



**Marketing to  
the C-Suite**

★ EARNST INSIGHTS ★

They are high powered. They are busy.  
And they are bombarded all day long.

*So how do you market to the elusive C-Suite Audience?  
And how can you make sure your brand gets the cut through it deserves?*

**Here's to reaching the people that matter.**



## Introduction

It's not always easy being at the top of the food chain. The fact is the role of the C-Suite is changing. Once a functional head of a business in charge of managing operations from the top down, today these leaders of industry have business strategy at the heart of their function – looking at how they can grow and evolve the business and steer the ship through good times and bad. However it's all with the added weight on their shoulders that ultimately the buck stops with them.

So looking at an audience with so much on their plate, and only a limited number of waking hours in the day, how on earth do B2B marketers even get in front of their eyes – let alone open an opportunity for the sales team to get half an hour in their office?

The barriers certainly are a plenty – efficient gatekeepers who aim to let only the most appropriate items land in their bosses inbox, competition from hundreds of other brands, salespeople knocking on the door every day and varying media consumption patterns all get in the way of your message reaching the target audience.

But wait. Don't tear up this guide now and give up thinking there is no way to communicate and engage with the top dogs in industry. Remember; business people are still people – they just happen to be at work. So think carefully about what encourages them to engage? What value can you add to their incredibly hectic days? But most importantly remember; the product or service that you are marketing to them could be the answer.





## Reaching the right audience, in the right place at the right time

**T**he C-Suite is made of all forms of business men and women. A group that was traditionally male, elite and full of job titles that covered only the core business structures including Finance (CFO), IT (CIO) and Operations (COO) has now evolved into a much wider group, covering a whole raft of business functions including security (CSO), HR (CHRO) and Compliance (CCO).

This development means that communications and marketing materials aimed at a C-Level audience can be much more targeted for purpose, and in turn the possibility of starting a conversation with the right decision maker for your product or service is increased.



All this is only possible if you get the most important part of any campaign right from the start.

The data.

Collecting the right data and getting under the skin of who you are marketing to is key to ensuring the success of any campaign aimed at the C-Suite.

In a recent direct marketing campaign for PensionsFirst; the data was key to persuading 60% of the target audience, all FTSE 250 CFOs, to agree to a meeting. Not only did PensionsFirst ensure that all the names, job titles and addresses of those being targeted were up to date, but they made sure to understand the key issues being faced by those who they were targeting, which in turn made up part of the communication that was sent out.

This initial information discovery can be done in a number of ways; through agencies, brought in via specific packages or online through the likes of LinkedIn. Agencies are also being more inventive in contact discovery, looking for the top executives in annual reports, press releases and company social media feeds. Once you have a list of potential content, it is of utmost importance to qualify these by phoning the company before to confirm details. But get it right and you will reap the rewards.

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## Cutting through the noise

**W**here other business audiences may be easier to reach through marketing communications, planning a highly targeted campaign aimed at the C-Suite is extremely important – a simple email or piece of direct mail simply won't cut the mustard and you will be left wishing you had spent your money better in other ways.

Your first task with any direct marketing materials – be it DM or eDM is getting past the gate keeper. Usually a PA or similar role, the gatekeeper is there to ensure that their boss, the C-Level executive, is not bombarded every minute of the day with phone calls, emails and pieces of mail that are irrelevant to them. The gatekeeper is the first person who is going to see your marketing, personalised or not, so keeping them sweet is key.

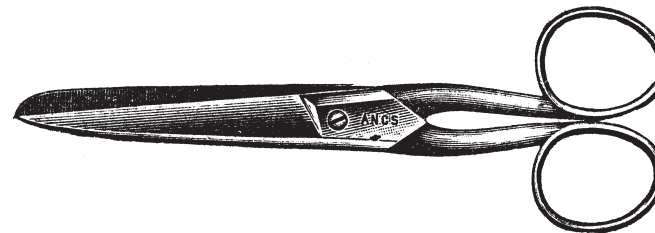
When Thunderhead launched its award winning 'I AM' campaign targeted at a C-Level audience they realised just this. Before the DM and emails were sent to the target audience, the gatekeeper received a postcard explaining who Thunderhead were, how they would recognise the DM piece that would be arriving in the next couple of days and why they should pass it on to their boss. But it wasn't all demands from Thunderhead... if a meeting was set up the gatekeeper was sent a small token of appreciation. So if you do make it past the all-seeing gatekeeper, how do you ensure your message stands out from the crowd and encourage the CXO to take ten minutes out of their day and take your call?

Most important is to ensure the right tactical mix. High impact outbound marketing in the form of high value DM, through to inbound engagement by publishing high value content through the right digital channels, all needs to be coupled with a message that resonates with the issues that the target is facing.

