



Boothmanship

These pages survey the art of designing and operating a booth for the next EDCS Demo Days.

- [The purposes of a booth](#)
- [The visitor's approach decision](#)
- [Making people comfortable](#)
- [Your objectives](#)
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Boothmanship: The Purposes of a Booth

A booth has two main purposes.

- It defines your organization as a player in the crowd at the show.
- It provides a space for your guests to interact with you.

The simple presence of your booth at the show says of your organization "We belong here. We have earned this territory. We are important enough to merit your attention."

Once this message is delivered, the attendees [make a decision](#) about whether they want to interact with you. If they want to, they approach you, and join you in the booth area. At this point, it's up to you to convert the situation into one of mutual benefit to your organization and to the attendee. The booth plays an important role in this process by providing the two of you a space in which to interact. But you yourself are even more important. Effective boothmanship includes

- [Knowing your objectives](#)
- [Making your guests comfortable](#)
- [Providing a useful demonstration](#)
- Forming the basis of ongoing relationships

Probably the single most common objective of any exhibit is to establish new relationships. If that objective is one of yours, you'll want to keep track of the names and contact information of anyone you meet. So establish a means of doing that. At many shows, there is an infrastructure involving badges and some form of data collection apparatus. We won't have that, so you're on your own. Do anything that seems right to you, but do something, and make sure everyone working at your booth knows what to do.

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Boothmanship: The Approach Decision

Once an attendee has spotted your booth, he or she must decide whether or not to approach you to talk to you. Since it's in your best interest that the decision should be to approach you, it's important to understand what you can do or not do to influence the decision. Most of this is just common sense.

Some attendees decide in advance that they will stop at every booth. Of these there are two main types.

- Literature collectors

These folks will usually speak to you only briefly, ask for whatever handouts you are giving away, and move on. The challenge for you is to decide whether you want to talk to them, and if you do, to snag them. If you don't want to talk to them, then your challenge is to encourage them to move on as soon as possible, with a minimum of your literature.

- Surveyors

These folks are somewhat more sophisticated, in that they know that some booths may not look like much, but there might be value inside anyway. They tend to ask a couple of questions to see how good you are and how relevant your stuff is, and if you pass the test, they will either tarry or come back. Otherwise they'll move on. As with the Literature Collector, it's up to you to decide how much you want to talk to a Surveyor, and whether or not to try to snag them. Usually, they *are* snaggable.

- Selectives

Most people are Selective. They will approach your booth only if it shows signs of being helpful to them in some way.

Collectors, Surveyors, and Selectives tend to use similar cues when they decide whether to approach or whether they will tarry if you try to get their attention. Here are some things these people respond to.

- [Crowds](#)
- [Booth Design](#)
- [Booth Discipline](#)

Crowds

If your booth is buzzing with activity, Selectives are more interested. The theory is, "If other people are interested, there must be something there." Of course, if your booth is swamped with people, and it's obvious you have no time to give attention to anyone else, Selectives may move on. So if you're very busy, try thinning the crowd by suggesting politely to some guests that you would like to meet with them later. But be selective about this: usually you would not say such a thing to a VIP or high priority guest, or someone you really want to talk to. And always couple your suggestion with an apology for the crowded conditions, and a suggestion that they come back at a specific time.

On the other hand, if you have no guests, or very few, you can improve your prospects by somehow acquiring a guest or two. If someone wanders by, even if they don't meet your

organization's selection criteria, don't let them get away. At the very least, their presence in your booth will be helpful to you in attracting the kind of guest you think you want. But you'll also find the interaction helpful in other ways.

- You'll get practice telling your story.
- Your guest will almost certainly ask a question you hadn't thought of.
- Your guest may have information you will find interesting.
- You'll get another contact to add to your network.

We can help each other in this regard. If you "buddy up" with some EDCS folks from another booth, you can demo to them at times when both of your booths are empty. This gives you some practice, and may attract some non-EDCS visitors to your booth when they see something happening. Once visitors are present, you can end the demo you were giving to the EDCS folks, and they can go back to their own booth. Later on, you can return the favor.

Booth Design and Maintenance

The design of your booth is mostly determined by Rome and DARPA, but you do have some choices.

