



# The Definitive Guide to C-Suite Marketing

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# Introduction: The Challenge

Of all the different aspects of B2B marketing, marketing to the C-Suite is one of the hardest. Not only is it hard, it's expensive, time consuming and risky. For this reason many marketers steer clear of it or focus on a broader, less senior audience. However, it is possible to consistently deliver great results marketing to the C-Suite.

In this guide we will take you through some of the key principles of C-Suite Marketing. These are principles we have discovered over 20 years of marketing and selling to senior decision makers. You can use this guide to create your own C-Suite Marketing programme, benchmark your current activities or simply understand more about our approach.



The guide is broken into clear sections starting with the two core principles of C-Suite marketing followed by two sections that explore these principles in more depth. In the middle part of the document we highlight things about our own C-Suite Marketing activities that may surprise you.

The penultimate section identifies some of the common mistakes people make when marketing to the C-Suite. Finally there's a section on the next steps and what you can do for your organisation.

If you are involved in marketing or selling to the c-suite this guide will help you understand some core principles that you can apply to your own activities.



# Chapter 1: Key Principles of C-Suite Marketing

A recent Harvard Business Review study revealed that C-Suite decision makers spend less than 2% of their time with vendors, which is around one hour a week. The cost of securing their time is many, many thousands of pounds.

Let's start by looking at some basic principles that need to be followed when marketing to the C-Suite. Some of these principles are the exact opposite of those applied elsewhere. They seem counter-intuitive at times, but 20 years of experience shows that they work. To help you understand these principles you need to go to the end of the process and look at the outcome you want to generate. Typically this is very high value, game-changing deals. So let's start by looking at what we can learn from the salespeople who've secured these deals and work back from there.



A RECENT HARVARD BUSINESS REVIEW STUDY REVEALED THAT C-SUITE DECISION MAKERS SPEND LESS THAN 2% OF THEIR TIME WITH VENDORS, WHICH IS AROUND ONE HOUR A WEEK."

## What can we learn from top C-Suite salespeople?

Over the last 20 years we've interviewed many hundreds of Top Performing salespeople. These salespeople have certain characteristics, such as they always engage at a senior level and they have high levels of self-belief. They generate 3-4 times the revenue of their Core Performing counterparts and typically make up around 14% of the total salesforce.

One of the most interesting things about them (especially when it comes to C-Suite Marketing) is that Top Performers have a completely different way of selling to the C-Suite. In fact, they work in the exact opposite way to their Core Performer colleagues. To understand this approach we need to break "a sale" down into four basic questions that need to be answered in the buyer's mind before a purchase decision is made:



ONE OF THE MOST INTERESTING THINGS ABOUT TOP PERFORMERS IS THAT THEY HAVE A COMPLETELY DIFFERENT WAY OF SELLING TO THE C-SUITE."

1. How does it work?
2. What are the benefits?
3. What is the business case?
4. Why should I trust?



Most salespeople address them in that order (1-4), but high performing salespeople address them in the exact opposite order (4-1). This is a key principle of C-Suite Marketing, too. Whereas you might use features and benefits in your marketing, the C-Suite needs credibility and business case first. Your product and your brand are distractions. Features and benefits are white noise.

