Customer Loyalty

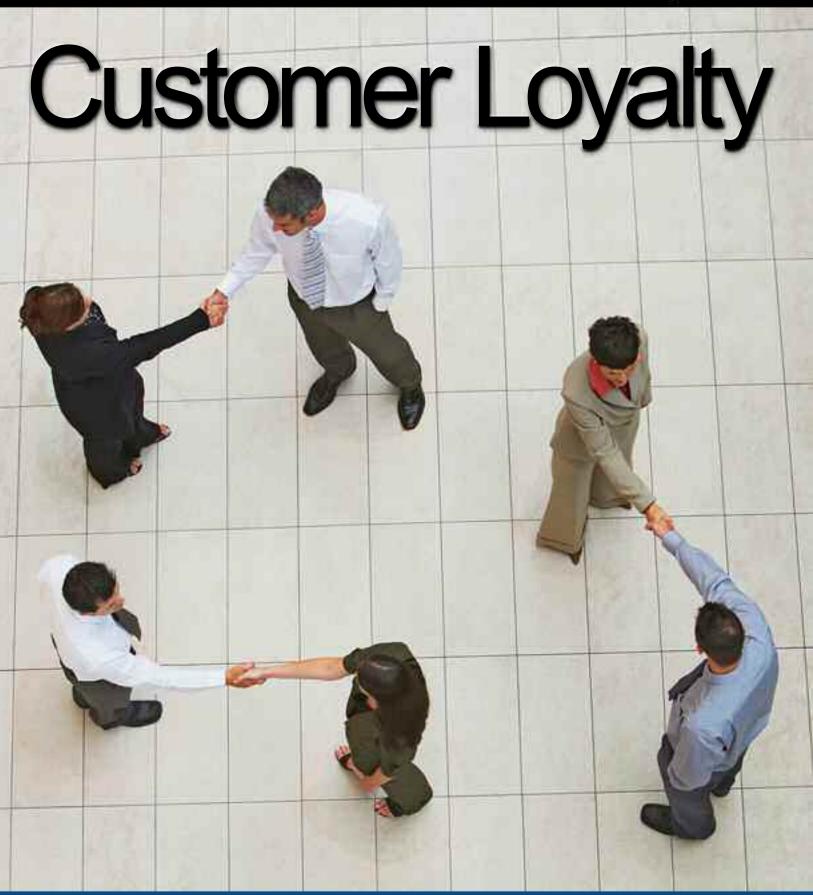## Secrets to Boosting Your Sales With CRM

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Chapter 1
WHAT IS CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT?

BUSINESSES SPEND A GREAT DEAL OF TIME pursuing prospective customers: researching them, marketing to them, nurturing them and, finally, selling to them. However, once the sale has been made and the prospect becomes a full-fledged customer, it's not unusual for the company's attention to shift back to finding new prospects. The customer may be entered into some company database, left to receive a periodic phone call or direct-mail solicitation asking him or her to purchase something else. With the cost of adding a new customer between five and eight times that of keeping an existing one, this kind of approach simply wastes opportunities and money. No matter what size a business is, that scenario can be offset by a good customer relationship management, or CRM, program.

What Is CRM?

CRM is a business strategy that elevates the customer beyond a name in an electronic data-base. More than just a software package, it involves people across virtually every area of a company in a process that captures data and applies it to strengthen customer relationships, improve communication, identify and act on selling opportunities, save money, enhance customer loyalty and increase profitability.

■ **HERE'S HOW IT WORKS:** A technology solution is designed to capture data that is collected at various locations within a company. Employees working in sales, marketing, accounting, customer service, IT and even the warehouse become active participants in the system, observing and capturing information in the software solution. The data provides comprehensive customer histories and overviews, allowing the company to have instant, at-a-glance access to the needs, buying histories, purchasing patterns and other details about customers.

In recent years, CRM has received so much hype that it's tempting to dismiss it as just another flavor-of-the-month business acronym. That would be a mistake. Market research firm Gartner Inc. estimates 2007 worldwide CRM software revenue at $7.4 billion, up 14 percent from the previous year. Good CRM programs capture information about customer needs, buying habits, preferences and concerns. They merge technology and personalized service to ensure that customers' needs are met in more sophisticated and engaging ways than with periodic e-mails and sales letters. In addition, a comprehensive and well-executed CRM program can help companies manage data more effectively, helping them improve everything from pricing to forecasting to supplier and distributor relationships.

