

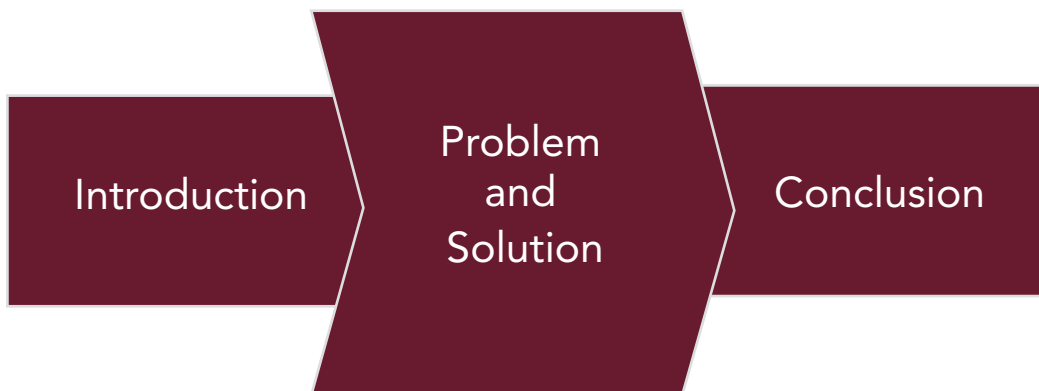
# FLASH DEMOS: NARRATIVES AND BEST-PRACTICES

Flash is a platform for the delivery of web-based video, animations, and rich interfaces. One of the most popular uses of Flash among our clients is for product and technology demos. What might typically be offered as a listless PowerPoint deck can be made fresh and exciting through Flash.

Flash provides a powerful environment for the integration of images, sound and interactivity, but even the most beautiful Flash demo is only as good as its content. To truly achieve results, you need to present a narrative which engages and inspires your viewer. You need to create meaningful content which demonstrates a relatable business need and offers your product or service as a credible solution.

## EXPLORING A NARRATIVE

We recommend establishing a narrative outline for your demo which reinforces your audience's perspective and the primary value points of your solution. One such narrative is outlined below. This format can be used to deliver your messages within a strong and purposeful framework.



The weight of this narrative is on establishing the problem and solution. Both the introduction and conclusion phases would be fairly brief, but important in that they bookend the presentation and create a greater sense of context and purpose. The main portion of the demo would be contained within the problem/solution sequence. This structure can be used for an entire presentation or for individual topics, as appropriate.

## INTRODUCTION PHASE

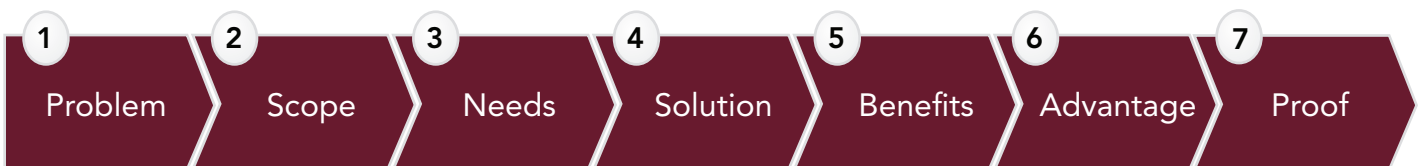
An introduction can serve as a transition into the demo. It is important to grab the viewer’s attention from the very start, and the introduction can accomplish this by focusing on a few key goals:

- ✓ Hook the audience with a powerful theme or opening statement.
- ✓ Provide a summary of the benefits that will be discussed. If the audience perceives that the presentation addresses their real-world needs or interests, they will be more willing to invest their full attention.
- ✓ Describe what the demo will be about, and the high-level topics which will be introduced. This creates a sense of context for the user where they can anticipate what is to come and can effectively “follow along” with an understanding of the presentation’s structure.

The introduction can be brief, but it lays the groundwork for what is to come.

## PROBLEM/SOLUTION PHASE

The bulk of the demo contents are contained within the problem/solution section. In this sequence, the problem(s) and the solution are introduced. Adhering to this sequence would form a strong narrative that leads from identifying the problem to introducing and supporting the solution.



- 1. Problem** – During this phase the problem is identified. The viewer must understand and relate to this problem. Using graphics and charts will help the viewer to recognize and visualize the problem.
- 2. Scope** – During this phase the impact of the problem is outlined. The demo should illustrate the size, complexity and urgency of the problem.
- 3. Needs** – This phase would summarize the actual business needs that must be addressed by any potential solution. In order to solve the problem, what must happen?
- 4. Solution** – This phase introduces the solution. In the case of an application or technology, the solution can be represented through screenshots, desktop video capture, or information graphics. “Before and After” scenarios can also be used in this phase and the problem phase to demonstrate the impact of the solution. For a particularly complex solution or one that offers industry or role-specific advantages, it may even be appropriate to include multiple, selectable scenarios.
- 5. Benefits** – This phase of the presentation outlines the benefits the solution offers. Wherever possible, the content should focus on quantifiable benefits rather than “features”.
- 6. Advantage** – This sequence would outline the solution’s competitive advantage. This can be accomplished through feature comparisons and quoted endorsements that cite the solution’s benefits over competitors. The demo should emphasize how the solution is unique or superior.
- 7. Proof** – During the proof phase, the presentation should substantiate the credentials of the solution and your company. Success stories and third-party endorsements can be used to validate the solution’s benefits and advantages. This creates an opportunity to discuss the key points that were made in the presentation within a real-world context that will resonate with the audience.

