

Marketing, Communicating, Engaging, and Getting the Attention of the C-level

Written by Edward F. Nesta

One of the hardest groups to garner access to has always been the C-level suite (CEO's, CIO's, CMO's, COO's, CFO's, and CXO's where X covers the remainder of the creative alphabet of position titles), and during these challenging times it seems to be even harder to get their attention regardless of the Industry.

So, are there rules to follow or creative approaches to use? It is less about the rules and being creative, and more about being direct, intuitive, and the most important component, know the C-level's industry, their company, the person, and their challenges. It is not about being a Business-to-Business (B2B) relationship or a Business-to-Consumer (B2C); it is about presenting them with what they want to hear and how you connect with them.

Breaking down marketing communications into a very simplistic process yields: The Right Message, To The Right Market, At The Right Time! So, where do we start?

The Right Message – Your message is more critical in today's environment than ever before. If you are not getting the response that you would like then step back and take a fresh look at what you are communicating. Especially for C-level contacts who not only have business issues on their plate, but they may have pressure from investors, shareholders, themselves if they own the company, and added concern from their personnel whose worry level increases every day as they learn new terms such as: bailout, foreclosure, bankruptcy, government takeover, ponzi scheme, and global melt down. Knowing not only the industry and the company, but some of the more discerning and personal elements that the C-level is dealing with will help build a connection. The C-level suite is looking for answers to their problems; they are looking for solutions that will help them achieve their business goals. So, keep the message direct, know your audience, and make sure you populate your presence across the appropriate mediums for the business segment you are addressing.

To The Right Market – For many companies their services span different markets, but this is not the direct meaning behind "To The Right Market." It means do not draft your services as a generic solution for all industries. Make sure that you craft a message that is targeted to each market you are addressing. Yes, many problems are similar in nature, but people want to feel special, and what better way to engage them as an equal than by using terminology about their business and their industry. In tough markets it takes sometimes 50% longer to close a deal, but in the end if you have connected with your client you could very well have built a relationship that will endure long after the global economic correction. If closing a deal takes longer, than obviously creating communications per market will take longer, but that is what is necessary if you want to stay in the game.

At The Right Time –Timing is everything when you are looking to connect with the C-level suite. They are notorious for always being preoccupied, but every person has patterns. So, one way to create the "Right Time," short of breaking into their office and recording a few days in the life of that specific C-level, is to create a presence that crosses on-line and print media, social and business events, forums, and panels. Even if the C-level was unable to attend a forum, participate on a panel, or attend a key conference, you can engage them with information from the event to show that you understand their industry, their business, and that you took the time to connect with them with direct information. So, when dealing in the current market conditions and looking to connect with the C-level suite it is all about them and their challenges, it is not about you or your business solutions. Don't worry, if you win the account you will have a lot of time to regale your client with stories.

Last point regarding the C-level suite, it has been written that many are not Internet savvy, well I do not see them spending their days surfing the Internet, or uploading video to their favorite social network, but if they are progressive they know that the Internet is a critical part of their personal and business existence. So, keep your Internet related discussion at a higher level with regards to how it will increase their top line exposure and/or their bottom line revenue. I recall a related conversation with a CEO who stated "dealing with the Internet is no different than other projects in IT or other business units. Key questions are, what are the costs, what is the projected Return-on-Investment, and what controls are in place to track the project or initiative?"

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