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White Paper

Get Past The Gate-Keeper. Reach The C-Level.



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"Do the right thing instead of trying to do everything right." –Peter Drucker

Communicating with senior executives within your target accounts can be challenging, but by following these guidelines you'll increase your chances of breaking through the gatekeeper and being welcomed with open arms:

1. **Go small** – Target a small number of companies at a time (5-10) that fit your ideal customer profile. On a macro level this means things like industry, size and location. Other considerations may include purchasing habits, industry position and corporate culture.
2. **Know your target** – Spend time conducting research on each target company. This includes scrutinizing their website, reading their annual report, uncovering their goals and objectives, identifying key initiatives, analyzing news from the past 12 months, studying product offerings and market trends, capturing information about executives, and discovering competitor insights.
3. **Identify your value** – After research, identify alignment between your business and the targeted companies - determine the value proposition your company can communicate to the prospect. Ask yourself what business results will the targeted company get from using your offering. Executives could care less about your products or services. All they want to know is how it contributes to their desired business priorities and outcomes.
4. **Create a door-opener** – Develop a direct-mail campaign that acts as a door-opener. Of course, the message and content have to be appropriate for the C-Level audience – a concise and compelling story aligned with their business needs. Needless to say, everyone wants the ear of the C-level players. Which means that they're protected by assistants who make sure that junk mail never reaches their desks. So what's a poor direct marketer to do? What tricks can you use to make sure that YOUR information gets past the gatekeeper, gets opened by the senior executive, and generates the action you're asking for?

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Here are some tips and techniques well worth remembering:

- **Forget about envelope teaser copy** – Envelope copy screams “JUNK MAIL” and thus will be tossed out by the executive’s administrative assistant. Some companies actually have internal mailroom policies stating that obvious junk mail should never be delivered to an executive’s desk. This means that you should avoid the junk look at all costs (often, a standard #10 business envelope without any teaser copy is effective).
- **Use overnight mail or priority mail** – A better approach, if your budget permits, is to use an express service. When someone sees a FedEx package, they open it. It’s as simple as that. Of course you can’t afford to send a mass mailing via FedEx, but if you’re mailing to a small targeted audience and following up with a phone call, this is a great way to go.
- **Make it eye-catching** – If you want to go beyond the standard #10 envelope approach, consider an eye-catching, multi-dimensional package to make an impactful, initial impression with the recipient. Have you ever received a box in the mail? You opened it, didn’t you? Thinking big doesn’t stop with the packaging, however. You need to carry this thinking into the contents. Here is your opportunity to provide the information about how your product or service helps to solve their problems. Think about how you can creatively make an even bigger impact with the contents. There are many examples of creative direct mail pieces that have been sent over the years.
- **Use the “Peer-to-Peer” approach** – This means you can have your letter signed by a person at your company with the same C-level title as the prospect’s title. For example, if you want to send a letter to the Chief Financial Officer at American Widget, have it “written” by the CFO at your company. Play up the fact that both executives face the same challenges and that the writer knows from personal experience what the prospect is up against.
- **Start the letter the right way** – It’s important to state an understanding of their issues and then communicate your value proposition in terms of results and outcomes - stated in business terms and tied to their organization’s needs. That’s the way to capture a C-level executive’s attention and get your foot in the door.

- **Invest wisely** – High impact direct mail campaigns take resources, both in terms of people and budget. While you do not need to break the bank on such a campaign, your per item cost may range from \$25 to \$250, depending on the quality of packaging and use of a premium item / giveaway. Furthermore, unless you are willing to spend the resources to follow up on the mailing, save your money. The right piece sent to the right prospect will go a long way to raising awareness, providing knowledge, and opening the door – but it won't take the order.
 - **Coordinate your mailing campaign with other forms of communication** – Your direct mail campaign should not be a one shot deal. This program should be one component in your integrated marketing plan, with consistent messages throughout. Your website – regardless of whether a prospect came into a specific promotional page, or went directly to the home page, should weave in elements of the campaign. Consider integrating a webinar into your campaign or incorporating elements of the campaign into your next trade show. The most clever direct mail campaign that looks to be disconnected from other marketing messages and programs may attract initial interest, but will eventually lose its impact. A message repeated many times using a variety of media, will have a greater impact than any one single impression.
5. **Make a follow-up call** – Prepare a loose script for making a follow-up phone call. Be prepared for voice-mail, actually reaching a live body, or talking to the executive's administrative assistant. In your script make sure you state that you've conducted significant research on their company and would like to share an idea about how they can (insert customer goal / objective). Then ask for a brief meeting to share the concept.
 6. **Get the admin's name** – When calling an executive - make sure you get the administrative assistant's name. After you've tried several times to reach him / her - enlist the assistant's help in setting a meeting.

7. **Talk about ideas** – When you finally get an opportunity to meet the C-level executive, be prepared to share your ideas. Do not talk about your products or service or they may perceive that the whole exercise is a waste of time. Talk about how you can help their business be more profitable, get a jump on competitors, reduce costs, maximize use of existing technologies, drive sales through the channel - or whatever other business result you can deliver.
8. **Measure your results** – Track mailings, calls and results in a customer / prospect database or CRM system. Develop an understanding about what works and what doesn't.
9. **Be persistent** – The C-level is a tough nut to crack. Be persistent in your efforts. Payback will come as you begin to break through and see results.

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