



## Mastering Technical Sales

2037 Trowbridge Drive

Newtown, PA 18940

Phone +1-215-431-1552

[John@masteringtechnicalsales.com](mailto:John@masteringtechnicalsales.com)

[www.masteringtechnicalsales.com](http://www.masteringtechnicalsales.com)

John Care, Managing Director

## Apologies!

### One Sheet: I'm So Sorry I Have To Write This

Public speaking experts state that you should never, ever apologize. It seems to be one of the golden rules that you should never break, at least for US/European cultures. Is that still the case for the Sales Engineer when giving a presentation to a customer?

I'm not a big fan of absolute rules (the customer **isn't** always right) so I'll say up front that my position is that you should almost never apologize. I'll also say that far too many SE's apologize for far too many things when presenting - so what follows is a list of do's and don'ts when it comes to Mastering Technical Sales.

Before looking at specific situations, the fundamental question to ask is "*what do I have to gain by apologizing?*" That may sound a little manipulative but we are after all dealing with selling. So carefully consider each situation and examine the potential risk, the impact on your credibility, the impact on your message and potentially any legal issues relating to liability (especially in the US where an apology can be taken as an admission of error and even guilt).

1. **Nerves.** Please don't start by telling people how nervous you are. You are a professional and nerves are part of the job. The customer will be oblivious to your nerves and will have no idea how you are feeling. You are in fact calling attention to a big negative so be quiet and get on with the job. For details on handling nerves refer to "[The Stress Free Demo](#)".
2. **Personal Mistakes.** When you make a mistake, just keep going unless it is so obvious you need to refer to it. Even in that case, correct your error in a professional manner and continue. As a general rule of thumb, if your mistake concerns money, availability or some key piece of functionality then you should correct yourself.

3. **Collateral Mistakes.** Don't feel obligated to point out every typo in your slides, a poor choice of colors, or my favorite.. " *This is a bit of an eye chart*". If it is an eye chart - fix it! Remarking that you rushed to put the slides together, or that they are someone else slides are also major negatives.
4. **Environmental Mistakes.** Sometimes things happen over which we have no control. At one point in the middle of my very important demo a construction crew started work in the parking lot outside. Don't apologize for the noise - instead you should either take action (close the shades and windows and suggest the audience move towards the front of the room) or defuse the situation with some humor ("who would expect our competition to turn up with helmets and jackhammers!")
5. **Corporate Mistakes.** It is not an unusual occurrence for a customer to start pounding on you about the quality of your support organization, the quality of your products and services or some other perceived slight back in the annals of history. We've all been in that situation. Listen carefully, take notes if appropriate, acknowledge the problem if one exists and even commit to having someone from corporate contact the individual - but don't apologize on behalf of your company.
6. **You're Late.** This may be my British upbringing, but I regard punctuality as a business necessity. If you are late for a customer meeting and the meeting is already in progress just enter the room and wait to be introduced. If you are the key presenter then make your apology before you present - don't start with the apology. The upside of apologizing in this instance far outweighs the downside as the audience already knows you are missing. Just be sincere and don't tell some big story to justify your tardiness.
7. **You Missed The Mark.** It happens. The product you showed was not what the customer was expecting. The key business issues you identified were unimportant. Someone gave you incorrect information during Discovery. Acknowledge the miss, don't point fingers at anyone - take it as an opportunity to rediscover the facts you need to get it right next time.. Again - don't apologize - it probably isn't your fault - but do action so the audience knows you are correcting the situation.

So think very carefully about apologizing. Although it is a very natural thing to do it doesn't gain you very much. Unless you are going to take a hit to your professional credibility or expose yourself legally - acknowledge and continue. I'm sorry to say that saying sorry is great for personal relationships, but not for making sales.