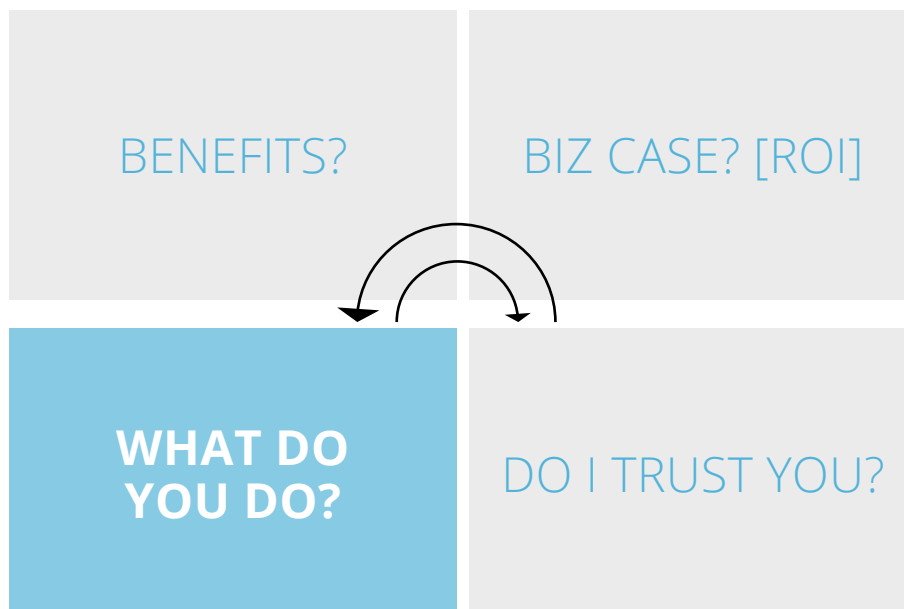


Fig. 1



Using this model it's clear that there are two important factors in engaging the C-Suite. Firstly, you must build TRUST (credibility) and secondly you must bring VALUE (business case). In C-Suite terms, this translates to "do I trust you?" and "do I get value from spending time with you?"

## What does this mean for C-Suite Marketing?

Let's relate these two questions further to your C-Suite marketing activities. If we compare them on a simple matrix you can broadly determine the outcome you will see from your Marketing (and Sales) activities – see fig. 2. We have plotted

TRUST on the y-axis and VALUE on the x-axis. This gives us four outcomes:



TRUST	YES	SOCIAL ONLY	ENGAGE
	NO	AVOID	OTHER SOURCES
		NO	YES
		VALUE	

*Fig.2*

1. If you have neither TRUST nor VALUE you will be IGNORED
2. If you lack TRUST the C-Suite will seek OTHER SOURCES for validation
3. If you lack VALUE the C-Suite will seek ONLY SOCIAL engagement with you
4. If you tick both the TRUST & VALUE boxes the C-Suite will ENGAGE with you

There are two important points to remember when considering this model. Firstly, if your company is not known by your target audience then you are starting in the bottom left quadrant (IGNORE). Secondly, you only have one shot at moving to another quadrant.

Most vendor marketing activities either don't move the C-Suite's perception of you or at best place you in the OTHER SOURCES quadrant because you have failed to establish a position of TRUST based upon independently verified credibility.

So let's explore the principles that underlie the TRUST and VALUE factors in more detail. In each area we will cover three of the principles in each area. There are others, but these are a good starting place.

## Chapter 2: VALUE - Content That Engages the C-Suite

When the C-Suite talks about VALUE they mean insight. Information that changes their perspective or thinking. To achieve this the insight you bring must tick three boxes.

Firstly, it must be credible. If it isn't credible it won't be listened to. Secondly, it must be valuable in itself. This means it must be relevant, useful information. Not opinion, but fact. Thirdly, it must be different. If you knock on their door and state the obvious it has no new value to the C-Suite. Let's explore these areas in more depth:



### VALUE Principle 1: Be Credible

This is absolutely central to engaging a senior decision maker. Credibility comes from independence. It comes from third party endorsement. It comes from the clients you work with. The partners you partner with. The people you bring forward to meet your C-Suite contacts.

It's very difficult for a "seller" to achieve credibility because you lack independence. You can get around this problem by using an independent entity to endorse your capability. Many B2B marketers use publications, consultants, societies and analysts to achieve this. Whatever you decide to do, it's important the platform you use represents you appropriately.

**How do we do it?** We create executive clubs during our projects because they allow us to position our clients as a credible solution to the business problem being discussed by the club. We also mix our clients' existing clients with club guests, i.e. prospects. It's the best form of endorsement.



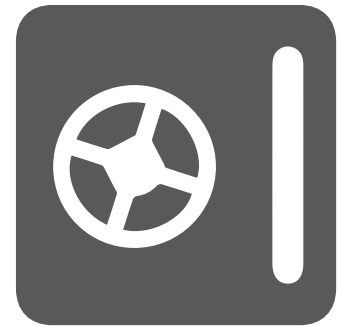
IT'S VERY DIFFICULT FOR A "SELLER" TO ACHIEVE CREDIBILITY BECAUSE YOU LACK INDEPENDENCE. YOU CAN GET AROUND THIS PROBLEM BY USING AN INDEPENDENT ENTITY TO ENDORSE YOUR CAPABILITY."

## VALUE Principle 2: Be Valuable

Let's take a moment to be specific about what is valuable to a C-Suite executive. Unlike the majority of people searching Google or visiting your website or following you on Twitter, the C-Suite is not interested in your product. They operate at a strategic level.

Valuable content for the C-Suite means insight. Stats, facts – a logical argument for change. You can complement that with “how-to guides” (like this one), but you need to establish the reason for them to get involved in discussion with you. You need to go further up the Buying Cycle to the Awareness phase in order to make the case for change. And in that respect, a strong logical argument is essential.