- If you have a computer, arrange it on a table so that passersby can see the screen. This will draw their interest. Try to make the screen face out, rather than to the side. Make sure the computer, the monitor, cables, keyboard and mouse are squeaky clean. Screen cleaner works on all these items. Pack screen cleaner, Kleenex, Q-tips (for cleaning the keyboard), and paper towels in the computer box when you ship it to Baltimore. Use them.
- If you have more than one computer, and you are doing a multiple-computer demonstration, put a nametag on top of each console, so you can refer to it by name during your demo if you need to. The name you use need not be the machine name, but usually it will be, unless the machine name is offensive or otherwise unusable in this context. If it isn't the machine name, make darn sure you don't confuse yourself.
- If you have a table, arrange it so that it invites, rather than defends. Arranging it like a counter at a drugstore, between you and the traffic flow, tends to block people out, and conveys a defensive impression. Instead, arrange it along the side of the booth.
- Keep your booth clean and orderly. No trash, empty cups, napkins, writing pads with notes scribbled on them, visible cabling. If the carpeting or drapes get soiled, torn, or detached, tell somebody (Alana perhaps) so it can be put right. If you brought your own booth lighting, be sure to bring spare bulbs. A dead bulb looks bad. If you brought booth lighting, use it or put it away. In the mind of the visitor, "off" means "broken", and "broken" means "incompetent."

- **Have some posters or other art for the back wall of the booth.**
They should contain a few smart phrases that capture your message and suggest your value. And they should be clearly legible to a passerby. Colorful graphics are nice if they communicate a message. But otherwise, they may not be the wisest use of space and money.

If your booth posters have some indication of where your technology is useful, the people who can use your technology may be more likely to approach.

- **Put a stack of your business cards in plain sight.**
If you don't have business cards, have some made. You'll need about 100 on hand, just to be safe. Don't check them with your baggage--they're probably the most important hardcopies you will bring to Demo Days.

If you are the PI or booth manager, your cards should be in sight at the booth at all times. If you are not the PI, your business cards need to be there only when you are.

If your institution won't provide business cards (as may be the case if you are a student), see a professional printer and order some. The usual price is about \$40-50 per 500, and the turnaround is typically a week or less. If you are a student, this is money well spent. It could lead to your first job. A cheaper way to go is to print them yourself on a laser printer. You'll need pre-cut card stock, such as Avery Laser Business Cards, to do this, but even then, the quality will be lower than real printed cards.

Booth Discipline

There are some simple dos and don'ts for behavior of your staff while they are in the booth. These guidelines are aimed at improving your chances of talking with the people you have targeted by encouraging their approach.

- **Stand, don't sit**
If you are seated, especially if there are two or more of you, people tend to think of you as engaged in a private conversation. They are less likely to approach because they don't want to be rude. If you stand, then the format is more like a reception, in which approach is encouraged.

If you are too tired to stand, then it's likely that the shift schedule should be broken up more. If you don't have the staff to break up the schedule, put a little sign up that says "Back at <whatever time>" and take a 10 minute break. And be sure to be back at the time on your sign. By the way, signs that read "Back in 10 minutes," with no specific time, are not generally believed. People who see such signs often do not return. Signs with a specific time are much more likely to encourage return visits by visitors.

Probably the worst thing you can do when no visitors are in your booth is to turn to your computer and start hacking, reading email, or, worse, surfing the Web. When you are using a computer, some people will refrain from approaching you out of courtesy. Others will conclude that your demo is not working and that you are struggling to figure out why. It

really doesn't matter--you lose either way.

- **Don't eat or drink in the booth**

Nothing deters approach more than the sight of someone eating or drinking in a booth. If you're hungry, wait for a break. Eat and drink in the lobby or corridor instead.

Remember that most of your fellow EDCSers are also hungry and thirsty. If you bring food into the hall, it's likely that you'll trigger others to do the same. And soon, lots of us will be eating in our booths. This really doesn't look good, so please keep your refreshments outside.

Even if you aren't actually eating or drinking, it's a risky proposition to bring food or drink to a booth. If you should damage or soil your literature, business cards, computer, or booth drapes, the impact could be significant, and it will surely be negative. I have seen this happen.

