

Before You Redesign the Deck, Watch Sales Use It

A practical checklist for finding where a polished sales deck breaks in a real buyer conversation.

A sales deck usability checklist for finding where polished slides break in real buyer conversations.

The deck passed review.

That does not mean it works.

Use this checklist before redesigning a sales deck, refreshing slides, or asking PMM to “make it sharper.” The goal is to find where the deck breaks in live use.

1. Deck snapshot

Field	Answer
Deck name	
Deck owner	
Primary seller using it	
Primary buyer	
Sales stage	
Product / offer	
Why are we auditing it now?	
What is this costing today? (win rate, cycle time, new rep ramp)	
What deadline are we auditing against?	

The job of the deck

What is this deck supposed to help the buyer understand, believe, or do?

If this answer is vague, do not audit slide quality yet. First decide the job of the deck.

2. Watch for the break

Mark what happens when sales actually uses the deck.

- ☐ Reps skip slides.
- ☐ Reps explain around slides.
- ☐ Reps rewrite the language live.
- ☐ Buyers ask basic clarification questions.
- ☐ Buyers remember the feature but not the value.
- ☐ Buyers compare the product to the wrong category.
- ☐ Proof slides are shown but not used.
- ☐ The deck only works when a senior rep presents it.

- ❑ Reps create their own unofficial version.
- ❑ The deck is too long for the real sales moment.
- ❑ The final slide does not make the next step clear.

The clearest sign the deck is breaking

3. Five questions that matter most

If you only have 20 minutes, do sections 1 to 3 and stop. That is the short version and it is genuinely useful on its own. The full audit runs to section 11, needs two or three call recordings, and takes about half a day.

Question	Answer
Which slide does sales explain around?	
Which slide does sales skip?	
Where does the buyer get confused?	
Which claim lacks proof?	
What can the buyer repeat after the call?	

The slide to inspect first

Slide: Why this slide matters: What breaks:

4. Ask the reps

The score in the next section needs evidence, and most of it only exists in the reps' heads. This is how you get it out.

Do not ask whether the deck is good. Ask where it breaks.

Open with this:

I am not reviewing whether the deck looks polished. I am trying to understand where it helps you sell and where it makes you explain around it.

Question	Follow-up	Rep 1	Rep 2	Rep 3
Which slide do you skip?	What makes it skippable?			
Which slide do you hate presenting?	What feels wrong when you present it?			
Where do you stop sharing the slide and just explain?	What do you say instead?			
Where do buyers get confused?	What do they usually ask?			
After the call, what could the buyer repeat to someone else?	Who did they have to repeat it to?			
If we fixed only one part of the deck, what should it be?				

Ask these too if the rep has useful detail.

Which slide helps the conversation the most? Which proof point do buyers actually react to? Which proof do we show that does not seem to matter? What buyer hesitation does the deck not help you handle? Have you made your own version of this deck?

That last one is the loudest signal on the page. A rep who has quietly built their own deck has already told you the answer.

What to listen for

One rep is an opinion. Three reps saying the same thing is a finding.

- ☐ Reps skip the same slides.
- ☐ Reps rewrite the same language.
- ☐ Buyers ask the same clarification questions.
- ☐ Proof is not used.
- ☐ Technical detail appears too early.
- ☐ The deck starts before the buyer cares.
- ☐ The rep leaves the deck during objections.
- ☐ The deck works only for senior sellers.

5. Sales usability score

Score each area from 0 to 2.

0 = missing or not usable 1 = partly usable, but requires rep translation 2 = clear and usable in a live buyer conversation

Area	Question	Score
Opening tension	Does the deck start with a buyer pressure, not company background?	
Buyer fit	Can the buyer tell this is for them?	
Problem clarity	Does the deck name a problem the buyer recognizes?	
Product role	Is the product introduced as the mechanism, not the hero?	
Value	Does the deck explain what changes after using the product?	
Proof	Does proof support specific claims?	
Workflow	Can the buyer picture how this fits into actual work?	
Objections	Does the deck help the rep handle likely hesitation?	
Retellability	Can the buyer explain the value internally after the call?	
Next step	Does the deck make the next decision clear?	