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## High value prospects = High value communications

**W**hen it comes to sending high value DM to the C-Suite audience, as important as it is to get the messaging right, sending an incentive or gift is likely to light up the eyes of your audience more than the hundreds of others flyers, brochures and postcards that they receive each week.

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*Often a little something that they can take home to the family at the end of the day is perfect*

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Something that they can take home to the family at the end of the day or keep on their desk is perfect. And so long as it ties in with the message that you are looking to communicate, it can act as the ideal icebreaker for your sales team to follow up.

When Thunderhead planned their campaign, they knew incentives and gifts would act as a key part of the DM piece. iPod Shuffles were sent out with a personalised recording loaded onto them for the C-level exec to listen to. Coffee cups were sent to another audience, to position Thunderhead as a refreshing change. Both were met with great appreciation and follow up meetings.





## The new digital C-Suite

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**I**ncreasingly the C-Suite is searching online for information to help understand and address the issues they are facing. It means campaigns that are not backed up with a sound content and social media strategy may well be doomed to failure.

The rise of digital marketing is changing the way the C-Suite can be marketed to and communicated with. A generational shift in the C-Suite is changing how they use the internet, which is now their top information resource for all of their business needs.

Creating content specifically for the C-Suite audience is now a top priority for businesses to show that they are experts in certain areas. It's also a way to draw top level executives into a conversation by reaching them early in the sales cycle – for example by using educational video and interactive shareable e-books.

Thought leadership pieces are increasingly important to the C-Suite. With their strategy heads on it is essential for them to keep up with the changing trends in their industry, the issues affecting them and the solutions available to them in the market.

Creating strong thought leadership pieces, often in partnership with analysts, provide great content for businesses to market themselves. These can be seeded and shared online to reach the target audience, and position themselves as the experts in the field and the provider for the c-level executive to talk about a solution.

Search is also an essential channel for connecting with this audience. C-Suite executives are searching for new products and services but also validating any purchases that need to be signed off from requests that have come into them. According to a report by Forbes, increasingly members of the C-Suite are searching for information themselves,

and turning to main stream search engines to do this – meaning your brand has to have a wide digital footprint and be in the right places online to ensure you are found by those at the top of the business.

Video is also an essential part of the digital marketing mix to this audience – a report by Forbes found that 80% of top senior executives are watching more online video than ever before. What's more, 1.5 million business searches are being made on YouTube every single day.

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## The all important follow up

**N**o matter how good your marketing campaign is, or how impressive your target finds it – a C-Suite executive is not going to be proactive in following it up. If you are looking to turn the lead into a meeting and hopefully into business for the organisation – the sales team needs to be involved in the process from the very beginning of the planning stages all the way to follow up.

A good sales process is the vital ingredient that makes a good campaign to the C-Suite great. According to B2Bleadblog.com, when a sales team follows up a direct marketing campaign within 48 hours the response rate increases significantly.

PensionsFirst took heed of this advice, imposing a strictly organised telesales follow up process within two days of the high impact DM landing.

To drive engagement with the C-Suite companies need not rely on sending out campaigns to nurture leads. This is an audience who, with their strategic head on, still very much believe in face to face business and the power of networking.

Attending events, whether in the capacity simply as an attendee, a speaker or as an exhibitor, often proves valuable in getting in front of your target audience, building sales leads and often arranging face to face meetings with top level executives the same day.

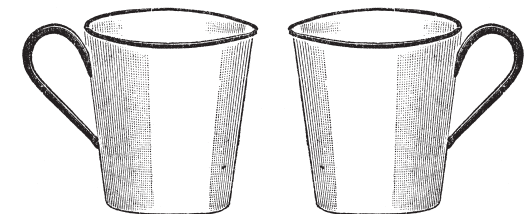
Most important for businesses when attending an event in any capacity is to ensure that their messaging tunes in with the attendees. Where many may simply be showing off who they are and what they do, events are your opportunity to show that you know what is going on in the industry and that you can provide a solution to the issues out there.

This messaging can be communicated in a number of forms – whether on a stand, through high value content that is given away on the day or in specific speaker slots – all showing off your expertise to the C-Suite audience and driving leads.

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## Getting engaged with your audience

**W**hen making content available at events, peer-to-peer stuff is always most favoured by the C-Suite as they want to know what their competitors and other business leaders are up to in order to find learnings for their own business. Being able to keep abreast of what others are doing in the industry as well as taking advice from other executives in the industry makes content and events more appealing to a C-Suite audience.