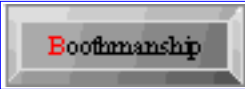
- **Attend to personal hygiene elsewhere**

If you must attend to your appearance for any reason, such as combing your hair, fixing your make-up, or blowing your nose, do it elsewhere, preferably in the rest room. You'd be surprised how much you reduce the chances that a visitor will approach you if he or she sees you blowing your nose. Do it someplace else.


- **Keep papers, valises, and literature from other booths out of sight.**

Best to store these things under the booth table. Two reasons. First, they look a bit messy. Second (more important): guests may take literature you collected for yourself, thinking the items are representative of your booth. Then two bad things happen: you lose the literature, and they get confused.

By the way, the best time to collect literature from other booths is after hours. Most booths leave their literature on display all the time, so you can make a single sweep of all booths when the hall is completely empty, and you can do it in 10 minutes or less, because there are no crowds and nobody in your way. Then take the literature back to your room and peruse it at your leisure during the week.



Boothmanship



Boothmanship: Your Objectives

Most likely, your long range objective is to form mutually beneficial relationships with some of the attendees. The benefits on your side include:

- Connecting with potential customers who might support further work related to your investigations, or who might be interested in using your technology in work of their own.
- Explaining your work results and intentions to people who may or may not have heard of your work, for the purpose of expanding your circle of influence.
- Meeting potential customers, other investigators, or just knowledgeable people who might know something about where your investigations might go next.

The benefits to the attendees include:

- Learning about the latest technologies, so they will be able to anticipate effects on and opportunities for current and future programs.
- Collecting information about advanced technologies to carry back home to colleagues, either to share openly or to consolidate their own power in their home organizations.
- Resolving confusion about technologies for which they may already have partial or incorrect information.

You may be able to add to these lists, or you may find that one or more of the items in these lists don't quite fit for you. Make a list of what you think are the benefits to you and your organization, and make a similar list for each category of attendee that you're interested in working with. Keep these benefits lists in mind as you design your demo, your booth, and your literature. All these elements should effectively support your benefits objectives.

But for the immediate present, that is, during Demo Days, your objectives are more specific:

- [Talk to the right people](#)
- [Don't talk to the wrong people](#)
- [Pick up some action items](#)
- [Say the right things](#)
- [Make a good and memorable impression](#)

Talk to the right people

To position yourself to talk to the right people, you need:

- To know who they are
- To be accessible to them
- To have access to them yourself

Knowing who to talk to can be tricky. Since it will be very helpful to know who is planning to come to Demo Days, try to get your hands on the advance attendance lists. You may not recognize

the names, but perhaps someone in your organization does. Target at least three or four people, more if you can. Know their names, so when you meet someone at the booth, you'll know if they are on your target list.

It also pays to think about what kinds of people will be in Baltimore. General categories include:

- Decision maker
- Influencer
- Consultant
- Competitor
- Technologist
- Manager
- Other investigators

The needs of each are different; they each have something different to offer you.

Don't talk to the wrong people

Once you recognize that you're talking to someone who can't benefit from anything you have to offer, try to terminate the conversation, politely, as soon as possible. You are doing them a disservice by prolonging it. One good way to do this is to direct them to a booth that is in better alignment with their interests.

Pick up some action items

When you talk with someone who could be a valuable contact, it pays to pick up at least one action item. The advantage of doing this is that it begins to build the connection you want to somebody who you think is important to you. By "action item" I mean some sort of action that has a deliverable. You might offer an electronic version of your slides, or your latest paper, or a reference to a publication, or even the phone number or email address of someone your guest wants to talk to. By doing them a real service, you demonstrate your interest in working together in some way.

Once you've talked to someone important to you, make sure you have a record of the conversation and any action items. A good place to do that is on the back of their business card. I keep business cards that have action items in my right suit coat pocket; ones without action items in my left. If someone back at the home office can discharge an action item for you immediately, take care of it ASAP. For example, if you promised an electronic version of some slides or a paper, and you have someone who can find it and email it, do it right away. Maybe it will arrive in their inbox during demo days, and that could be especially useful to your new contact.

But if it has to wait until you get back, try to execute the action items even before you fill out your expense report. The earlier they are discharged, the more valuable they are to both of you.

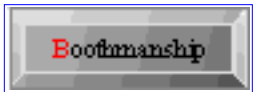
Say the right things

What the right things are, exactly, depends on your situation. But you need at least two well-crafted word packages. One is what is often called the "[elevator speech](#)." This is a short summary of what your technology is about, which can be delivered in about the time of an elevator ride. The second is not more than three or four sentences, a succinct encapsulation of the [technical case](#) for your effort.