**How do we do it?** We independently research a topic area (not what our client says about the topic, but what the market place is saying) and find a unique angle for our client's proposition. It takes time, but using a story based upon credible sources of insight allows us to draw our audience in. It allows us to tell a story that builds a compelling need, which leads to the next step of engagement.



## VALUE Principle 3: Be Different

Finally, in terms of VALUE, you have to be able to bring something different to the table. Can you challenge and show them a different way of doing things? Are you bringing a new perspective to the table? Is it controversial even?



Henry Ford said “if I’d listened to my market place I would have developed a faster horse”. We’re not suggesting that every insight you bring needs to fundamentally change their world, but it does need to be sufficiently different to gain their interest. Are you achieving this?

**How do we do it?** We start with challenging topics and back-fill from there. Some of the topics we’ve lead with include headlines such as:

“Is Your Next Hire an Art student?”  
aimed at a very techie IT audience

“The Sales Process is Dead”  
aimed at a senior Sales audience

“IT Innovation Doesn’t Exist”  
aimed at a senior IT audience

All of these headlines need to be backed-up with a compelling argument based upon facts from independent, credible sources.

## Summarising VALUE Principles

The simple fact is that if you knock on their door with the same message as everybody else then you are going nowhere. That ship has already sailed (with the first person who knocked on the door). Better to spend some time building a different, compelling and credible story than jump on the bandwagon with everybody else.

This message must also link back to your differentiator. If it doesn't you're (at best) creating opportunities that will be less likely to close and (at worst) creating opportunities that your competition are better placed to win.

If you can bring these three factors together you have the basis of a great message for the C-Suite. And if you'd like a second opinion, send us your messaging and we'll give you some honest feedback. In the meantime, let's move on to look at TRUST in more detail.



BETTER TO SPEND SOME TIME BUILDING A DIFFERENT, COMPELLING AND CREDIBLE STORY THAN JUMP ON THE BANDWAGON WITH EVERYBODY ELSE."



## Chapter 3: TRUST – Building an Intimate Relationship with the C-Suite

Without doubt, the higher you go up in an organisation the more polite, courteous and gracious people become. But don't be fooled. Courtesy doesn't mean they'll let you in easily.

Just like A-list celebrities, the C-Suite have a public image to maintain. But when they need advice they turn to trusted, often long-established friendships.



Consider your own relationships. You may have hundreds of friends, a dozen or so you relish meeting up with, and perhaps only 3-4 that you turn to in times of trouble. Often this last group is made up of people you've known the longest, had your ups & downs with, and you trust them.

There's a well-established psychological model that helps to explain this. Relationships are formed by passing through five phases – the five stages to human relationships. These five stages are Withdrawal, Ritual, Past Times, Gaming and Intimacy.

[You can read more about these stages and their importance on our C-Suite Marketing Blog](#), but the most important point is that you have to get to Intimacy quickly with the C-Suite.

The C-Suite is not interested in making more friends – they have plenty of social invites to keep them busy. What they are truly interested in is how much value you can bring to their organisation. By this we don't mean your product or the benefits they bring; we mean what you bring to them both personally and inside of the boardroom.

So, how do you build TRUST with the C-Suite?

## **TRUST Principle 1: If you value their relationship, invest**

The single most important time to engage senior decision makers is precisely at the moment you don't want to – when they don't need your product. This principle will probably challenge the core tenants of your Marketing & Sales activities – that your target audience should have a budget and authority to use it. However, just as you learn who your friends are when the chips are down, the same is true for C-Suite executives. This means you need to market to the C-Suite all the time.

The challenge marketers have is they often need to generate short term pipeline or quantifiable results that can be linked back to their investments. So what you need is a way to stay connected with people. A connection that extends beyond the buyer-seller dance. Something that allows you to develop a relationship when the C-Suite exec doesn't have what you want. Just like the A-list before they became famous.

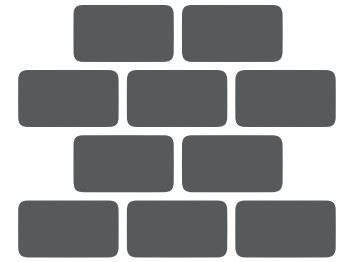


**How do we do it?** We build Clubs that allow us to stay in contact with people even when they are not ready to engage. The Clubs generate revenue for our Clients via the people who are ready, and nurtures those who aren't. In fact, one of the most effective ways to increase engagement with the C-Suite is to keep in contact when they leave a role. It shows that you're sincere. It shows that your intentions are good. You can be trusted.