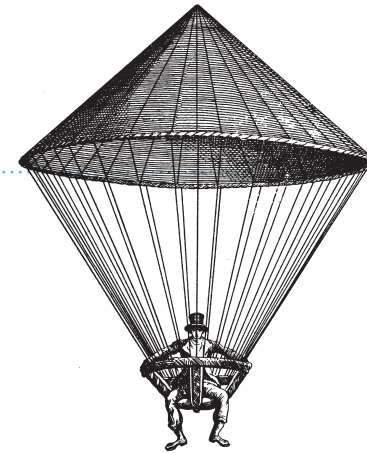
Salesforce Chatter has recently used peer-to-peer content to market their product – creating a series of videos called ‘CEOs on Chatter’ showing CEOs talking about how their business has used the software – showing off the benefits to other CEOs and promoting the product.

Once leads have been developed, relationships with C-Level targets can be nurtured by hosting your own bespoke events for the C-Suite. These events, with lower number of attendees, provide value to the C-level attendees and also allow sales teams to have a more personal conversation in a more relaxed and informal atmosphere and also mean that you can set the agenda and conversation to meet your business and marketing needs. Win: win for you and your guests.

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The same principles apply when there are just one or two individuals you are looking to both impress and develop a relationship with. Corporate hospitality has been a favourite for business for many years. Like smaller, niche events the prospect gains value (though not business value) and you have a situation where you can control the conversation and agenda in order to discuss how you can best do business together in the future, all while enjoying the rugby from the warmth of a box.



## Take note: The Bribery Act 2010

**B**ack in 2011, a law was passed that looked like it would create a real barrier to getting through to the C-Suite. The Bribery Act 2010 has an affect on all marketers using business gifts, and as previously mentioned, corporate hospitality for their prospects and clients.

Though an extremely important issue to consider, the good news is that when it comes to the Bribery Act, common sense is the best thing to follow – ‘if it doesn’t feel right then it probably isn’t’. There are, however, a number of questions that should be considered when planning sending a high impact DM piece that includes a high value item or planning any corporate hospitality events:

- Would the hospitality or gift be viewed as excessive?
- Would it be considered normal or typical hospitality or gifting in all the circumstances?

- Is it in fact hospitality – is the host going to be there or are you simply being given ‘a deal sweetener’?
- Could the hospitality or gift be motivated not by a desire to develop or improve a relationship but to secure the award of a specific contract or project?
- Have you been asked not to disclose the hospitality or gift, or has the recipient suggested that he will not disclose it?
- Does the hospitality or gift contravene any policy of either party giving or receiving it?

When sending out a DM piece the key thing to remember is that if it is used to deliver the message, then it will seem much less superfluous. It is worth considering general cultural differences in opinions to high value DM geographical.

For B2B marketers the Bribery Act is something to consider, as opposed to something that will change the way businesses market to others in the future. However being clued up on the issues is extremely important. To find out more visit:  
[www.justice.gov.uk/guidance/bribery](http://www.justice.gov.uk/guidance/bribery)

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## How to keep the conversation flowing

Once C-level leads have been developed and relationships nurtured, on-going communications with the audience are important. Where you once pitched your business as having a solution to their problems, going forward it is important to position your organisation as a strategic partner, who can help the C-Suite with their task of growing and evolving the business moving forward.

Regular emails, direct marketing pieces and thought leadership pieces are important to keep the audience both interested and engaged.

Although often hidden, communicating and engaging with the C-Suite is not out of any B2B marketers reach.

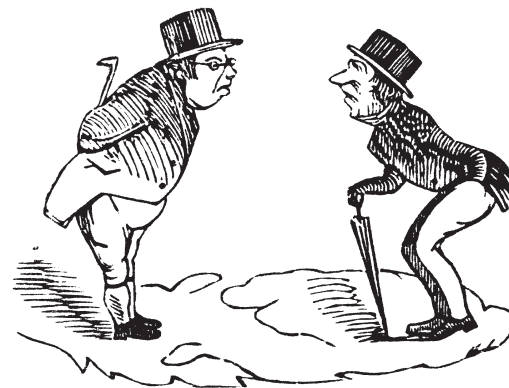
What you must remember is this is not a regular audience. These are high powered, highly intelligent people who want you to appeal to their vanity by sending intelligent, thoughtful and engaging communications that are in tune with their needs.

Any good piece of marketing will talk to them about what they know and what is keeping them up all night - the same old marketing tactics for those lower down the business just won't work - this is a high powered audience that needs a well-planned, creative and unique approach.

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*Want help marketing to the C-Suite?  
Drop Earnest an email today:*

[info@earnest-agency.com](mailto:info@earnest-agency.com)



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#### **Earnest, who?**

Earnest is a full service marketing agency combining game-changing strategy and creative to deliver real results for clients in the business-to-business space.

We specialise in helping brands stand out from the crowd; devising high performance marketing strategies; and developing campaigns that surprise, engage and perform in equal measure.

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