Make a good and memorable impression

Making a good and memorable impression is easy once you've done your homework. You have an [elevator speech](#), and a solid [technical case](#). Your [booth is well designed](#), and you and others working in the booth displayed a [professional booth manner](#). Your literature and demonstration were well coordinated with your elevator speech and technical case. You made visitors comfortable, you listened well, and you picked up some action items.

This is all it takes to be memorable. And it works because so few people do it well.





Boothmanship: Making People Comfortable

This may sound squishy, and for many of us, it isn't easy, but you'll do a lot better at meeting your objectives if you make your guests comfortable than you will do if you make them uncomfortable.

Remember that even though we might prefer that our technology be evaluated on its merits alone, our customers can't help but include other factors in their evaluation processes. One of these factors is how they feel about working with us personally. Which they will often have to do, since most of our technologies are still in early developmental stages. After all, we aren't selling shrink-wrapped software.

So if we can find ways to make our guests comfortable, then they will feel better about evaluating our technologies on their merits. On this page you'll find a few simple things to do (or to avoid) to make people comfortable talking with you in your booth.

- [Shaking hands](#)
- [Making meaningful conversation](#)
- [Listening](#)
- [Giving your demonstration](#)
- [Sitting and standing](#)
- [Making eye contact](#)
- [Swarming \(a don't\)](#)

Shaking hands

When someone approaches your exhibit, you need an opener. Something like "Are you interested in ways to improve architectural consistency?" What fool could say no to a question like that? Of course, your visitor will say "Sure, tell me about it." Before you begin, introduce yourself, and then you can shake hands or not. If you do, the introduction will go smoothly, if you don't, it won't. Simple as that.

The relationship that forms, however comfortable it is, will not be deep. After all, you'll probably spend only a few minutes together. For this reason, the first few seconds can set the tone for the whole interaction. Starting off with a warm, firm handshake creates a positive and lasting impression, and an atmosphere of warmth and trust.

It's also rare. At least [one study has shown](#) that fewer than 8% of exhibit visitors are greeted with a handshake. And this is the opportunity for EDCS: if we greet our visitors warmly, we'll go a long way to building good relations with our customer community.

Making meaningful conversation

One of the best ways to make people comfortable is to participate with them in a meaningful

dialog. If we can get lost in an exciting conversation, full of insight and mutual benefit, that's the best we can hope for. The main benefit to anyone in a dialog is learning. So be prepared with three to six questions that you want the answers to. Try to find questions that stimulate thought and encourage dialog. The more open ended they are, the better. Here are some examples:

- What concerns does your organization have about evolving software architectures?
- How important would <name your benefit> be in the next few years?
- How familiar are you with <name your technology>?

These are just starters. If you can get a dialog going on anything like these questions, you'll surely learn a lot about your prospective customers.

Listening

As Yogi Berra once commented, "you can see a lot by observing." And you can hear a lot by listening.

Listen to your visitors carefully. They will be only too happy to tell you what they want, what they know, what they don't, and most important: why what you have isn't what they need. Much of the time, there won't be much you can do to change your stuff to meet their needs, but sometimes there will be, and your visitors can be a great source of ideas. Even if their comments lead nowhere on your current project, they might guide you to an even better project.

One good way to make sure you're listening enough is to limit your contributions to the conversation. Ration yourself so that 80% of the time you are listening. And never speak for more than two minutes straight.

Giving your demonstration

Most demonstrations in Baltimore will be one-on-one, or perhaps one-on-a-few. This kind of demonstration is more difficult to give than a demonstration to a larger audience, since the members of a very small audience usually feel that they can interrupt you for questions and comments, while members of a large audience tend to sit quietly and let you do your thing. But there's a lot you can do to keep control of a small audience while still satisfying their inquisitiveness, when giving [small audience demonstrations](#).

Sitting and standing

If you are sitting, it is somewhat less likely that you will be approached, [as we've said](#). But it works the other way, too. That is, if you're talking with someone and you want not to be interrupted, or if you just don't want him or her to get away, simply offer a chair. Once your guest sits down, two things happen. First, he or she will realize how long it has been since last they sat, and how tired their feet are. They will relax and feel good almost immediately. Second, you will have their ear and attention, for as long as you continue to deliver something of value.

