Selling to the C-Suite: Find out what matters at the top

Most seasoned salespeople know that understanding who you’re selling to is one of the most significant keys to success. Understanding their pain points, how—and when—it’s best to reach them, and having a handle on how much power they have to make the final decision can help you make a stronger sales pitch and move your business forward.

But what about selling to the C-suite? It’s rare air up there, and these top executives are not only sometimes hard to reach, they are hard to know and understand. In most cases, you won’t close the deal without their approval, and very often you aren’t just selling to them, you’re selling to their team, across departments and layers of approval.

According to Fred Emery, Director, OneCard Sales at Heartland OneCard, selling to the C-suite is like any other relationship.

“Find out what the needs are and then show you can fill them,” says Emery. “You need to keep an eye on the audience, learn the audience and figure out how best to work with them.”

When it comes to selling integrated security technology, your C-suite customers may include IT, finance, operations and the CEO. They are busy, often receiving as many as 150 emails a day, and their time is limited. Emery says the key to communicating effectively with these executives is to know your product, and to present the information to them as succinctly as possible so that they can understand quickly how you can meet their needs.

“Varying communication helps as well,” says Emery. “Don’t just send email, because it can be easily overlooked. Phone communication is still a vital form of communicating. Going old school and actually sending a handwritten note or a letter can help you make contact with the decision-makers in their busy daily schedule.”

Effective selling to the C-suite also means remembering that these stakeholders have a strategic focus; they are paid to meet their business goals and are looking at you as a resource for helping them do so. At the same time, they don’t want to make a mistake. Again, this is your opportunity to ease that concern.
Get to know the decision-making team

While C-level leaders have final decision-making power, they rely on information and opinions from their team to help them choose the right solution. So you need to build a relationship with the team as well; a strong ally can go a long way in solidifying a business relationship and ensuring that your message is received and understood by C-level prospects.

As an integrator, you are very likely to be dealing with the CIO, but your day-to-day contact is more likely to be someone in a middle management role who is trusted to make decisions. Building strong relationships at every level can help you gain an insider’s perspective on critical issues, get familiar with budget challenges and even help you understand who is connected to whom within the company.

Emery points out that lower-level team members will be more likely to do a deep dive into the project, focusing on things like software interfaces, project implementation steps and timing, user training and other details that will be critical to the project’s success. That means they will be looking at you and your company, as well as the solution you offer, and will want to know things like:

- How will you relate to their location and their internal staff?
- How will you bring a solution to them in a way that reduces their workload or is as effortless as possible?
- How will you deal with bumps in the road?
- How transparent are your processes?

It’s critical that you work to gain approval from both sides in order to make the sale.

Bring the right partners to the table

Technology is an investment and, according to Emery, bringing strong brands to the table can make a difference in closing the sale. That’s just one of the reasons Heartland works with Allegion as a member of the aptiQ Alliance. Emery points out that when Heartland is talking to security and facilities personnel they get brand-name recognition from Schlage and Allegion.

“They know these names,” says Emery. “They know it’s a quality product that’s tried and tested, and these aren’t fly-by-night companies.”

Emery points out that end users feel more at ease investing in a product they can trust because they know they are getting a good value for their budget.

“Allegion is very competitive, and they offer products with a wide range of functions and features, so virtually any client can find a product that will meet their needs within the Allegion portfolio and their budget constraints,” says Emery.

Be confident in what you bring to the table

The larger the organization the tougher it can be to reach a C-suite stakeholder, and the more nerve-wracking it may be when you finally get face-to-face to present your solution. But remember, you are the expert in security technology. While the CIO may know a lot about technology, it’s you they are turning to for guidance on how to put this technology to work to meet their business needs.

Here are a few things C-suite leaders are relying on you for (and that you should feel confident about):

- Identifying a solution that improves their business productivity
- Recommending future-forward technology that will be able to flex and grow as needs change
- Providing guidance on how to mine data to improve service, cut costs and create efficiencies
- Explaining justification for the costs of expanding their security technology system
- Offering an honest opinion on what will best meet their needs
- Choosing partners who will do what you say they are going to do

Here are a few things Emery says C-level customers want to know:

- How will this project fit into the ecosystem of my campus/office?
- How will it work with existing systems?
- How can it increase efficiencies and cut costs?
- How will it provide services to the users?
No matter who your customer is, follow-up is what makes the difference. Do what you say you’re going to do and provide what you say you’re going to provide, including the knowledge that C-suite executives need to make the decision. Ultimately, you may be implementing technology, but what you’re really selling is a relationship.

If you want an Allegion integrator sales rep to assist your client, contact us today online or by calling 888-758-9823.