If that sounds like just a souped-up version of a contact management database, think again. Technology is a critical component of CRM, but managing customer relationships also has critical people-focused and strategy-based components. CRM programs can be powerful tools that span various sectors of your business, helping you learn more about your customers and your own operations. Each piece of data tells a story about the customer, his or her buying habits and the overall patterns in their businesses—which can help you foster better relationships with your customers by better understanding their companies and anticipating their needs. In addition, it strengthens internal and external communication, allowing you to send relevant information to your customers and inform your employees about customer needs and business trends, seasons and cycles.

The Benefits of CRM

Before instituting such a dramatic change in your business technology and processes, it's important to understand the potential benefits of CRM for your company. Virtually any business can benefit from a comprehensive approach to CRM, in a variety of ways.

■ **FOR YOUR BUSINESS:** By housing all information in one accessible location, a CRM system diminishes the number of errors a business is likely to make in dealing with customers. From ensuring that addresses and contact information are always correct and managing service agreements to allowing salespeople to access terms and buying patterns in one location, your CRM system gives employees access to all the information they need to become more focused on delivering excellent customer service and, as a result, improving profits.

CRM can also automate communications and other functions of your business. You can segment portions of your customer list to receive special information or offers. A CRM system can be programmed with autoresponders that deliver information when requests are sent to particular e-mail addresses and that periodically send customers newsletters, new product information, reminders, relevant news clippings and the like. Because this is tracked and managed by the system, it cuts down on the time it takes to keep customers informed about your business. Reminders about orders or service appointments can be programmed to go out via e-mail. Prompts on web interfaces can remind employees to mention certain promotional offers or to ask questions that will yield additional data for the CRM system.

Because customer data is housed in one location, salespeople can easily manage quotes and estimates and view buying patterns. This can be a valuable resource to mine for leads. Aggregate information can unveil clues about trends among your customers or in the marketplace in general.

■ **FOR YOUR CUSTOMERS:** Customers benefit from CRM systems because of increased efficiency. When a customer calls to place an order or receive assistance, he or she no longer has to wait for the "right" person to help. Virtually anyone with access to the CRM system can provide assistance. This increases efficiency and reduces downtime. Because a CRM system may house special order arrangements or customer preferences, customers receive knowledgeable service from anyone with access to the system. This makes dealing with your company more convenient. In addition, some CRM systems can link to information and troubleshooting downloads. Customers can access information themselves, and that data can be captured for the overall customer profile, giving the company insight into customers' areas of interest and potential problems.

■ **FOR YOUR EMPLOYEES:** A CRM solution can help your employees in a variety of ways. In addition to empowering them to help customers more efficiently—which allows them to do their jobs better, diminishing some sources of frustration and increasing job satisfaction—CRM can help employers track work flow and output. Since employee-customer interactions and their outcomes are often captured in CRM systems, both employees and their supervisors can spot areas that need improvement, as well as areas that are strong. If a customer service person's effectiveness is diminishing or a salesperson's numbers are off, the employer can track those benchmarks and determine whether there is a problem with the employee, the customer or customers, the products or services, or how the products or services are being delivered.

CRM provides an early-warning system for employee effectiveness to head off trouble before it becomes ingrained. For example, an employer might see that a salesperson's numbers are off for the quarter. By scratching beneath the surface of that number, he or she might find that the salesperson is struggling with a new product introduction, which is affecting productivity. Or the employer might find that a recent overhaul of sales territories has made a territory too large to be covered effectively. The CRM system can deliver clues to these circumstances much sooner than an employee—who is busy trying to overcome the obstacles rather than modify them—may report.

■ **FOR SALESPEOPLE:** CRM gives salespeople greater and more convenient access to account information. For marketing personnel, CRM delivers an easier way to manage and track campaigns and other promotional pushes. For customer service employees, CRM provides instant access to customer agreements and records, allowing them to spot potential problems before they become issues.