## CONCLUSION PHASE

A conclusion presents an opportunity to leave a lasting impression with the audience. This phase of the demo should:

- ✓ Summarize the key points of the demo
- ✓ Provide closure by ending purposefully (rather than just “drifting off” or ending abruptly)
- ✓ Motivate the audience to act

If the audience is given a call-to-action at the end of the demo, then they are motivated to reconsider the points raised during the presentation in order to support that task. This call to action can take the form of a single item, or a menu that permits multiple levels of interaction or self-qualification. The user can also be given an opportunity to download PDF files (success stories, overviews, data sheets) that relate to the points made during the guided tour.

## STORYBOARDING YOUR DEMO

You can explore this narrative in PowerPoint by creating slides which summarize the content for each phase of your demo. Use the slide area for screenshots, infographic sketches, and bullet points for primary messages. Use the notes pane to define the purpose of each phase and to develop detailed content and voiceover. This storyboard will help you to collaborate and to secure accurate bids from vendors for the development of a Flash demo.

## BEST PRACTICES

- ✓ **Support a strong narrative** using the structure we have outlined or a similar, purposeful outline.
- ✓ **Support more than two-dimensions.** For a self-guided presentation, the structure of the demo should support content beyond the linear level, giving the user an opportunity to explore based on their needs or viewpoint. For example, at the start of the presentation the user might select a particular problem or industry focus.
- ✓ **Offer interactivity.** To further engage the audience, it is important to give them opportunities to interact with the presentation. This interaction should be at a level beyond the usual back/forward/pause buttons. For example, a viewer might be given an opportunity to select from a menu of success stories, or explore concepts through a dynamic illustration that updates based on their selections.
- ✓ **Create contextual signposts.** Using context clues and summaries serves to lead the audience from one section to the next, and helps them understand where they are, where they have been, and where they are going.
- ✓ **Use illustrations purposefully.** Studies show that listeners retain 40% of information when provided with a visual reinforcement of that information, and only 10% when they aren't. Therefore, graphics and diagrams should be used to reinforce key points.
- ✓ **If it's worth saying, say it again.** The key messages should be previewed in the introduction, outlined in the problem/solution phase, and summarized in the conclusion.
- ✓ **Be succinct.** The presentation should not outstay its welcome. Focus on your key messages, and provide ancillary materials through downloads and web links.
- ✓ **Offer compelling call-to-actions.** The demo should leave the user with well-defined pathways to additional resources and opportunities to communicate with your company or self-qualify themselves.

## IS FLASH THE RIGHT PLATFORM?

Flash was originally released in 1996, and has since become—according to Adobe—the world’s most pervasive software platform. The latest statistics show an installed base of more than 98% of all US internet users.

We can recommend Flash unconditionally for an array of uses, including product and technology demos. It is a robust platform for designers and coders. It supports an array of media types, and is cross-platform friendly. However, it isn’t necessarily the perfect platform for every project.

Microsoft Silverlight is one alternative. Silverlight is a web application framework which is very similar to Flash. It integrates media, graphics, animations and interactivity into a user-facing environment. Silverlight offers strong scripting capabilities and supports Visual C#.Net and Visual Basic.Net, among others. It’s a solid choice if you want to leverage the capabilities of the .NET framework. On the other hand, it has a much higher learning curve and uses Windows-centric code that is less familiar to web developers.

Silverlight is also a strong choice if optimizing your demo for search engines is an overriding consideration. With Silverlight, text is always deployed as a separate entity and is fully indexable by search engines such as Google.

However, two years after launch, Silverlight still struggles for acceptance among end-users. According to recent estimates, it has established a 10-30% install base among US internet users. Unless your audience is limited and known to support Silverlight, Flash might be the right platform simply because of its ubiquity.

Using PowerPoint might also be an option, especially if your demo is not intended for web delivery or if you want to manage your content in-house. PowerPoint presentations will lack the “wow factor” of a Flash demo, but they can be flexible and maintainable.

## YOUR DEMO CHECKLIST

We recommend working through this checklist prior to engaging with an agency to develop your Flash demo. Defining your content, requirements and goals will help to secure an accurate estimate for the work and create a foundation for a successful result.

- ❑ **Define your business goals.** What do you hope to achieve with this demo? What is your timeline?
- ❑ **Assemble your team.** Who will create content and provide input on the demo?
- ❑ **Define your audience.** Who will be viewing this demo? Will it need to support multiple roles? Will it require translation into multiple languages?
- ❑ **Define your venue.** How will the demo be viewed? Will it be delivered via the web or on physical media? Will it need to support an in-person demonstration, such as by a sales team member? Will it be used in your trade show booths? Keep in mind that each usage may require different functional variations. A trade show might use a looping version of the demo, while the web version may include more self-guided functionality.
- ❑ **Inventory your assets.** What content will you supply and what will be created by the vendor? Assets can include textual content, infographics, screenshots, desktop video capture, stock images, videos, audio narration, music, web forms, and downloads.
- ❑ **Define the demo’s shelf life.** How long do you anticipate this demo will remain on-point with your messages? Will you update it to keep it current?
- ❑ **Create your storyboard.** Develop the outline for your presentation. This will serve to define the level of complexity, length, and format. You should also consider whether you expect the vendor to help refine and finalize your storyboard.

Find out how AtrE.NET can apply our design experience and insight to your Flash demo project.

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