

# GETTING YOUR VOICE HEARD

A guide for CISOs on how to get cyber security at the top of the board's agenda



## THE ROLE OF THE CISO IS CHANGING

In the last few years the role of the typical CISO has evolved hugely, and not before time. Once a highly technical role, many of those responsibilities are being pushed down a layer while the CISO takes on a far more strategic position as the individual responsible for data risk management across the entire organisation.

Part of this involves direct communication into the board, rather than via a CTO or CIO as was often the case in days gone by. That's a fantastic step forward, but only if the CISO can get their voice heard.



*“While a growing number of company boards are recognising that cyber security can’t be ignored, too many continue to see it in negative terms. We have developed this guide, in conjunction with a number of industry experts, to help CISO’s shift that perspective at board level so that it gets the positive attention it deserves.”*

**- TOR MACLEOD, FOUNDER OF VIA RESOURCE  
AND THE CYBER LEADER’S NETWORK**



## INDIVIDUAL BUY-INS

- Tailor solutions to specific departments, individuals or projects
- Don't take a one-size-fits-all approach



*“Get the individual buy-ins first, so by the time you actually get to the boardroom, everybody in that room knows exactly what to expect and you can be in and out in five minutes, budget secured.”*

**- VICTORIA GUILLOIT, DIRECTOR OF AWARENESS ON MESSAGE LTD**



## THINK COMMERCIALY

- Understand that info-sec is not simply about reducing risk. It is about helping your organisation make smarter business decisions.
- If you are to get the board members to understand your world, you must begin by understanding theirs.
- Compromises will be necessary. Taking a hard line on nuanced matters will seldom work.

*“Engage your board by talking about risk profiles. What is the board or the business willing to accept from from a risk perspective? It’s not for security to say what you can and can’t do - it’s for the business to say or you cannot can’t do. Just because something is a high security risk doesn’t mean it’s a bad business idea, it could be a very valid business move to continue anyway.”*

**- THOM LANGFORD, CISO OF PUBLICIS GROUP**



## GET YOUR DUCKS IN A ROW

- Surprising the board with new ideas/concerns rarely results in a positive outcome.
- If you can, liaise directly with individual members of the board ahead of time, and try to address their major concerns one to one.
- This will allow you greater opportunity to address individual concerns in a private environment, so that any potential issues can be resolved prior to the board meeting.
- It will also allow you to tailor your message to each individual, as they all each have different levels of technical understanding.



## FIND YOUR CHAMPION

- On every board there will be one person who instinctively gets the opportunities and threats of cyber security more than anyone else. Identify this person and build a close relationship as they will be critical in influencing other board members.
- This is particularly important if you're lacking in boardroom experience, as this person will be able to help you shape your content in a way that really resonates with the less technically informed members of the board. They will help you to focus on commercial outcomes, such as reputational damage, operational downtime or large fines.
- Usually these evangelists will come in the form of a CIO or CTO, but increasingly they're found in less obvious parts of the business. Wherever they are, book in some quality face time and develop that relationship as far as you can.



*“It is important to make sure you are talking to the right people. For my business case I put to the board, I was communicating with the owners of the business so I’m talking directly to the decision makers who have the view and the authority to take a decision on what we do with this organisation. As a result, the process is a lot easier and more supportive.”*

**- CHRISTIAN TOON, CISO OF PINSENT MASONS LLP**

## START TO THE TOP, BUT DON'T NEGLECT THE BOTTOM

- The cyber security mindset needs to be embedded across the entire organisation, so while your primary goal should be to get the board bought into your strategy, you also need a plan for dispersing this throughout every level of the company.
- After all, if you fail to demonstrate you are bringing the troops with you, the board are unlikely to continue to give you the attention you're demanding in future meetings.





## KNOW YOUR COMPETITION

- The board are always intrigued by the activity of close competitors.
- Understand how these competitors are investing in cyber security.

*“We keep seeing in each industry one or two brands really taking the initiative with cyber security, and it those that are differentiating themselves and seeing the strategic benefits, while all the others play catch up.”*

**- TOR MACLEOD, FOUNDER OF VIA RESOURCE AND THE CYBER LEADER'S NETWORK**



## BE CONFIDENT

- The majority of CEOs now consider cyber security a core part of their role, and that is already filtering through to the board agenda.
- It is not as difficult as it once was to get your voice heard, so don't hold back. Your board will be expecting you to speak loudly!



*"I've noticed a big change in the last five years at board level. Cyber security is not a hard sell anymore."*

**- STEVE WRIGHT, INTERIM DPO BANK OF ENGLAND**