WHAT YOU NEED IS A WAY TO STAY CONNECTED WITH PEOPLE. A CONNECTION THAT EXTENDS BEYOND THE BUYER-SELLER DANCE."

## TRUST Principle 2: Relationships are built one-to-one



How often do you talk about wanting to build relationships with strategic decision makers and then break your engagement activities down into a discrete set of elements, each one delivered by a different resource? This is a major challenge for the modern marketer who needs to bring campaigns together using multiple resources and effectively “stitch it together”. However, this is very tactical and it lacks integrity from the C-Suite’s perspective.

The C-Suite’s experience of your hard work is an unintegrated set of different touch points across email, social media, face-to-face and phone conversations. All of which seems a bit shallow and tactical. Especially when important pieces of information get lost along the way. This happens more often than you might think. And each time this information is lost, your intention to build a relationship with this person ebbs away until eventually you find yourself in the IGNORE bucket.

**How do we do it?** To overcome this problem we have one person manage the project from end-to-end. They research the message (so they are informed), they connect via email and social

media, they speak to the guest and understand their business priorities, they meet them at the club dinner and they call them afterwards to seek an appointment for our Client. One person, one voice, one understanding. It's very powerful and leads to a 70-75% appointment acceptance.



### **TRUST Principle 3: Challenge Received Wisdom**

It can be pretty lonely at the top. There are very few people the C-Suite can talk to openly and have their opinions tested. In most situations your C-Suite contacts are surrounded by people who report to them. Every day they have their opinions endorsed because they are in a position of power and people don't want to challenge them.

This is a frustration for senior people, but a fantastic opportunity for the C-Suite marketer. By challenging their wisdom you can cut through the noise and take yourself into the trusted space.

There are many ways to do this such as using analyst reports and reporting compelling metrics from clients in a similar field. These are useful tools, but the most effective is discussion with their peers. This is the most powerful form of fresh wisdom.

**How do we do it?** When we bring C-Suite executives together we actively seek discord. We encourage differences of opinion. By doing this we push the envelope of their thinking. We want them to go away thinking either they've had their opinion changed or confirmed. And if it's the latter then by goodness it's been tested.

This is an incredibly valuable exercise for senior people who generally only get to share their ideas internally – an environment in which a collective view can form that's out of line with the wider industry or their client base.

## Summarising TRUST Principles

The C-Suite values relationships that are different, surprising and offer a unique way of seeing things in comparison to the views that they're used to. They need someone who is credible yet relevant and can quickly fix the problems they face. And they also need somebody who they can trust to keep information confidential, and to deliver on the goals they agree. Trust is the hardest earned commodity in a relationship, and also the easiest to lose. One slip and it's gone. Usually forever.

## Chapter 4: The C-Suite Marketing Methodology

When we talk to B2B marketers and explain the key principles the next question we often hear is “how do you do it?” and in particular “how can you guarantee the result?” So now that we’ve covered the key principles we’re going to touch upon our methodology.

There’s nothing that we do that you wouldn’t consider doing yourself. Our methodology uses all of the elements you would expect in a multi-channel marketing campaign aimed at a senior audience. There’s messaging creation, data research, outreach in the form of email and social media, there’s a face-to-face element (essential for the C-Suite) and there’s appointment setting.



However, what we do tends to be fundamentally different at each stage. The methodology is based on 20 years of C-Suite marketing & sales experience. Here are just five elements that may be a little different to the approach you see others taking when marketing to senior people:

## 1. Avoid using a database.

Most companies “maintain” a database. You almost certainly do this yourself. Publications and event companies maintain a database of known contacts (“friendlies” if you like). These are people they know well and who can be relied upon to attend an event.

We don’t believe in this approach. We don’t start with “who do we know?” as this mindset leads to bums on seats, not sales-ready prospects. You need to research each project on a bespoke basis, starting with the goal in mind. For us and our clients this is always revenue.

## 2. Use pop up clubs.

To overcome the barrier senior people put up towards vendors, we create an independent club to feature our client. The club exists whilst we are actively working with our client and disappears when we are not.

In practice, most of our clients work with us continually so the club becomes a permanent fixture, and this may be the same for you too. When you set up a club it also allows you to be very specific with your messaging.



### 3. Only use dinners.

Running an event is almost unavoidable when marketing to the C-Suite. For this purpose we only use dinners. Not lunches, not breakfasts and not coffee mornings. Not even conferences or exhibitions.



The simple fact is that if you want to accelerate the process of relationship building and reach the Intimacy stage, you need the C-Suite's working day to be over. At this point their focus is more easily switched from Operational Activities to Strategic Ideas. They are more open and willing to look at the bigger picture.