Total score: ` /20`

6. What the score means

Score	What it means	Decision
0 to 6	Pretty deck, weak sales tool	Rebuild the story before redesigning slides.
7 to 12	Usable in parts	Fix the breaking slides first.
13 to 17	Mostly usable	Improve weak moments, proof, and next step.
18 to 20	Sales-ready	Keep the structure. Refresh only where needed.

One exception to the total. If Proof or Retellability scored 0, the deck is not mostly usable whatever the total says. A deck the buyer cannot repeat has not landed, and no amount of clean structure fixes that.

The honest label

The score gives you a band. This gives you the sentence you say out loud.

- ☐ Pretty deck, weak sales tool
- ☐ Usable in parts
- ☐ Mostly usable
- ☐ Sales-ready

Tick this as well if it applies, whatever the score said:

- ☐ Borrowing credibility from senior reps

If the deck only works when your best rep presents it, the deck is borrowing credibility from the rep.

That is not enablement.

7. Slide-level audit

Use this while watching recordings of at least three real buyer calls, run by three different reps, from the last six weeks. A dry run does not count. The whole point of this audit is that internal presentation is not the test.

Slide	What is it trying to do?	What does sales actually do?	Buyer confusion removed?	Action
1				Keep / Rewrite / Move / Delete / Appendix
2				Keep / Rewrite / Move / Delete / Appendix
3				Keep / Rewrite / Move / Delete / Appendix
4				Keep / Rewrite / Move / Delete / Appendix
5				Keep / Rewrite / Move / Delete / Appendix
6				Keep / Rewrite / Move / Delete / Appendix
7				Keep / Rewrite / Move / Delete / Appendix
8				Keep / Rewrite / Move / Delete / Appendix

The slide where the deck breaks

Slide number: What happens: Why it breaks:

8. The translation test

If the rep has to translate the slide, the slide is not done.

Pick one slide sales explains around.

Slide: What the slide says: What the rep says instead: What this tells us:

The deck is forcing sales to translate:

- ☐ buyer problem
- ☐ product value
- ☐ workflow change

- ☐ proof
- ☐ differentiation
- ☐ next step
- ☐ other:

9. Proof check

Proof should support a claim.

It should not sit on the slide like decoration.

Claim	Proof used	Does the proof support the claim?	Fix
		Yes / No / Partly	
		Yes / No / Partly	
		Yes / No / Partly	

Proof decision

- ☐ Proof is strong enough.
- ☐ Proof exists but needs better placement.
- ☐ Proof is weak. Soften the claim.
- ☐ Proof is missing. Remove the claim.

10. Buyer retell check

After the deck, can the buyer explain the value to someone else?

What should the buyer be able to repeat after the call?

Now check:

- ☐ Buyer can name the problem.
- ☐ Buyer can explain why it matters now.
- ☐ Buyer can describe what changes after using the product.
- ☐ Buyer can remember the proof.
- ☐ Buyer can explain why this product is credible.
- ☐ Buyer can tell someone else what the next step is.

If the buyer cannot retell the value, the deck has not landed.

11. Rebuild decision

Choose the smallest useful fix.

- ☐ Rewrite opening tension
- ☐ Clarify buyer fit
- ☐ Move product explanation later
- ☐ Add workflow change
- ☐ Replace generic value claims
- ☐ Match proof to claims

- ☐ Add objection support
- ☐ Split technical detail into appendix
- ☐ Add talk track notes
- ☐ Create buyer-specific variants
- ☐ Rewrite final next-step slide

What should change first?

What should not be touched yet?

Final question

If sales has to translate this deck live, what is the deck failing to say?

Start the rebuild there.