

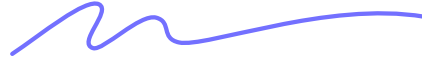


The Presales Team's

Definitive Guide to Overcoming Demo Failures



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Introduction

Demos. Most presales teams have a love/hate relationship with them. On one hand, you need a dynamic environment to show off your product. Buyers need to be able to imagine themselves using your product: How does it look, feel, and behave? How will your product benefit their lives? A slide deck of screenshots or video demo simply won't cut it.

On the other hand, there are so many things that could go rogue. Between server errors, shared demo environments, mock data limitations, out-of-control products, uninvited guests in your demo, and customers changing the best-laid plans — there's often too much left to chance.

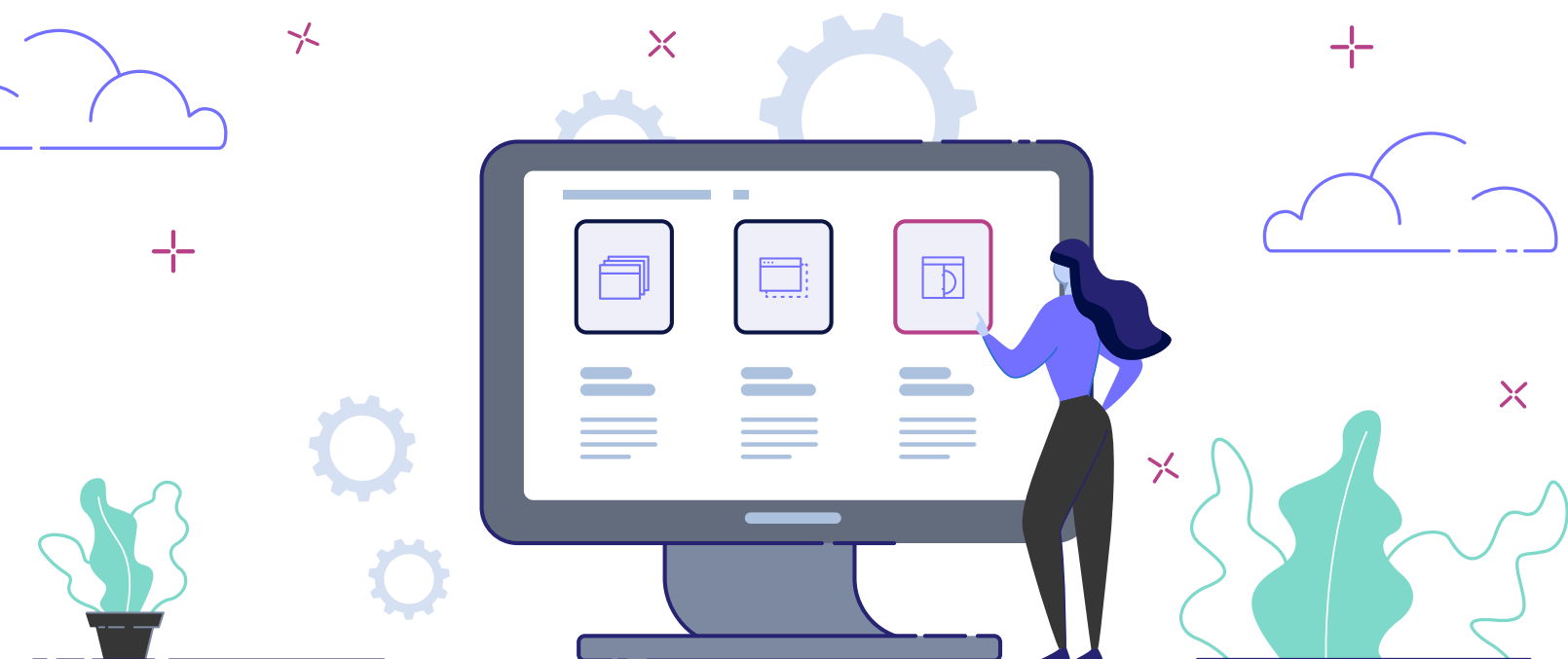
And, while demos are necessary to illustrate your product story and show value, many solution engineers (SEs) are stretched too thinly as the primary caretakers of their demo environments. According to the [Reprise Presales Landscape Report](#), prep work and maintenance consume far too much of the SE's valuable time:

Prep work: 38% of SEs spend more than 5 hours per week preparing demos

Maintenance: 71% spend more than an hour per week cleaning/maintaining their demo environment; 21% spend between 3-10 hours.