But take care not to offer a chair prematurely--first establish that there is mutual interest, and that

the conversation is deepening.

Making eye contact

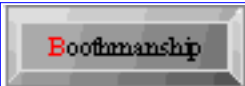
Eye contact--steady, confident, interested, warm--is probably the most important tool you have to get and keep a visitor's attention. The most significant trap here is that nowadays, everyone is aware of eye contact as a tool and as a measure of someone's confidence and sophistication. If you are aware of this, then you know that you can't outsmart anyone using eye contact--but you can lose them if you avoid eye contact.

Swarming (a don't)


Swarming is what happens when a visitor approaches an exhibit staffed by three or four eager people with nobody to talk to. All of them descend upon the hapless visitor. If there are several people from your organization at your booth, and no visitors, when you finally do get a visitor, resist the temptation to pile on the poor soul. Appoint one (possibly rotating) "designated hitter" to meet and greet, and then maybe one more of you, at most, to join in as "backup". Three (or more) on one is a definite no-no.

Usually, the designated hitter will be the most capable person available, but this is not necessarily wise. The Japanese, for example, use a junior person in this role, with the senior person held in reserve for difficult situations. This has the advantage of giving the junior person opportunity to gain experience under supervision, which limits risk. If you have enough staff for two pairs of designated hitter and backup, consider one of them as the primary pair, and one as backup. Using the most capable pair as primary is not necessarily wise--try following the Japanese design.

If a visitor pair approaches you, usually one of them is their designated hitter, and one is their backup. The visitor backup might chime in from time to time, but usually plays a minor role. If you receive a visitor pair, it's best to avoid working with them as a pair yourself, because that puts four people into the conversation, which is really too many. Try to handle them as one-on-two. That is, let your designated hitter deal with a visitor pair solo. Your backup can listen in on the conversation, but should stand aside unless invited in for some specific reason. Being "on deck" in this way, your designated hitter can turn to your backup when something comes up, such as a request for literature, business cards, or a demo.



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Boothmanship: Giving Demonstrations To Small Audiences

If there is an art to giving effective demonstrations of software, then there is magic to giving them to small audiences. Here is some of the magic.

Most of us have experienced sitting through large-audience demonstrations. When we finally get a chance to attend a small-audience demonstration, we have a tendency to interject things into the narrative the demonstrator is providing. We interject comments, suggestions, leading questions, observations, jokes, almost anything. Your challenge as performer of small-audience demonstrations is to get *your* message across in spite of your audience's attempts to interject, while making your audience feel good about understanding what you're trying to show.

There are five keys to success:

- [Keep it simple](#)
- [Demonstrate the indisputable](#)
- [Connect with your audience](#), listen to them, and let them know you are listening.
- [Maintain your focus](#) on your own message, and make sure you give them a chance to hear it.
- [Configure your computer](#) for a demonstration

Keep it simple

Many of us have a tendency to elaborate. We love the technology, and we want others to love it too. But they don't. At least not often. They love solutions, not technology. They want us to show them simple solutions.

The simpler the solution, the more they like it. So give them what they want: simple solutions. The solutions can be complex under the covers, but if you try to show them the hidden complexity under a simple solution, very often the message you convey to them is that the simple solution is complex. Wrong.

So: keep it simple.

Demonstrate the indisputable

The purpose of a demonstration is to persuade by means of a live illustration. You are trying to persuade the listener of the value of what you have done, by showing him or her a simple example. Your effort will be much *more* persuasive if it is indisputable on its face. By this I mean that a demonstration that shows a definite, accomplished chain of actions is more effective than a demonstration that shows how one would use your technology to execute a definite, accomplished chain of actions. It's best to restrict your demonstration to the illustration of the benefits of your [non-comparative claims](#).

In general, it's very difficult for you to prove, by demonstration, any [comparative claims](#). An example of a comparative claim might be that your technology yields, say, a fivefold increase in productivity by making system documentation available in real time to all developers. On the other hand, you *can* show that your technology does make system documentation available in real time to all developers. That fact is presumably indisputable, and a lot easier to demonstrate.

