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Be Succinct or Be Overlooked: Getting the Attention of C-Level Executives

Providers of technology solutions or services looking to reach decision makers had better be succinct, crisp and clear in their marketing approach if they want to get even a *sliver* of an executive's time and attention.

Information Overload

Most of us probably remember the drug ad that was on TV for "Adult Attention Deficit Disorder." It featured a montage of images showing various people looking perplexed and confused, scurrying from one task to the other in a blur of unproductive activity.

I remember the first time I saw that commercial, thinking to myself that most of us are probably not suffering from ADD at all, but rather, are just overworked, harried individuals who are probably experiencing something more along the lines of what I call "Adult Information Overload" syndrome.

Everyone is oversaturated with too much information, too many choices, too much mail, days that never end because they blur into the next, cell phones, instant messaging, Blackberries, endless streams of spam. It's no wonder we have been dubbed "the over communicated society."

As information levels have increased, our attention spans have spiraled downward. That's why people fast forward through commercials with their TiVo or DVR—they can now compress viewing time of their favorite shows to around 40 minutes. It's why something called "speed dating" has become fashionable. This is where potential couples sit across from each other and give a personal elevator pitch in about 5 minutes. When the buzzer sounds, you can either move on to the next

person, or swap phone numbers. Romantic? Hardly. Efficient? Absolutely.

Well, the same dwindling attention spans are at play in the business world. If you are a provider of technology solutions or services vying for the attention of a busy C-level executive, you had better be succinct, crisp and clear in your initial marketing approach if you want to get even a *sliver* of their time and attention.

The Executive's Daily Barrage

The average C-level executive comes in each day and has to do battle with the digital onslaught of information brought on by the Internet. Additionally, many still wade through stacks of printed materials—trade journals, research reports, white papers, etc. in an effort to stay on top of trends in their industry. All of this information has to be absorbed, processed, reacted to. Then, they have to make serious decisions using this information—decisions that could ultimately affect their own livelihood, the standing of their company and the lives of its employees.

So what does this mean? It means breaking through the clutter with your company's messages is incredibly tough. It means you have to make it easy for prospects to get a snapshot of what you do and why they should do business with you in a matter of minutes, even seconds.

Today, attention spans are inversely proportional to titles—the higher up the food chain you target your messages, the less time executives have to spend thinking about what you are trying to tell them.

If your marketing efforts make prospects have to work too hard to figure out what your company does and why it would benefit their organization, they will lose interest and move on to the next provider. (Translation: your competitor).

Clear Positioning, Concise Messaging

Your job is to capture the decision-maker's attention long enough to inspire or compel them to take action and enter into the sales cycle. To do this, you must develop a concise, crisp positioning and messaging strategy that starts by answering these three (seemingly) simple questions:

- *Who are we and what business are we in?*
- *What makes us different?*
- *Why should a prospect care?*

Notice it says “seemingly” simple. That's because on the surface, this exercise may appear to be very elementary. However, this can be challenging even for the most qualified management teams at the most savvy organizations. More often than not, outside expertise is brought in to help guide companies through this process.

Providers of complex technology solutions especially struggle with this task because they can become too close to, and too enamored with, their own technology.

Instead of explaining the benefits of their offering and what problem it solves, they default to explaining the inner workings of their technology and its “robust functionality.” Yes, the technology will need to be explained to the right people at the right time in the sales cycle. But leading with acronyms, buzzwords, feature/function and deep, “under the hood” information in the early awareness-building stages is not going to turn heads.

You Only Get One Shot

With the volume of information continuing to expand, you must recognize that attention spans are inversely proportional to titles—the higher up the food chain you target your messages, the less time executives have to spend thinking about what you are trying to tell them.

Therefore, you must be able to communicate what you do on the home page of your website, the first sentence or two of your press release and most definitely, standing in front of someone at a tradeshow. Otherwise, you may never get another opportunity.

This is precisely why investing the time and attention up front to develop your company's messaging and positioning strategy is so vitally important to the success of all your future sales and marketing efforts—and ultimately, to the growth of your entire organization.

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