

## RECRUITING HARD TO REACH B2B RESPONDENTS

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Making strategic business decisions in a tough economic environment means that it's more important than ever to make sure our respondents are the real deal. Indeed, clients tell us that they value our ability to access and research senior C-suite and hard to reach audiences. They often ask us how we go about this. There's no magic formula, but after more than 20 years, we have developed a set of rules that work.

We call it the BOARD room approach. It helps ensure successful projects with qualified respondents, who are informed and empowered to speak for themselves and their companies.

### **B is for Business Language**

Any approach to senior business leaders must be couched in appropriate business language. We need the credibility that initially comes from using a suitably sophisticated and targeted vocabulary. The sort of terminology that might be appropriate for a main grocery buyer is unlikely to get our interviewers past the switchboard. "Hello, my name is Jane from BPRI and we need to interview your CEO for a research project" won't even get by a temporary receptionist or student on work experience.

If there were a "one size fits all" approach we could give an example but in fact, each case is different and we need to make sure that from beginning to end we speak the way that our respondents do.

### **O is for Optimal Engagement**

Successful executives operating in senior roles are rarely sitting around waiting to take part in market research studies. In fact, their diaries can be booked for weeks in advance. This is one aspect that can make genuine C-suite studies time consuming. Our clients who know the business value of authenticity appreciate that the right respondent might take longer to recruit and interview than is the case with less senior audiences. We encourage participation by accommodating different times and places for interviews. So we have interviewed business leaders while they are travelling to meetings, in the spare time after check-in at the airport and at whatever "anti-social" hour they might suggest they are available – including over the weekend.

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## **A is for Appeal**

There is a greater likelihood of someone contributing their views when the subject is one that appeals to them. Any project can be spoken of in a number of different ways and finding the best way to appeal to an individual executive has a dramatic impact on response rates. The “hook” is always one that can stand the scrutiny of rigorous market research standards – we don’t recruit anyone under false pretences, but the way we appeal to an HR Director in a major retail bank will be different to the way we discuss the same project when recruiting the CEO of an international telecommunications company.

## **R is for Relationship**

One of the reasons that BPRI continues to succeed in researching hard to reach audiences is because we recognise and respond to the fact that they are in high demand. Rather than overburdening them with requests, we develop relationships with them. This means we can identify when it is most appropriate to engage with them, for what type of study and for what timeframe. Each new contact is a potential respondent not just for the current project but for studies in the future. In some cases they are also potential clients. The relationship is based on a respectful rapport which is vital when the audience itself is finite.

## **D is for Dialogue**

Whether qualitative or quantitative, our interviews are designed around the idea of a dialogue - not a question and answer session. It’s impossible to enter into a successful dialogue without the rest of the ‘BOARD’ letters being in place – but if we fail on the last letter, dialogue, respondents can decide to change their mind about participating at all. “Losing” a respondent mid-way through an interview because they have decided to withdraw support is a very real risk with senior executives if the dialogue is not properly sustained in a professional, conversational way. It’s something we work hard on, consistently and continuously - and as a result can claim remarkably few “drop outs”.

We learn fresh ideas and solutions with every study. But building our experience into a consistent framework like BOARD means we are better at engaging with our hard to reach audience. If you would like to comment or find out more email [morvah.stubbings@bprigroup.com](mailto:morvah.stubbings@bprigroup.com)