Between these two tasks, the high end of our survey respondents spend over a month per year keeping up with their demo environment. Considering presales teams are in short supply and high demand, that time could easily be spent on more strategic tasks.

Not to mention, when demos fail, it can be both high-profile and costly. We'll walk you through some of the most common reasons demos don't go according to plan, and how you can improve both the technical and team preparation aspects that go into making a demo seamless.



3 Common demo failures explained

Technical issues

Technical issues — like crashes, slowdowns and errors — often occur due to running a live demo on an application in production (or sales and presales [sharing a demo | production environment](#)).

Whether it's new code being released into production or Wi-Fi downtime, technical issues can damage your reputation and product credibility or prevent a deal from closing. Infamous examples include Google's generative AI chatbot giving a [factual error](#) in its first demo with press, and Steve Jobs facing a [Wi-Fi connection demo issue](#) during one of his signature iPhone events.

Data privacy and/or anonymization issues

Anonymizing customer data for a demo is essential. If anonymization is not done properly, you run the risk of exposing potentially sensitive data or PII from your customers. Data anonymization details can potentially fall through the cracks during the demo prep process, even for the SEs who pay meticulous attention to detail. Or, in some cases, an unexpected detour in a demo could accidentally reveal another customer's PII.

Team preparation issues

Even the most knowledgeable SE can run into difficulties during a live demo. It often happens when demos go off-script, new features debut without sufficient enablement or training, or a prospect wants to explore a part of the application that's not part of the plan.



How to **avoid** demo failures (once and for all)

These demo failures and others can be avoided with the proper preparation and technology enablement for your presales team. Let's walk through what to look for from a technical perspective in your demo environment, and how to prepare your team to expect the unexpected.

Overcoming issues with demo technology

The right demo creation platform can help solve many of the issues that come with demoing a live application. Best of all, a demo platform doesn't require the prep work and maintenance of standing up your own demo environment.

With the right demo technology, SEs can build powerful, compelling product stories for every type of buyer. But just like your product, no two demo needs are alike.

For teams that prefer to demo their live applications, SEs might benefit from an overlay technology that allows for simple, easy verticalization, personalization and data anonymization of a live application or existing demo environment.

For teams where maintaining a demo environment is too costly or complex, SEs should look for a demo creation platform with app cloning capabilities. This type of technology allows for the creation of a demo environment that behaves like the real product, but is divorced from the product's backend. Doing so creates a safe and stable demo environment, without the maintenance issues associated with a traditional demo environment.

Some SEs want the ability to demo products that aren't live yet, or have complex workflows including integrations or multiple products that can't be demoed in the traditional way. Or, maybe they just want to showcase one or two features without showing off their entire application.

For these teams, screen capture technology might be the right fit. This type of demo technology allows SEs to build specific demo flows for anything and everything, including feature launches, product functionality, and templates for specific personas, industries, or use cases.

When evaluating demo creation platforms, look for one that includes multiple types of demo technology to suit your individual needs. Above all, a demo creation platform should provide your team with the stability and security necessary to demo enterprise technology without worry.

Preparing presales for customer questions and challenges

Even with demo technology fail-safes in place, you never know when a prospect is going to take your demo to a place your presales team isn't ready for. Proper preparation and training is essential to keeping on-track and on-message.

One area to focus on is objection-handling. While objections can be difficult to manage, they show that a prospect is engaged. Demonstrating empathy and showing that you're listening is key to keeping a prospect on your side. Here are some tips from presales experts on how to handle even the trickiest objectors.



Understand the types of personas likely to object. As B2B sales pro Daryn Mason writes on [LinkedIn](#), there are many different types of people who might fire over an objection during a demo. One could have already decided on your competitor's product and be armed with talking points about your weaknesses. Another may be trying to prove a point internally. A third might be focused on showing off their own knowledge. Knowing how to engage with each persona may keep you out of certain traps, such as taking 20 minutes going down a rabbit hole to talk about a specific technical feature. Role-playing with each type of objector persona can help your team understand their motivations and know how to respond accordingly.