■ **FOR OTHER STAKEHOLDERS:** CRM, by virtue of its name, is generally focused on customers. However, your CRM program may reach beyond traditional customers to include data focused on prospects, suppliers, vendors, donors, investors, distributors and other partners in your business delivery system. Such integration can help you enhance your marketing efforts, track your own inventory and suppliers, and more effectively deliver products and services at every point along the supply chain.

CRM Applied

IF YOU'RE HAVING TROUBLE ENVISIONING HOW CRM CAN WORK FOR YOUR BUSINESS, CONSIDER THESE EXAMPLES OF OPPORTUNITIES IN ACTION:

Using a CRM system to analyze business activity at the midyear point, a midsize accounting firm finds that an increasing number of its clients are physicians. This began after one of the partners was interviewed about practice management for a trade publication targeting physicians. Closer examination of the account activity finds that these are highly profitable accounts, especially as the firm's expertise in servicing physicians grows. As a result, the firm institutes a marketing push that includes more publicity in medical trade publications, as well as new marketing messages that focus on the firm's specialization in health-care practices.

When the manager of a small manufacturing company finds that web sales of a particular type of jam are beginning to increase, a bit of digging finds that several popular food bloggers have been touting it as the best thing on sliced bread. As a result, the company increases its production of the jam and purchases ads on the food blogs that have delivered so many orders.

After a senior salesperson retires, a midsize software consulting firm with four offices finds that its largest customer requires greater levels of emergency support than ever before. Now that the data, which had previously been in the salesperson's head, is being captured through CRM, it becomes clear that the senior salesperson had been quietly dealing with problems with the account instead of sharing concerns with the rest of the company. As the customer's dissatisfaction grows, the company is in danger of losing the account, but it quickly puts together a proposal showing how an upgrade could save the client money while decreasing downtime due to problems. With analysis of the data provided through the new CRM system, the company is able to raise the customer's satisfaction, decrease the costs of servicing the customer and make a substantial new sale.

However you envision your CRM program over the long haul, it's usually a good idea to start with a subset of your ultimate CRM goals and grow the system from there instead of trying to design a massive system that will encompass all the people and businesses that participate in your company. To grow the system most effectively, pick the areas where it can be most useful—usually the sales and marketing process, but not always.

At the same time, choose a scalable technology component so you're not investing in one system to start and another to grow. Ensure that the solution is flexible enough to accommodate the unique aspects of your business and adapt to the changes and additions you will ulti-

mately want to make. Once you have a solid infrastructure that accomplishes what you need it to do, it will be easier to expand it to include new data sets, generate new types of reports and monitoring, and add new stakeholders to the system.

Chapter 2
WHY IS CRM IMPORTANT?

WELL-EXECUTED CRM SYSTEM CAN BE a critical component of many areas of your business. So much so, in fact, that some even call it a business philosophy, because CRM reflects a method of servicing customers by analyzing and using the raw data collected about their businesses, as well as what and when they buy from your company, in an effort to gain in-depth insights.

Think of CRM as the connective tissue between the different functions within your business—a single, integral database that houses all the data you have related to each customer, as well as current information on promotions, new products, service agreements, buying histories and other relevant data. This comprehensive resource becomes an essential link between the company's marketing and sales teams and the customer. Everyone in the company can be up-to-date on customer needs, patterns, preferences and buying habits simply by accessing the database. This facilitates communication with customers, ensuring that when a customer

contacts your company, the individual or team servicing them has access to the best possible information. Through this database, your company can automate a substantial portion of its customer communications. By creating data sets based on specific parameters, you can target your customers more accurately, provide personalized letters and e-mail messages, and cut down on costs by saving the time and efforts wasted by inaccurate customer information.

Such laserlike precision and efficiency, coupled with the comprehensive customer histories in your CRM program, can add muscle to your sales team, allowing them to spot selling opportunities and act on them. In addition, you can examine data about customers and create profiles of your best and most profitable customers, dividing them by industry, geography, size of company or other demographics. In doing so, your company can ensure that it is focusing marketing efforts on its best customers and prospects, again avoiding the waste of targeting customers who are not profitable and prospects who aren't a good fit for your business.

