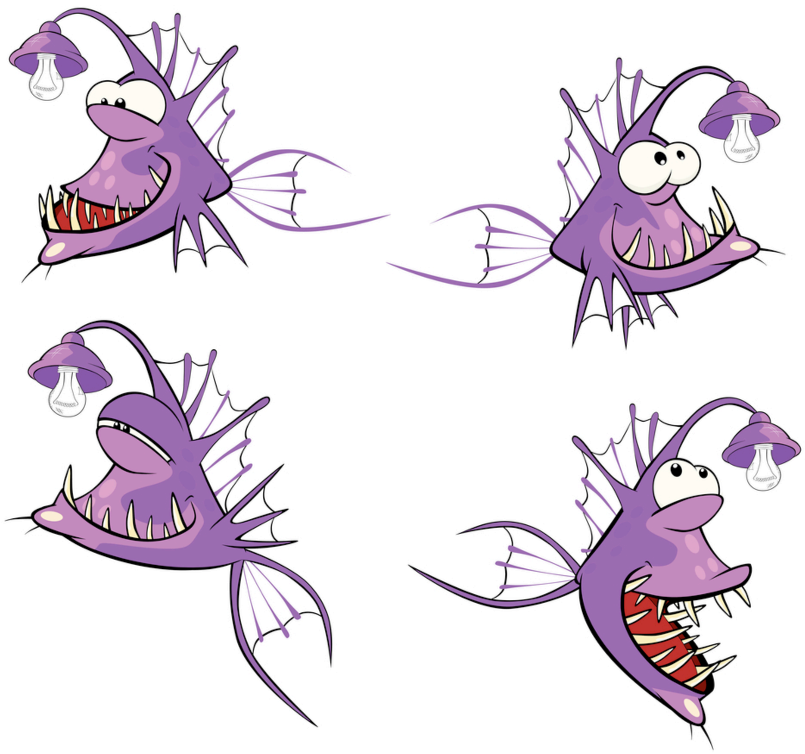
ELIMINATE THE DEMONS FROM DEMONSTRATIONS



Ensure success of your product demonstrations and evaluations

Tactics for Great Product Demos

The devil is in the details

Selling often requires providing samples or doing product demonstrations to prove the performance matches the claims made by eager sales and marketing organizations.

If they go well, deals close quickly. But how do you ensure that those opportunities don't go down the porcelain drain because a demonstration failed to perform as expected?

Having spent 28 years selling technical products, I've seen a lot of things happen. Everything from forgotten components and broken instruments, through personality clashes with customers and even fellow employees.

In looking back on the reasons, I learned that most of the issues encountered could have been easily prevented by focusing on few simple concepts.

Eliminate the demons from demonstrations

To run successful product demonstrations, your first priority should be to eliminate the *demons* from the word *demons*tration.

As Mr. Murphy always says, "anything that can go wrong, will go wrong". Unfortunately, more times than not this happens during the product evaluation.

Demons can rear their ugly heads in a number of ways including:

- Instrument malfunctions
- Methods being run incorrectly
- Sample contamination
- Missing components

Demons can also pop-up by not having a formal process for the work to be done.

Again, this sounds basic, but I've seen several multi-billion dollar technology companies who became complacent with their demonstration process. Either they didn't have one, or they did demos so frequently that the routine caused them to lose focus. They met with clients, went on autopilot, and navigated right into the position of losing the sale.

Your demonstration process needs to not only outline the scope of work to be done, but needs to clarify the responsibility of each member of your team, including their role in interacting with the various customer participants. As we'll see in the example below, personality demons have the potential to be as destructive to your sales process as a non-functioning product.

A robust demonstration process should include:

• What work will be done

• The roles and responsibilities of each participant

• Who will address which types of questions

• Assigning a meeting manager

• Responsibilities for communicating with the client after the meeting

• Contingency planning - what to do if something goes wrong

When providing clients with samples to run their own evaluations, the process is slightly different, but the same rules apply. Make sure they know the exact procedure for how the product should be tested, provide them with a method, and have the right resources available to ensure the sample is evaluated correctly.

Don't assume the customer knows how to run them, or that they will use them correctly. I found that poor sample evaluation was more common than I expected, and in many instances the negative result could have been easily prevented.

The last component is contingency planning, and I like using a strategy developed by the military for developing a communications plan called P.A.C.E. - Primary, Alternate, Contingency and Emergency.

Your company may not need a Plan, A, B, C, and D for your demonstration process, but you do need to spend time considering everything that could go wrong, and how you will deal with it while meeting with the customer.

The most basic plan will be to *check, double check and re-check* to assure that you have everything you need, the equipment is working correctly, and that everyone involved knows what's expected and their role in the process.

Check your ego at the door

I have a degree in chemistry and was the resident expert for my company when I was selling technology products to biopharma companies.

I thought my products were great. I knew my company was great, and I knew that I was extremely knowledgeable in my area of expertise.

The challenge was putting a leash on my opinions so that I wouldn't get into debates with my customers. Having made some serious mistakes early in my career, I had to work very hard to remember the following:

Rule # 1: The customer is always right.

Rule # 2: If the customer is wrong, refer to Rule # 1.

When the customer is wrong, or disagrees strongly with your position, these rules can be hard to follow. This is not to say that you should acknowledge incorrect information as true, or refrain from sharing your point of view. On the contrary, pushing back is required in many instances. What this suggests is that we need to balance how we present our expert opinions. People are best convinced by reasons they discover themselves, and our approach needs to incorporate tactics to help them along this process.

Unfortunately, when you or your teams don't follow the rules, the impact can put a serious hitch in your selling efforts.

For example, I had one instance where one of my company's chemical engineers, who was world class in her field, met with one of my clients who had similar credentials. We were discussing a new application for one of our products that had the potential for millions of dollars in sales.

The conversation started out OK, but then the debate started. It began with some rounds of technical one-upsmanship, testing each other to see what they each knew. By the end of the one hour meeting they were standing up, knuckles on the table, nose-to-nose in a heated debate.

After the meeting my colleague said to me: "Wow, that was a tough meeting, but I won that debate." I replied: "Yes you did, but you just cost me several years of my life." I then went on to explain to her that it had taken me 3 years to build the respect and trust needed to get that meeting, and now I was confident that the customer would never meet with me again. Fortunately, I was finally able to recover the relationship, but it took a lot of time and energy which delayed the sale by about 6 months.

So what do you do?

Ensuring success of your product evaluations and demonstrations isn't difficult, and can be covered by a few easy steps.

1. Have a process for the work to be completed

2. Make sure everyone knows their role

3. Run the method beforehand and double check everything to minimize the chance of a problem.

4. Provide methods with any samples

5. Plan for every contingency - P.A.C.E.

6. Check your team's ego at the door

This may sound simplistic or just good "common-sense", and you're right it is, however it's the simplest things that are typically the most overlooked and the easiest to address.

For more information on maximizing your company's selling efforts, please visit the Selling Resources page on our website at www.tritonconsult.com.

If you would like specific training designed to develop your technical team's ability to help drive sales and client relationships, download the program description for Tech*sale*nce™-Sales for the Technical Team.