

How to Get the Most from An Application Demonstration

Do you ever wonder why you waste time sitting through an application demonstration listening to a vendor delivering an out-of-the-box demo, mechanically grinding through the features of their product? Does the demo give you sufficient information to do the preliminary filtering of potential solution choices?

By allowing the vendor deliver an out-of-the-box demo, you get a general overview for the application. It does not help you assess fit with your business requirements and uncover potential critical gaps.

To make the best out of a demo, I suggest that you do the following:

1. Gather high level information on your current operation – tasks that you do today;
2. Identify who does what – roles and responsibilities;
3. Identify tools/applications you use in completing the tasks;
4. Develop key scenarios for the operation;
5. Request the vendor to demonstrate how their application would deliver on those scenarios;
6. Request for a high level mapping of functionalities to tasks for each scenario;
7. Make it clear to the vendor that out-of-the box demo would not be acceptable.

I have sat through many product demonstrations feeling frustrated because the vendor does not want to take the time to customize their demo. No doubt a customized demo would require additional effort. In fact, I am using the word “customized” loosely. What the vendor really needs to do is to frame their presentation and demonstration in context that is in line with your business needs.

By walking through the scenarios in the demo, you are able to see at the high level, how well the application will satisfy the key business requirements. There is no question that further review of detailed functionalities is necessary. However, taking a scenario approach applicable to your business sets the stage for assessment. It also gives the vendor an overview of the key business activities that the application would need to support. Further, they need to come prepared to address any obvious gaps.

For vendors who truly have your interest in mind, they will invest the time to tailor their demo so that it makes sense to you. In conclusion, you want to see how an application meets your business needs. Seeing the features of an application out of context is an ineffective use of everyone's time.