A 2007 study by the CMO Council, a nonprofit organization of top marketing executives worldwide, found that alignment of marketing with sales and demand generation are top priorities. While nearly half of these companies are gravitating toward restructuring to achieve such integration, an effective CRM program can allow these functions to maintain their independence and effectiveness while benefiting from sharing information across departments more frequently. By better managing the information you have about customers, you can better coordinate and focus your marketing, customer service and sales efforts. For example, a software company can track which customers need to upgrade their systems and provide timely information about new products and how they can specifically benefit that type of business. A restaurant supply company may review its customer data and notice trends in certain types of food preparation, enabling it to tailor promotional pricing to products that are going to be in demand. A particular specialty foods company keeps track of the holiday gifts each of its customers places through its catalog or online. In September the following year, it sends each customer a list of what he or she sent the previous year and to whom. This reminder makes reordering holiday gifts easy and convenient—and with an effective CRM system in place, it can be coordinated with a few simple keystrokes or an electronic interface with your mailing house.

Such attention to customer needs creates stronger relationships and can enhance your sales efforts. Think of the specialty food company: Customers could go to another company, compile their gift lists again, choose gifts and place their orders. Or they can simply call the toll-free number provided or visit the company's website, enter their identifications and complete their entire holiday orders in minutes. As long as the quality of the product or service is there, this type of convenience keeps customers coming back for more. In this case, the power of information creates greater convenience—and increased sales and customer loyalty.

Adding Muscle to Your Selling Process

CRM can also give your sales efforts extra punch. By creating a system where requests for information and other leads are routed to appropriate internal contacts, your company has the opportunity to capture leads that may otherwise have gone unnoticed or that could have slipped through the cracks.

By capturing sales and contact information in one location, salespeople can easily look at customers' histories and get a better understanding of the sales cycle of particular customers. Seasonal businesses may be excellent customers at some times of the year but not others. Some potential customers may sign multiyear procurement contracts, meaning it will likely take a long time for a sale to emerge—but also that this type of customer is worth courting and nurturing over that period of time. Some customers' buying habits may be based on their fiscal year, their projects or their product schedules. Capturing as much data about companies as possible helps your sales team apply the appropriate amount of time and effort to each customer.

Such historical data may also indicate whether there are opportunities for upselling or cross selling. Perhaps a customer's software system or manufacturing equipment is in need of an upgrade. While many businesses might choose an "if it ain't broke, don't fix it" attitude toward investing in equipment or software, a sales representative backed by a comprehensive CRM system has an advantage. He or she can create a detailed presentation about the benefits of upgrading, citing money-saving efficiencies, new features and other benefits to the customer. A tailored presentation that directly addresses the customer's particular situation can be much more effective than a generic and impersonal push to buy a new product just because it's new.

Your CRM system may also cut down on the time and effort it takes to sell to a customer by providing indications of customer preferences based on past purchases. A great example of this type of selling on a large scale is Amazon.com's recommendations. Based on previous purchases and site browsing, Amazon users receive suggestions for similar books and products when they log on to the site. Similarly, you may find you have a customer that buys only one type of product or service. By analyzing the data you've captured, you can often determine whether it makes sense to try to expand that customer relationship, focus on it as a niche market or discontinue marketing efforts altogether. In addition to streamlining your selling process, such prediction-based marketing can help you further solidify customer relationships by showing customers that you understand their needs and preferences.

What Can CRM Automate?

When thinking about what your CRM program can do for you, you may be tempted to think about immediate needs, such as creating automated mailings or e-mail blasts to customers. However, this is where a comprehensive view is useful. Think about what might be possible beyond those initial efforts. While it's usually not a good idea to tackle all the potential applications right out of the gate with a new CRM program, such an exercise will help you find a technology component that can be built to suit your needs.

A CRM Program Has Potential Benefits for Many Functions

Marketing can access a highly accurate contact list that has fewer possibilities of data-entry errors, reducing the number of communications that are undeliverable. This enhances customer communications, including mail, e-mail and phone, and allows your marketing team to track results from specific campaigns.