Empathize and prepare use cases. Presales practitioner Max Lupertz uses the [Feel-Felt-Found](#) approach to prepare for tricky questions. Creating a bank of use cases based on customers' challenges would be helpful for this approach. If an objection arises, you can acknowledge that this is a common problem you've experienced before with other customers, and point them toward the applicable case study or solution.



Address common challenges head-on. If you see a pattern in questions prospects are asking, and you have a good solution to their concern, address it directly in a future iteration of your demo. The demo process is nothing but a good learning opportunity, and a chance to refine your demo for future prospects that fit similar characteristics.



Empower the team to say "I don't know." While it may seem counterintuitive, trying to dive back into the demo to explore a minor product feature or answer an unknown question can bring up all sorts of new risks. Help your team understand that it's okay to say "I don't know, but let me investigate and get back to you." This is especially important if a question threatens to derail your demo altogether.

Another important area of focus is aligning features or product solutions with use cases. This is yet another area where a demo library comes in handy. Map features to specific use cases in your demo library, making it simpler to show off specific features or solutions that meet prospects' needs.

“Can you click into this other section?”

Let's talk about staying cool when a prospect derails the demo.

Maybe your team is demoing product tours with limited interactivity, making it impossible to show off certain parts of a demo. Or, the data within a certain section of a demo isn't scrubbed of PII. Perhaps your prospect gets mired in the minutiae of one use case or feature, leaving you no time to cover the rest of your demo.

What do you do?

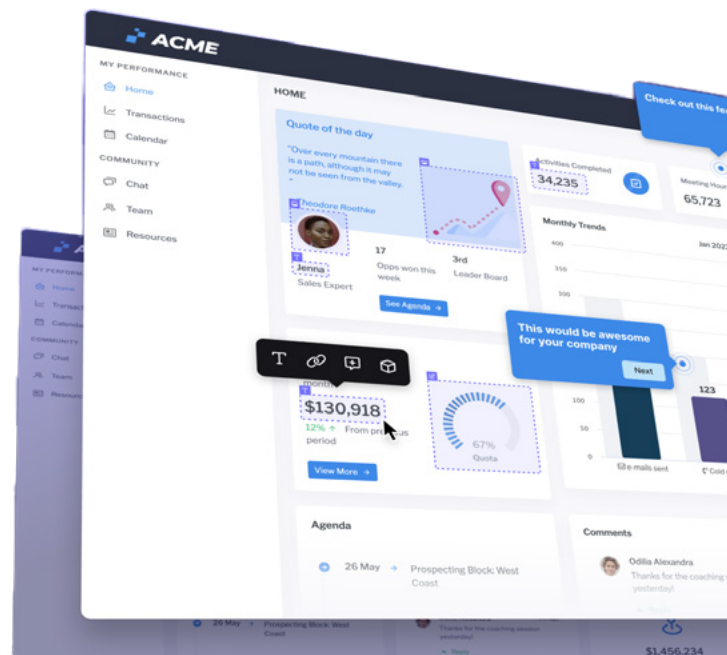
As solution consultant Michael Rao recommends in [Presales Collective](#), take a step back and remind the prospect of their overall goals and pain points you intend to address, as detailed in discovery. Rather than showering the prospect with features, it's wise to address one issue at a time. Summarize key points more than you think you might have to (Rao recommends as often as every five minutes).

Overall, you should use your demo as a framework for a broader conversation. Make it a two-way conversation about what the prospect would like to explore. Plan your demo to show off the most impressive parts of your product. And above all else, debrief with your team to avoid repeating any mistakes for the future.

Making the most of your demo opportunities

Overcoming some of the most common demo failures is a matter of investing both in your people and your technology. Train and role-play with your team to help them understand how to handle tricky situations — including objection-handling techniques, industry-specific challenges, technical feature questions, and resetting customers who derail your demo.

From a technology perspective, take the worry off of your solution engineers' minds with a demo creation platform like Reprise. Using Reprise, you can save the 30+ days a year your SEs would usually spend keeping up with your demo environment. Beyond time-savings alone, using Reprise can improve stability, while empowering your presales team to personalize demos and anonymize data with ease.



Ready for a trustworthy, seamless demo experience?

See Reprise in action [➤](#)

