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How to Get a Meeting with the C-Suite

Getting a meeting with a C-suite executive depends on whether your proposition is relevant, specific and credible enough to earn their time.

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Key Points

- Getting a C-suite meeting requires a point of view, not a pitch. A specific hypothesis about their business, written in their language and without mentioning your product, is what earns the conversation.
- The buyer needs to answer three questions before they will act: why change, why now, and why us. Building the case for all three is the seller's job, and why now is usually the hardest.
- A-tier accounts need account plans and a one-page point of view before any outreach goes out. Tiering determines where to invest depth and where to run volume, and mixing the two dilutes both.
- Outreach runs across several channels at once: email, phone, LinkedIn, and in some cases direct mail, all working together. Across cold databases, a first engagement typically requires around 44 activities, and converting it into a qualified meeting takes around twelve more touch points.
- The first C-suite meeting is a hypothesis test, not a demo. The goal is to validate the problem, understand the buying organisation, and book the next meeting, not to pitch.
- Warm introductions compress the effort significantly, but only if you have a clear point of view ready to back them up. Network maintenance isn't a crisis activity.

What is getting a meeting with the C-suite?

Getting a meeting with a C-suite executive is a question of whether your proposition is relevant enough, specific enough, and credible enough to earn time from someone who is accountable for the whole business.

A CEO, CFO or COO is thinking about growth, risk and efficiency across the organisation, not about departmental problems or feature sets. To earn a meeting, you need to speak to what they are actually responsible for: revenue targets, cost reduction, market position, regulatory exposure. If what you are saying sounds like a product pitch or a departmental upgrade, it won't get through.

What creates a meeting is a point of view. A specific, well-researched hypothesis about the business you are targeting, connecting something you have observed about their situation to an outcome you believe you can help them move. It isn't a brochure and not a pitch. It's a provocation designed to get a response.

Why most attempts fail

Most attempts to reach the C-suite fail at the same point: the message is about the seller, not the buyer.

Outreach that describes what a product does, lists features, or opens with a company introduction is written from the wrong end. A C-suite executive reading an email about your technology or your team has no immediate reason to care. Unless you can connect what you do to a problem they are accountable for, the message lands as noise.

The second reason attempts fail is a lack of specificity. Generic outreach, whether through email sequences, LinkedIn messages, or phone scripts, doesn't differentiate. It signals that you haven't done the work. A C-suite audience is well trained at identifying templated messaging, and their response rate to it reflects that. The data bears this out: across large outreach programmes, getting a first engagement from a cold contact typically requires around 44 activities. That number drops significantly when the message is genuinely relevant to the person receiving it.

For founder-led teams, the failure usually comes earlier. The founder understands the value they deliver but hasn't translated it into language that connects to a C-suite agenda. The point of view, the specific articulation of what is wrong in a target account and how you can move it, hasn't been built.

For teams with a dedicated sales function, the problem is often that sellers default to pitch mode too early. They describe the product before establishing the problem. They talk about what they do before they have earned the right to be heard.

What it actually costs

The cost of not reaching the right level in an account is a lost meeting, plus time spent in the wrong part of an organisation, building relationships with people who can't make a decision or free up budget, and arriving at the end of a long sales cycle only to find that the C-suite still needs to

approve it.

If you're selling to a mid-market or enterprise account and working primarily with a department head or team lead, you're likely to hit a ceiling. The deal reaches a point where someone above them needs to sign off, and that person has no context for what you are doing or why it matters. You're starting the conversation from zero at the point where you should be closing.

Reaching the C-suite early prevents this. When there is executive-level awareness of a project from the start, the deal moves differently. Cycles shorten. Procurement and legal move faster when the business priority is visible at the top. The absence of C-suite access doesn't just slow things down. It often means the deal stalls entirely when it reaches a gate it was never prepared to pass through. **Good teams still miss the number. Usually for reasons that were visible earlier than they realised.**

There is a softer cost too. Working at the wrong level limits what you learn. C-suite conversations give you a view on how the business thinks about growth and risk that middle-level conversations rarely surface. That intelligence matters for how you position the deal and how you move it forward.

What good looks like

A meeting with a C-suite executive that goes well starts before the outreach. It starts with a point of view on paper.

A point of view is a single-page hypothesis connecting three things: a goal the business is trying to achieve or a risk it is trying to manage, the specific challenge getting in the way of that, and a credible linkage to your solution. It should be written in language that reflects the executive's world, not your product. It shouldn't mention your product by name. It should read like a provocation: specific enough to prompt a response and confident enough to invite a challenge.

The best version of a point of view fits above the fold of an email. Someone reading it on their phone should understand what you are saying and why it might matter within the first two or three sentences. If you can't make it that sharp, the research behind it isn't done yet.

What good looks like in the outreach process is clear account tiering. A-tier accounts, the ones you most want to land, get genuine account plans. You understand what the business is trying to do, where it is exposed, and where your solution creates clear movement. B-tier accounts get sub-vertical personalisation. C-tier accounts get volume outreach at a lower level of effort. Mixing these tiers is one of the clearest ways to dilute your results.