Sales can use your CRM program to monitor customer buying patterns and trigger reminders for action during key periods of the sales cycle. Incoming leads can be routed to the correct salesperson, and reminders to follow up on sales quotes and customers whose volume has fallen off can be programmed into the system. This makes it less likely that a customer will slip through the cracks.

Customer service can access detailed records of all interactions with a customer so that anyone who answers the phone and has access to the data can have the most up-to-date information when helping the customer. Frequently asked questions or troubleshooting information can be automated for delivery to customers on demand.

Owners and managers can generate data-specific reports, including sales levels by product, category or customer, as well as reports about specific customer buying trends. This gives managers and owners a comprehensive overview of the patterns within the company's sales, marketing and other functions. Sales levels can be tracked by customer, sales representative or territory. Company leadership can immediately see information about buying cycles and determine whether a particular sales representative is performing to expectations.

Of course, there are other applications for CRM programs, but these are among the most frequently used—and most essential—for the majority of companies. However, the applications of your CRM program can extend to virtually every area of your business.

The Essential Link Between Marketing, Sales and Customer Service

Too often, the three key functions that directly affect customers—marketing, sales and customer service—operate independently of one another. This can create confusion and inconsistency in how you communicate and service your customers. For example, marketing staff may come up with a price promotion. However, if that is not communicated to the sales team, the result could be incorrect billing, which may take time or resources from the customer to rectify and could create ill will and mistrust, making it seem like your company does not adhere to its word. Similarly, if a salesperson makes a sale and gives certain guarantees to a customer but those are not communicated to the customer service team or even to the other sales team members, then the customer may feel as if the company is not standing behind its assurances. This can be particularly problematic if there is employee turnover and poor communication between or even within departments. This "silo effect"—where information is housed vertically in departments that may or may not communicate with each other—could actually damage your business.

With a comprehensive CRM system, however, customer communication is captured and housed in an accessible database, making the most current information available to anyone who needs it and has access to the system. By breaking through barriers between various business functions and making communication transparent, your company can act in a more consistent and unified fashion with its customers, instilling a greater level of trust and strengthening customer relationships.

Selling to the Right Customer

Another benefit of building a CRM program that has detailed customer data is that such a system allows you to see exactly who your best customers are. Many small businesses make the mistake of thinking that any customer is a good customer, but that may not be the case. Some customers take up time or resources that are not proportionate to the revenue they provide the business.

A CRM system can help you rank your customers in terms of profitability. By generating reports that highlight customer details, you may see certain industries or types of businesses that are buying more of your products or services. You may also find out that there are other customer characteristics that are undesirable. By segmenting this data, you can easily see the characteristics of your best customers. This can help you target your selling efforts to strengthen existing relationships with ideal customers and to better identify and attract customers that share characteristics with your ideal customers. At the same time, you can avoid marketing aggressively to prospects that share characteristics with your least profitable customers.

Regardless of the size of your business, an effective CRM program harnesses the power of every company's most precious resource: customer information. By taking the knowledge that is often housed inside various files, contact management databases and employees' brains and putting it all into one comprehensive database, your company can service customers in a more efficient and knowledgeable manner.

CRM'S ROLE IN INCREASING CUSTOMER SATISFACTION AND LOYALTY

W **HEN IT COMES TO KEEPING CUSTOMERS HAPPY** and coming back to you time and time again, information is power. An effective CRM strategy helps deliver that information in a format that is useful, giving you the power to create a more effective and efficient approach to customer service. By implementing a comprehensive CRM strategy, your company can track and measure customer feedback and satisfaction levels. This allows you to spot dips in satisfaction levels before they become big enough to be problematic.

Creating Cohesive Customer Service

Customers expect a consistent level of service each time they contact your company. Customers with a history of purchasing from your company also have an expectation of familiarity—that the person on the other end of the phone knows about their account and their needs either firsthand or through internal access to their customer information.

When you have a CRM program that gives employees access to the latest customer information in real time, it's easier to meet those expectations. Any employee with access to the system can review a customer's history, agreements, service contracts and the like and make recommendations or take appropriate actions based on that information. For example, let's say you own a restaurant supply company, and a customer calls about a problem with a specific product. By accessing the customer's information, you can see whether the customer bought that piece of equipment from your company, whether or not there is a service agreement, and if there's a history of this problem, either with this particular customer or with many customers who have purchased the product.