This may seem like an obvious point, but I've seen many people erode their own credibility by trying to demonstrate claims that were plainly debatable, while failing to clearly demonstrate indisputable claims they could easily have made. By focusing your demonstration on what you can clearly and indisputably demonstrate, and by making the disputable claims verbally, you preserve your own credibility, and allow the listeners to draw their own conclusions.

Connect with your audience

One possible interpretation of the audience's attempts to interject is their desire to connect with you as you give the demonstration. In effect, an interjection is a way of saying "Hello, I'm here. Talk to me." If you make your demonstration more personal, you tend to mitigate this effect.

Some good things to do to make your demonstration more personal include:

- Start out by asking a question or two.
Let your audience know that you are really interested in what they want to see, and that you are flexible about what you show them, tailoring the demonstration to their needs and time constraints. If you ask what their interest is, more specifically, they'll probably tell you something, and if you actually listen to what they say, it will help you give a more pertinent demonstration.
- When you're about to shift gears, ask them another question.
Most demonstrations are segmented; they aren't monolithic. At various points, when you want to show something else, you shift gears. You might find yourself saying something like "Now I'm going to show you how we can disable the enemy's cloaking device." Instead, it would be better to ask a question: "Would you like to see how to use this software to disable the enemy's cloaking device?" This approach is much more involving. It shows that you care about the audience's interests, and it introduces an element of suspense. They'll love it.

One question worth asking is the time question. If you've spent a lot of time with them, and they are fidgety, you can suggest that this is a good place to break if they are short of time, and that they can come back later. They will appreciate your not twisting their arm. Sort of like Miracle on 34th Street, when Macy's Santa Claus started giving parents hints as to where they could buy gifts that Macy's didn't stock. It's such a revolutionary idea that it rarely fails to impress.

- When you need a made-up name, use theirs.

Sometimes in demonstrations, you have to invent a name. For a marker, a file, a variable, and so on. When you need to do this, use their name. Say, "Let's see, we need a name for this message type: how about 'Swamy-message'?" (Assuming your audience-member's name is Swamy. Then, for the remainder of the demo, their name will keep popping up in every other window. Which demo do you think they will remember better, one in which "Foo-message" pops up in every other window, or one in which their own name pops up in every other window? Seeing one's own name on the screen has a tendency to settle one down some.

- When they do interject, listen closely.
You can get important cues from their interjections. If they are confused, you may not have delivered a clear narrative explanation. Try again, but only once or twice. Make a mental note to review your narrative. If they are joking around a lot, it might mean that you are too deadpan, too serious. If they keep asking you to repeat things, because they couldn't hear, speak more loudly or more in their direction. It could be noisy in the hall. If they offer some significant insight, or ask a question that shows they missed something significant, remember it, because you might want to use it yourself the next time you give the demonstration.
- After you finish, offer yourself as a resource.
By the time you finish your demonstration, you'll know a fair amount about their interests. You might be able to point them in useful directions, to other exhibits. If, for example, you know they are interested in rationale capture technologies, and you happen to know something about what we're exhibiting from that cluster, they might appreciate some guidance. Be careful, though, to stick to what you know.

If you want to do this kind of thing, try to keep some hall maps handy, so you can point out where relevant technologies are showing.

Maintain your focus

- Stick with your [Issues, Features, Benefits and Proofs](#).
This is a good outline for the narrative of your demonstration. State your issues, demonstrate your features, describe your benefits, demonstrate your proofs.

If your brochure is structured along these same lines, then your demonstration and brochure will be parallel. Weeks later, when your listeners read over your brochure, they may remember the demonstration more easily. And if you make a video version of your demonstration, it will be in good alignment with your brochure.

- Stay on track.
If your audience seems confused, it's possible that your narrative is unclear. Try to straighten it out, if you can, but don't get too far off track. You may have other people to talk to, and it's even possible you don't know that, because of the way people make the [approach decision](#). If you're watching one of your colleagues give the demo, and they do get too far off track, and people are

waiting, give them a sign to keep it moving. Usually a gesture such as pointing at your watch will do, if you haven't agreed on a more subtle one in advance.

Sometimes questions and observations can get you off the track. Remember what you're doing. This isn't the venue for philosophical discussions. If you want to delve more deeply, set a date for doing that, either in Baltimore (perhaps dinner, lunch or a break together) or later. It's often a good sign when this happens, so go with it. But don't let it interfere with your major goals while you're in the booth.