What good looks like in the first meeting isn't a pitch. It's a hypothesis test. You go in with your point of view, invite challenge, and listen. The goal is to understand whether your read of the business is accurate, to learn who else is involved in the decision, and to book a next meeting with the C-suite contact and within the team they direct you to.

How to get there

Start with the point of view before you contact anyone. Research the business using public information: annual reports, press coverage, LinkedIn activity, earnings calls if publicly listed. Identify the goal or risk most live for them right now. Build the linkage from that to the specific mechanism by which you can help. The more precise that linkage, the more effective the outreach.

Structure the point of view around three questions the buyer needs to answer for themselves: why change at all, why change now, and why with you. Why change is about establishing that the status quo has a cost. Why now is about identifying or creating a compelling reason to act in this window rather than deferring. Why us is usually the easiest to address, but it's the one sellers spend the most time on, often at the expense of the other two. Build the first two before you get to the third.

Tier your accounts before you start outreach. Decide which organisations are your A accounts and keep that list small. Eight to ten is about right, where you can genuinely do the depth of work the approach requires. B and C accounts get lighter treatment, but the logic of the point of view still applies at every level.

Use multiple channels. Email, phone, and LinkedIn all have a role, and they work better together than in isolation. Direct mail can be effective at the top tier when the message is relevant and the approach signals genuine effort. The channel matters less than the relevance of what arrives through it. After a first positive response, research consistently shows it takes an average of around twelve further touch points to convert that engagement into a qualified meeting. Getting the first engagement isn't the end of the work.

Where you have warm introductions available, use them. A mutual contact making an introduction puts their credibility into the transaction. That creates rapport that cold outreach can't manufacture. Maintain your network consistently, including when you don't need anything from it. The introductions available to you six months from now depend on the conversations you are having now.

Once you're in the meeting, don't pitch. Test your hypothesis. Share what you observed, invite them to correct you, and ask who else in the organisation owns the problem you have identified. Get a next meeting confirmed before you leave, both with the C-suite contact and with the team below them. Expect to move up and down in the organisation as the cycle progresses: get high-level sponsorship, go into the team below, come back to report, go back in again. Build that expectation from the first conversation.

Common mistakes

Going in with a pitch instead of a point of view. The most common failure in C-suite selling is opening with the product. C-suite executives aren't interested in software features or service models until they have a reason to be. Going in with a pitch signals that you haven't done the work. A sharp hypothesis about their business signals that you have.

Treating all accounts the same. Account tiering isn't optional. It's the mechanism that directs your most personalised effort at the accounts most worth winning, and keeps volume outreach cost-effective at lower tiers. Treating a tier-A account with the same effort as a tier-C account wastes the opportunity. Treating a tier-C account with tier-A investment burns time you don't have.

Solving why us before solving why change and why now. Sellers naturally gravitate toward differentiating their solution because it's what they know best. But the C-suite buyer doesn't need to know why you are better than the competition until they have decided they are going to change at all. Build the case for why change and why now first. Why us follows from those two.

Running the first meeting as a demo. A first meeting with a C-suite executive is a discovery conversation. Your job is to validate your hypothesis, understand the organisation, and earn the next meeting. If you try to present before you have established the problem in their terms, you will lose the room. Stay in question mode longer than feels comfortable.

How to tell if it's working

The clearest early signal is whether you are getting responses that push back on your hypothesis rather than ignoring it. An executive who replies to say your read of the market isn't quite right is engaging. That is the conversation you want. Silence means the message wasn't relevant enough to be worth a response.

Further into the process, watch whether the C-suite contact is actively sponsoring your access into the organisation. Are they making introductions? Are they following up on progress? If they have disengaged after the first meeting, the hypothesis didn't land firmly enough to generate action.

At a broader level, if the point of view process is working, deal cycles in accounts where you have C-suite access should look different from those where you don't. Earlier budget conversations, faster movement through procurement, fewer stalls late in the cycle. Those differences are the signal that reaching the right level early is doing what it should.

Further reading

7 Steps to Win Buying Group Consensus and Cut Deal Slippage How to build consensus across a multi-stakeholder buying group from the first meeting, so deals stop stalling when they reach committee.

MEDDPICC Explained: A Practical Guide for Founders and Sales Leaders A practitioner's guide to MEDDPICC as a qualification standard, including how the Economic Buyer element connects to C-suite access.

How B2B Sales Really Works: The 10 Core Principles You Need to Know The foundational principles behind effective B2B selling, including why buyer-led approaches outperform pitch-led ones at every market level.

Related terms

Economic Buyer The person in an organisation who controls the budget for a decision and whose approval is required to close. Often a C-suite executive.

Champion The internal contact who believes in your solution and is willing to advocate for it inside the buying organisation, including upward to the C-suite.

Multi-threading The practice of building relationships with multiple stakeholders across a buying organisation rather than relying on a single point of contact.

Discovery Call The structured conversation used to understand a buyer's situation, goals, and what is getting in the way of achieving them.

Mutual Action Plan A shared document outlining the agreed steps, owners, and timescales for moving a deal forward, used to maintain momentum after an initial C-suite meeting.

Related: The point of view is what gets you the C-suite meeting, How to run a C-level meeting without blowing it.

Related service: Strategic Sales Enablement

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