corporate startup lab
A CMU Swartz Center Initiative

Pitching Innovation to the C-Suite

CSL

Don't let a bad Q&A session
be the death
of your otherwise great presentation

Here's how to keep it alive…

Common Challenges When Presenting to the C-Suite

- One of the most common complaints of corporate entrepreneurs is being blindsided by questions from outside their areas of expertise

- Even well-prepared corporate entrepreneurs have higher-stakes conversations than traditional startup CEOs with stakeholders coming from narrower perspectives

- Before pitching the idea, think about it from the perspective of the functional areas of leadership in the C-Suite

- How will the most powerful decision-makers in the company view your ideas

Common Challenges When Presenting to the C-Suite

Defending Ideas Early
- Corporate entrepreneurs are "on the clock" and have defend ideas early to people with the ability to kill the startup, sometimes as early as Day 1

Lower Tolerance for Error
- Gaps in knowledge or bad exchanges with the few important people who control budgets can influence whether the project gets supported or killed

More Breadth Required
- Corporate entrepreneurs will face scrutiny from many disciplines and projects can be de-railed by key influencers with speciality areas of focus

The Solution: The C-Suite Canvas

Pitching Innovation to the C-Suite
Intrapreneurial Thinking Hats

PRODUCT NAME / IDEA	DATE	VERSION

THE CMO HAT
Chief Marketing Officer

What's the target market?
How does it overlap with existing markets for your company?
How will customers find out about the product or service, and how will it be delivered to them?
What kind of channels and communications will be required?
How does your idea fit with the existing brand(s) and reputation?
What would a failure mean for existing brands, and how can you mitigate reputational risk?

THE CLO HAT
Chief Legal Officer

What are the relevant laws and regulatory frameworks?
What intellectual property issues will we face?
Are there any privacy or environmental concerns?
What contracts will be needed to make this happen?
What existing contracts impact or are impacted by the idea?
Cant the customer safely interact with the product?
In unclear legal areas, what's the government's current thinking?

THE CEO HAT
Chief Executive Officer

Does your idea fit with the long term direction of the company?
Does it affect (cannibalize/help) existing markets, or open new ones?
Does it make the company a better company?
Does the idea make sense on the road map, or is it a one-off?
What do the huge successes and failures look like for the company?
How is the world different, and for whome, if this idea achieves its maximum potential?

THE COO HAT
Chief Operating Officer

How might this idea integrate with existing processes, systems, and workflow? How might it align with, and/or impact, the culture?
What core competencies are leveraged, and what new competencies need to be developed? What resources will be required to develop the idea, and later to implement it? Will pursuing or implementing this idea create any spillover effects (positive or negative) in other operations?

THE CTO HAT
Chief Technology Officer

How do you know your idea is feasible?
What technology will you need to buy, borrow, and/or invent? How will your idea or operations fit with existing products or systems? What expertise are you missing?

THE CFO HAT
Chief Financial Officer

SHORT TERM
What will the next steps cost?
What are you really buying with that investment?
At the beginning you'll often be learning and experimenting; think about framing those efforts as expending resources to acquire valuable knowledge.

LONG TERM
What might the costs look like? What are the biggest drivers of those costs?
What might the upside look like, in savings, revenues, or improved productivity?
What non-monetary resources will need to be committed?
What are the biggest assumptions behind the cost and upside predictions?

Think from Different Perspectives

C-Suite Canvas is a starting point, a checklist to make sure you've covered your bases before walking into a high-stakes meeting or water-cooler conversation. It allows you to:

- Be prepared

- Track iterations and progressions of an idea
- Recognize gaps in the plan that need to be addressed
- Ensure cross-functional alignment and support

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A Few Tips for Pitching the C-Suite

Pre-Selling

Pre-selling occurs in the meeting (hallway chat, over coffee or lunch…) before the meeting – these are typically one-on-one, thus they can be more candid

You can:
- Surface concerns and defuse objections, making the sell-in easier
- You can gain valuable insight about what executives already know and potential gaps in knowledge so you can tailor your content
- You can uncover new details or consideration that lead you to adjust your presentation
- You can understand their agenda or pain points better
- If you can't speak with the senior executive, meet with someone on their team and test you presentation

Preparing for Q&A

- Customize and write down questions that you anticipate you might be asked and the corresponding answers – in a corporate setting, you might be surprised to know the questions are typically the same…it is just the answers that vary by initiative

- You can always plant a question or two or refer to a question you received earlier in the pre-sell

- If there are no questions…you can say something like, "a question we considerer or team members have asked me…?"

- Remember, Q&A is a good time to reinforce your key messages

Thank you!

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