- **When the demo is ended, end it.**

After you've given your demonstration, there may be time for a little unstructured discussion. If it seems right for you, that's great. But remember, if it takes more than a few minute (5 or 10), you could be missing opportunities to meet other people. This is especially true if you and your audience are sitting down, chatting in front of an idle computer.

So after a few minutes, if it seems like there is more to discuss, try to make an appointment to do it on your break or some time when the exhibits are closed. A meal perhaps, or another idle interval.

- **Help other exhibitors**

If things are slow, we have a tendency to walk around looking at each other's exhibits. This is great. But remember, especially during the first two days, we are in Baltimore to talk to non-EDCS people. If you want to watch another demonstration, that's fine, but ask no questions publicly, and make no comments. Let the non-EDCS people have the floor and air time. Help your fellow EDCS exhibitors to stay focused by not deflecting them. Later in the week we'll get our chance to talk with each other. Or perhaps you can converse privately when both of you are on break, or the exhibit hall is closed.

Configure your computer

Many of us will be using computer software configurations that are very similar to the configurations we use for development. Unfortunately, what's good for development is not necessarily good for a demonstration. Here are some things to check before you go before the public.

- **Turn off your screen saver.**

Now is not the time to be saving your screen. If you want your screen images to be burned into the brains of the people you talk to, you might have to use a little phosphor to do it.

- **Use a reasonable font size.**

It's often difficult to change the font size to something that will be truly readable, but if you can, make it 18 or 24 point, at a minimum. Nothing smaller is really legible. And don't forget, some of the people you want to reach have lost the 20/20 eyesight they had when they were 20. Go easy on them: use a larger font if you can.

- **Remove any extraneous images.**

If you have a startup screen or a desktop pattern that has a truly wonderful picture of your

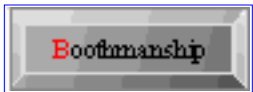
dog or your 1953 MG/B, or your family, or an F/A-18 E/F, it could be distracting to viewers of a demonstration, even if it's soothing to you. Remove it for Baltimore. Replace it with a plain blue or gray field.


- **Tame your icons**

You may have some icons, possibly for directories or hard disks, that you customized to look like Lieutenant Commander LaForge, or Captain Picard, or a Smurf. Decustomize them.

- **Standardize sounds**

I once saw a demo given on a machine that had had its alert beep customized to be a recording of the Terminator (Arnold Schwarzenegger) saying "Hasta la Vista...Baybee." Got some laughs, but needless to say, this came across as somewhat unprofessional. Best to revert all alert sounds to standard beeps or chimes.





Boothmanship: The Elevator Speech

The "Elevator Speech" is a very brief, lucid, concise summary of what you are about. You'll be really glad you have one when someone walks up to you in your booth and says, "Hi, can you tell me about what you have here?"

- [What is an elevator speech?](#)
- [Attributes of a good elevator speech](#)
- [Example of an elevator speech](#)
- [Where and when to use your elevator speech](#)

What is an elevator speech?

An elevator speech is a short explanation of what you're doing and why. It should take less than two minutes to deliver. It should be memorable. It should be easily repeatable by the people to whom you deliver it. That's the whole point, after all--you want these people to be able to recall who you are, what you do, and why they should care.

At its core, the elevator speech is the answer to the question "Why should I know about what these guys are doing?"

At its most effective, it can be a high leverage tool. If it is clear and memorable, then when one attendee asks another "What's going on in the EvoSoft booth?" someone who has visited EvoSoft can easily answer the question with *your* elevator speech.

Attributes of a good elevator speech

A good elevator speech associates the name of your organization with the key elements a customer cares about:

- What problem does your technology address?
- Why are you unique?
- What benefits does it provide the customer?
- When will it be available?
- How can I determine that your claims are valid?

And most important: a good elevator speech uses no jargon or special terminology.

Example of an elevator speech


EvoSoft is addressing the problem of global configuration management. We think of the code itself as a set of distributed objects, and we consider systems to be compositions of those objects. This lets system maintainers think in terms of components, not files, which reduces configuration management errors and the need for retesting when things change.

The technology is available now, and we're testing it on a GPS-based guidance system upgrade.