By housing the information in one place, it's easier to set consistent policies regarding customer service. You can train employees in the protocol they need to follow to properly address customer issues. If the restaurant supply company sees that a particular product is not performing as expected, for example, it may make adjustments to its standard return or repair policies to stave off a wave of customer dissatisfaction. These policies can be noted in the database, allowing employees to provide informed and effective counsel to customers, streamlining the journey between problem and solution. This is a much easier solution than having employees return calls to customers after checking with a manager, supervisor or salesperson. The CRM system may even prompt employees to update certain information and ask questions that will help enhance the database while they're helping a customer solve a problem.

In addition, companies can spend less time accessing the information they need to provide proper service to customers and get to solving issues and servicing accounts more quickly. One health-care insurance provider which switched from a system that included multiple software applications to one central database of customer information boosted cost savings and efficiency, resulting in decreased training time, shorter service calls and happier customers overall.

The Benefits of Creating a Central Database

Creating a central customer database for easy access by all departments is at the heart of any CRM strategy. This database can be as simple or as comprehensive as your company needs it to be. In addition to basic contact and sales information, you can include copies of

the specific agreements you have with various customers, giving employees insight into the level of service to which each customer is entitled.

Using such a database to service customers can also help eliminate common customer service annoyances. If only one salesperson at your company has access to specific information about a particular customer—perhaps through individual files or just in his or her head—it can lead to a frustrating situation when the customer has an immediate need or problem. Having to wait around for that salesperson to handle the issue could cost your customer money and create ill will. Of course, many people have had the experience of calling a company with a problem only to be disconnected. Upon calling the company again, the individual may have to repeat the explanation of his or her issue. With real-time customer service, should such a disconnection happen, the information from the original call is housed in the database, and any employee can pick up where the conversation left off before it ended abruptly. Such seamless communication alleviates customer frustration, leaving them with the impression that the company manages its data well and truly cares about solving individual problems.

The most effective databases are accessible from anywhere, allowing employees in multiple locations to access the data, including those in branch offices and those who are traveling. If a salesperson is on the road and needs to check on the status of a customer order before a big meeting, he or she should be able to do so from anywhere.

CRM Increases Internal Accountability

Another way CRM helps your business is by providing a better understanding of how employees are performing, in both the responsibilities of their jobs and their interactions with customers. By capturing information about what happens at the various touch points customers have with your company, you can better understand their experiences. If a customer has a bad experience with an employee, it's likely to show up somewhere in your CRM system. If many customers have a bad experience with an employee, or if a supplier is not performing as expected, the data is eventually going to ferret out that problem.

For example, let's say your company designs and sells fun T-shirts. If your CRM system shows that customers want a particular style of T-shirt and are upset that they can't get it in a timely manner, you're losing sales and facing customer dissatisfaction. Using your CRM data, you can do some sleuthing to find out how to solve the problem. Trace the production process of the T-shirt. When the shirts are ordered from the manufacturer, is it being done in a timely manner? Are the raw materials you need to create the product—in this case, shirts

and materials for silk screening designs on the shirts—in-house? If so, you've found your problem: You need to institute better inventory controls. If not, then you need to go to the next stage in the process. Is the equipment working? Can the shirts be screened in a timely manner? If yes, then you have information to solve the problem. If not, once again you can move on to the next point. Are the shirts being produced in adequate quantities? Are they being delivered to the warehouse for shipping in a timely manner? How long is it taking between the time orders are placed and the time they ship? What shipping method is being used? Again, look for clues in your CRM data.

Because employees are logging the details of their interactions with customers, you can examine the communication styles of various employees to determine where improvements can be made and to recognize excellence. If a particular employee's customer contacts frequently result in problem resolution and high levels of customer satisfaction, that might be an indication that this is a talented individual who can contribute more to the company and should be further trained and cultivated for roles with increasing responsibility. Conversely, if a particular employee has a track record of poor customer interaction, it may be an indication that more training is needed to shore up communication and customer service skills.

