

BEST PRACTICES TO TARGET C-LEVEL EXECUTIVES

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Overview

Targeting C-Level executives is a tough proposition. The general consensus is that they are difficult to reach and have a narrow focus on what is important for taking up their valuable time. Although it is recommended to carefully plan and evaluate potential returns when developing C-Level campaigns it is not suggested to discount a C-Level campaign if the costs and metrics align with goals.

For this campaign to be successful there must be keen attention paid to crafting appropriate messaging, creating relevant email, working with gatekeepers, understanding roles, and addressing key influencers.

Unique Messaging

C-Level contacts are concerned with the overall business picture and how their pains impact the organization's bottom line. Messaging must speak in terms of business benefits. In order to truly be heard by this level, the messaging needs to center around business goals. This messaging is entirely different from the messaging that will speak to manager or director level contacts.

C-Levels pay keen attention to value. When constructing messaging it is vital to position your product or service as to the value add to their company.

Messaging should illustrate the following:

- Proof of ROI
- Aligning IT & business goals
- Maximizing investments
- Optimizing Infrastructure for growth
- Save time
- Cut costs
- Increase productivity
- Increase Revenue
- Increase the top line
- Increase the bottom line
- Free your people up to focus on what's important
- Improve competitive edge
- Provide Security

Understanding Roles

The role of the executive is key in determining how you want to communicate with them. Just because they stand at the top of the organizational chart does not mean that they thwart the decision making abilities of their Vice Presidents and Directors.

Influencer

Often C-Levels will defer to the VP and Director levels no matter the relevancy of the product or service. At this point it is a wise idea to politely present the case to the C-Level while being careful not to usurp the other party or the deferral.

Economic Buyer

The economic buyer has focus set on the pure monetary values of the product. What will the virtualization cost? How will this save money over time? What is the short term return?

Catalyst

C-Levels often have a short tenure at organizations. This may cause a desire to leave a legacy. This desire may propel the executive to seek your service as a “game-changing” strategy for the company. They may seem to become a true proponent of your solution. At this point it is best to align with the ego and name recognition of the executive.

Vetoer

Conversely to the catalyst, the vetoer may take the approach of “not on my watch.” Once it is determined that this is the position of the C-Level then messaging must be focused on the security of the product and minimize the perceived risk of adoption.

Relevant Email

It is essential to integrate email strategies with the telemarketing as many times it is necessary to provide information before gaining access to the Executive. Remember that gatekeepers screen their bosses from anything that is perceived to contain a sales pitch. It is important that the email speaks openly to C-Level interests:

- Profitability
- Competition
- Costs
- Sales
- Results

It is also important to keep email communication relevant and brief. The email should be written in terms of business benefits, rather than technology or product benefits. C-Level executives are not concerned with how your product or solution works or how it will make their IT director’s lives easier. What they are concerned with is how your solution will allow them to achieve their business objectives. Gatekeepers read most C-Level’s email first, so make sure that the email speaks to them as well.

Gatekeepers

There is a strong need to work with the gatekeeper in order to gain access to the C-Level. It is likely that the initial telemarketing call will be focused on the C-Level's administrator. It should be your policy to treat the gatekeeper like a major player in order to gain their respect, which in turn will help you to achieve access to the actual decision-maker. Instead of trying to avoid the gatekeeper, engage them in conversation whenever possible in order to more effectively reach the decision-maker.

Gatekeepers can be leveraged to a real advantage. The focus for the gatekeepers is to treat them as a key influencer, after all they have the greatest amount of access to the C-Level target. Always probe to discover the best times to contact the Executive and see if the gatekeeper will schedule a call on C-Level's calendar.

Offering to send the information to the gatekeeper so that they can direct it to the Executive is often a successful strategy. Email is the easiest to convey but it must have something compelling in the subject line as well as a reason to speak further. Including attachments or links is a great segue into a future dialogue.

Hyper Personalize

It should be a bit more costly to run an effective C-Level marketing campaigns as opposed to one targeting directors and management. We recommend that every detail of the campaign be customized directly to the specific name of each target. The C-Level audience is passionate about their careers, hobbies and causes. Methods of reaching them must be as passionate and creative as they are.

One example of this is through personalized URL's. How would you react if you saw a promotion with your name on it directing you to a microsite that was www.your-name.com? Use hyper personalization leverage it to drive a one-on-one conversation.

Tactical Approach

TeleNet recommends an integrated marketing campaign that is carefully crafted with multiple contact points. The target list should be small and manageable with highly accurate data. TeleNet recommends leveraging a pre-qualified segmented list of targets.

Touch One

Direct Mail Branding Piece. This should be a highly creative, dimensional and memorable "use" item that will grab attention. The trick of the item is that it should be relevant and of "use." Items that are too much of a gimmick will not penetrate the gatekeeper.

Touch Two

A professional mailer. A Fed-Ex style executive letter referencing the branding piece but more importantly illustrating the business aspects of the solution. This messaging should be brief and to the point while clearly spelling out the offer and its benefits.

Human Touch

The most important element to the campaign is to have a highly skilled and strategic thinking marketing communication specialist. The specialists should be very accomplished in navigating gatekeepers and developing relationships for information gathering purposes.

Task the specialist with not only discovering standard environmental information but also determining the C-Levels role in your solution. A series of if/then questions can be developed to determine the most likely path of direction that will be taken by the executive.

The objective of the call should be to establish the need for a face-to-face meeting. Empower the specialist to set a specific date and time that conforms to the C-Levels calendar. Give the specialists a wide range of acceptable dates. The specialist should also follow up an appointment setting scenario with a meeting request spelling out the specifics of the call.

Email

The marketing communication specialist should always be armed with a repository of relevant email templates to be personalized and delivered. Follow up courtesy emails to the gatekeeper should not be ignored. By highlighting the business importance of your product in a personalized email to the gatekeeper vastly improves the chances that the email will be forwarded to the C-Level.

In the situation where the C-Level provides the specialist with a quick no interest and the proverbial "send me some information" the specialist should capture the direct email address and send the link to the personalized URL.

Personalized URL

Make it personal. Stroke the ego. The main purpose of the URL is to spell out the specific benefits to this particular C-Level and the targeted company. Spend the time to research. Deals that require C-Level attention are worth the specialization and customized approach.