Where and when to use your elevator speech

Once you have an elevator speech, you'll be amazed at how often you can use it. Here are just a few ideas:

- **Riding down the hotel elevator (of course) when someone asks you what you're showing.**
- **Standing at your booth, an attendee asks you "What are you demonstrating here?"**
- **You have to produce a one-page flyer for Demo Days and you need a good summary paragraph.**
- **Standing in the lobby drinking coffee and eating a danish, another EDCS person asks you "So what are you working on?"**
- **Waiting for the plenary presentation to start, the suit in the seat next to you asks you the same thing.**
- **An urgent call goes out from the plenary presenters for new slides from everybody that summarize what we're doing.**
- **Somebody decides to produce a sheet of capsule summaries for all projects in the program.**
- **You decide you need a clear, brief introduction for your project's web page.**



Boothmanship



Boothmanship: The Technical Case

If your guest is interested enough, you'll get a chance to make the technical case for your effort. Usually, if this happens, it will be in preparation for giving your demonstration. So think of the Technical Case as a motivator for:

- A demonstration of the use of your technology
- A longer, more detailed explication of your work

The effective Technical Case has four basic components:

- **Issues:** it highlights and defines the principal issues that your technology addresses.
- **Features:** it describes the main features used in your approach, features that distinguish your work from other work.
- **Benefits:** it lists the benefits your users or customers derive from using your technology.
- **Proofs:** it provides, at a minimum, some indication of proof of the validity of your claims.

These four components together create a logical flow that is the thread of the argument of your technical case.

But the core of the technical case, as delivered in a form acceptable to decision-makers, is the answer to the question: So What?

So What?

A couple of years ago, one of the real experts in proposal preparation gave me a gift of a rubber stamp that says "So What?" He advised me to use it liberally on any proposals that I might ever have the chance to review. The reason, he said, is that technical authors are often so close to their subject matter that they forget what their audiences don't know. So as you write your technical case, ask yourself "So What?" And if an answer comes to you that isn't already explicit in what you've written, rewrite it.

Issues

The issues are those concerns of the customer that you have chosen to address. A common failing in technical presentation is to omit a clear, customer-centered statement of the issues. A customer-centered statement is one that is expressed in terms of the interests of the customer.

For example, if you are producing a more maintainable version of a tool that a customer is already using, saying that the new release is more maintainable is not a customer-centered statement. It would be better to say that you have rewritten the tool so that it will be cheaper to maintain, thus reducing the price to the customer, and making it easier for you to add new capabilities customers need, and to repair problems that affect usability.

In EDCS, the most attention-getting issues will be those that center around system evolvability. So

try to construct at least a couple of issues couched in terms of customer interests related to system evolvability.

Features

What makes your approach special? What are you actually doing? The answers to these questions are the features of your work. They distinguish your work from other work you've done, or from work others are doing. Try to restrict this discussion to those features that provide specific, user-visible benefits. Since customers just plain don't care about features that don't provide visible benefits, telling them about such features just obscures the value of what you're doing.

If you provide three to five features that are clearly linked to user-visible benefits, and make them prominent in your conversation and literature, you have a good chance of making your message memorable.

Benefits

Benefits to the customer, not to you.

This is the heart of your message--what the customer cares most about. The usual benefits that people think of are "better, faster, cheaper." Unfortunately, people are pretty skeptical of such comparative claims, even if you can back them up with measured data from actual use.

For this reason, it's best if you can also cite at least one benefit that is **non-comparative**. **Comparative claims (claims that end in "-er" like better, faster, cheaper) are too often subject to conditions and interpretation. A non-comparative claim is a claim that stands on its own, and is therefore less subject to interpretation. For example, "our software development rationale capture technology provides the ability to track the engineering design debate in hypertext, with direct links to source code and test data, which helps future maintainers understand why the engineers made the decisions they did." This is a non-disputable, non-comparative claim of direct benefits to the customer.**

Proofs

Proofs are difficult, no use denying it. Especially for comparative claims. Proofs for comparative claims typically involve some sort of measurement in a real project that tries to use the technology. Not many of us have done this yet.

Proofs for non-comparative claims are easier. Generally, either your technology does it or it doesn't. If possible, design your demonstration to show the proofs of any non-comparative claims you can.

