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Timing Is Everything

How To Fit Sixty Minutes Into Thirty

"I'm sorry - something else came up, we can only give you thirty minutes instead of sixty."

In the current business environment, sixty minutes rarely means sixty minutes any more. Customers arrive late for the meeting, webcasts are usually delayed by 5-10 minutes and events conspire to reduce your face time with a customer. Do you really believe that your customers get up in the morning with a breathless anticipation of what's going to happen in their vendor meetings that day?

So when your time has been slashed in half - what can the Sales Engineer do?

1. **Make A Plan.** You should always have a "Plan B" - which is what you will show or do if you only have half the time. This is a standard part of any professional preparation and applies to presentations, demos, whiteboards, discovery meetings etc. No excuses.
2. **Chop, Don't Trim.** It's extremely difficult to make up time by trimming a couple of slides (minutes) from multiple sections. If you can omit a slide or screen and your presentation still makes sense, why is it there in the first place? You are better off chopping out an entire section/topic from your presentation. Corporate Overviews and Industry/Solution Overviews are prime candidates.
3. **Focus on Key Business Issues.** Over twenty years of experience caused me to formulate the first law of discovery which states that "every business issue comes down to a number that is either too small or too large". Make sure that no matter what else you do, you clearly show how your solution makes that number smaller or larger. Everything else is tangential.
4. **Try A Double Ending.** There are occasions when part of your audience can stay longer; examples might be at a User Group meeting or a joint business/technical meeting -

especially if you are the last item on the agenda or at the end of the day. You can offer to cover the "chopped" material after the official end-of-meeting.

5. **Don't Rush.** Trying to cram 60 minutes into 30 minutes just doesn't work and it will leave the audience dizzy and confused. Even trying to push 60 minutes into 50 doesn't place you in the best light. Speaking too quickly or skimming over slides will not reinforce your message. Think about occasions when the situation has been reversed - how much do you remember about those meetings?
6. **Give Them A Choice.** You may be in a situation where you can either cover Topic A or Topic B. In the absence of executive guidance or a decision from an internal coach - try giving the audience the choice and then go with their preference. As an SE I was always ready to push a discussion or presentation before the demo. I took the view you were far more likely to be invited back for a demonstration than for a discussion - especially the lower in the organization you went.
7. **Don't Run Over.** Yes - it's annoying that you have less time to present. Get over it. Use it to your advantage as a way to avoid deep dive questions by just pointing to the clock. Give the audience a five minute warning - you may get an additional 5 or 10 minute extension if you are doing well.
8. **Follow-Up Is Important.** Even if you are thrown out of the room at the end of your time, stay around for a few minutes in case someone wants to follow-up with you. This is especially true of mass-market as opposed to single customer events. There have been occasions when I have run a Q&A in a hallway or adjacent conference room.
9. **Follow-Up Again.** Make sure you have an agreed-upon plan to cover the "chopped" portion of your presentation. It may be as simple as building and emailing a handout or using a video. Remember point #6 - you are more likely to be invited back if you have something to show.
10. **Negotiate "Compensation".** When asked to trim or chop your presentation, see if you can get something in return - especially if you are doing someone a favor. *"Sure, I can present in 30 minutes - how about you set up a short meeting next week with the business owner in return?"* You would be amazed what you can get if you only ask!

Summary

Time is a precious gift, and sometimes the customer will take that gift away from you. So be prepared for that to happen by always having a Plan B to utilize just 50% of your original time. Don't quit, don't pout and don't rush - just go through less material in less time and really focus on the solutions and the results instead of all the features and functions.

"The only reason for time is so that everything doesn't happen at once."

Albert Einstein, physicist.

Talking Points is a monthly column authored by John Care, Managing Director of Mastering Technical Sales. For more information on this and other Sales Engineering topics visit the website at www.masteringtechnicalsales.com.

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