### 4. Avoid using the phone.

This usually raises an eyebrow. Most people assume we have a list of contacts and a bunch of people making hundreds of calls a day. But that's the antithesis of our approach.

We use research, messaging and analysis to narrow down on the people who show the greatest propensity to engage. In 90% of cases we only pick up the phone once somebody has confirmed their attendance at a club evening.

## 5. Use offline analytics.

We're fans of marketing automation and engagement analytics. They can help to identify the best people for you to engage with, but what they don't provide is that wider view – the correlations between groups of people.

The human brain is still best placed to do this, which is why it's important that your team is built of talented individuals who are capable of leading a C-Suite Marketing initiative from beginning to end.

### Summary

Hopefully this gives you some insight into what we do and how you may be able to achieve great results marketing to the C-Suite. As a belt-and-braces we've also included a section on common mistakes.

# Chapter 5: Common Mistakes

While you focus on getting the right building blocks in place it is still very easy to become victim of some common mistakes. Many marketers repeatedly make the same errors and sabotage their C-Suite Marketing efforts. Here's a quick run through of the top five most common mistakes we see:

## 1. "Let's invite everybody"

First of all, ignore everything you know about volume. It's ineffective here and although being super-targeted can be scary, it's pivotal with C-Suite Marketing. The more relevant you are, the more tailored you are and the more specific you are, the better.

By being very targeted and focusing on quality rather than quantity you're more likely to have a higher success rate when engaging with senior decision makers. By focusing on quality over quantity you have a higher chance of reaching a level of intimacy with your target C-Suite executives.



## 2. “Richard Branson’s confirmed to speak!”

Another mistake many marketers make is getting an amazing chairperson to lead the club dinner. If you were to have Richard Branson chairing your dinner, for example, you’ll get lots of senior decision makers wanting to attend, but they’re unlikely to be the right prospects as their challenges may not align with your product or service. They’ll just be there to see Richard Branson.

So this is a dangerous step to take. Your audience will be attracted by the chairperson rather than overcoming a challenge you can help them with. It might feel great on the night, but when the guests fail to convert to meetings and appointments you’ll realise it was an expensive mistake. The same rule also applies to selecting the venue.



THIS IS A DANGEROUS STEP TO TAKE. YOUR AUDIENCE WILL BE ATTRACTED BY THE CHAIRPERSON RATHER THAN OVERCOMING A CHALLENGE YOU CAN HELP THEM WITH.”

### 3. “Our CEO is a draw!”

Is your CEO Bill Gates? If so, please see the point above. Otherwise, let's be candid - your CEO, no matter how much of an expert they are, is there to sell your company. They have an agenda. They are far from independent, and therefore the C-Suite will always be sceptical about whether to TRUST what they say.

The topic your CEO could talk about might be genuinely valuable to your C-Suite target audience, but this lack of perceived independence undermines their position. If the content is valuable, get a client speaker to give their perspective on it. Your CEO is not a draw.



### 4. “We’re over-subscribed. Fantastic!”

If you're running an event (and it's nearly always essential to do this with a C-Suite audience) it's easy to see success as having lots and lots of guests. However, the depth of relationship you can form is in direct and opposite proportion to the number of attendees.

You do need a certain number to have a buzz, but know when to stop. 12 to 16 guests is just about perfect for a dinner session. You'll also notice that at this size you can be more attentive before the dinner and therefore minimise drop out.



## 5. “We’ve outsourced the follow up”

Finally, one of the most damaging mistakes is breaking down the points of contact. A fragmented funnel where you have one person for marketing, another for appointment setting and another to build the relationship face-to-face is one that will fail in building intimate relationships with the C-Suite.

If you have too many people involved in the process from beginning to end then the senior decision makers you’re targeting will have no chance to connect and build relationships with you. Before that relationship is built they’re being introduced to someone completely new.

## Moving Forward

Hopefully this guide has given you some ideas about how to market more effectively to the C-Suite. You can use this guide to create your own marketing initiatives, benchmark your current activities or evaluate whether our methodology is right for your plans.

If you would like to have a 10 minute call to discuss your plans we can show you how our methodology can be applied to your business and how it can generate 6 to 7 figures worth of pipeline in as little as 6 to 8 weeks.

During this call you will learn how:

- The C-Suite Marketing methodology can generate high-quality, C-Suite leads.
- This methodology speeds up the senior decision maker nurturing process to at least 6 weeks.
- You can establish rock-solid positioning and thought leadership quickly within your industry.

**REQUEST A 10 MINUTE CALL**