Depending on their roles in the company, different employees will make specific contributions to the CRM system. It is essential to train your employees to understand the system and contribute appropriately to it. Many CRM providers will provide such training as part of the initial installation. Getting your employees to commit to using the system and keeping it updated is crucial to making it work.

This is also an area where you can assess accountability. As you train your employees in the data sets for which they are primarily responsible, make sure they understand that contributing to the CRM system is one of their job responsibilities. Make it a point to periodically review the data and ensure that it is up-to-date. Of course, controls should be put in place to determine who will be able to update data, as well as who will be allowed to access it but not change it. This is critically important. Allowing too many people to have editing privileges in the database could lead to corruption of the data. Instead, determine where the most logical knowledge pools are and appoint trained personnel to be responsible for updating the database.

Tracking Account Activity Through CRM

Your CRM program keeps information about customer accounts and activity just a few clicks away. The applications of your CRM program will be essential for determining the type

of data you wish to collect, but most should center around customer activity.

It's a waste of time and resources to capture and manage data that is not useful to your company. What is and isn't useful will, of course, vary by company. Beyond basic contact information (name, postal address, e-mail address, phone and fax numbers, website and the like), some of the most commonly captured information includes:

■ **RELEVANT CUSTOMER DETAILS:** In B2B sales, this may include industry, number of locations or employees, and revenue level. In B2C sales, this may include customer preferences, date of birth (for birthday promotions or demographic/security information), and previous ordering and shipping information.

■ **SPECIFIC SALES INFORMATION:** Details such as product, color, quantity, date of purchase and any specific delivery or other preferences can provide tremendous customer insight. In addition, if there are specific reasons for a purchase, those should be noted to ensure that the data accurately reflects a typical transaction and to tell you whether or not it is likely to be repeated. You can examine the customer activity for trends or buying cycles. How long is the lag time between purchases? This type of understanding can help you better communicate with customers and anticipate their needs. It can also give you clues about changes happening at their companies that might impact your future business with them. For example, a customer may place a large order because their company is kicking off an annual event. Or it may be replacing materials lost in a flood or fire. The former represents an opportunity to make repeat sales. The latter represents an opportunity to better service your customer and strengthen the relationship, such as with expedited shipping or a good-faith discount.

■ **CUSTOMER SUPPORT DATA:** If your business uses a customer support system, whether through a call center, a service center or even in-store support from employees, that data should be captured. This will help you spot recurring problems with particular customers, products or services. Customer preferences and special circumstances can also be collected, allowing your company to better respond to individual preferences and needs.

■ **REQUESTS FOR INFORMATION:** If customers have asked for additional information through any channel—e-mails, in-person sales calls, web downloads and so on—these requests should be tracked and used to determine if their businesses have particular needs.

Other information may include web traffic data, click-through rates of banner ads or e-mails, and customer downloads from your website. Many solutions can handle text and graphics, and the database can also be configured to include background information on a particular company, such as news clippings, brochures and other data. Copies of written correspondence, records of sales visits and transcripts of phone calls can also be housed within the database, capturing virtually every communication with clients.

Of course, the bigger the database, the more management and input it will need to be kept current and effective. This decision should be driven by the needs of your business, as investing in an appropriate CRM program can provide a return on your investment that is many times higher than what you initially spent.

Capturing Data

While the thought of compiling such a mountain of data can seem daunting, much of it is already housed within the various functions, offices, filing cabinets and computers you already have. The biggest step is converting your internal processes that house this information into a centralized database instead of—or, at least, in addition to—individual files and contact management programs. Some of the richest places to mine for information include:

■ **ACCOUNTING:** Within your accounting and bookkeeping function lies names, addresses, e-mails and other basic data. In addition, you'll want to upload as much buying history as you can to help you paint an accurate picture of spending levels and habits.

■ **SALES:** Of course, the people actually selling have the most direct contact with your customers. They can be instrumental in adding additional information about the buying cycle and buying habits of a particular company, as well as service agreements and past problems. In addition, they often store a remarkable amount of customer information in their heads, such as special customer circumstances that range from seasonal business needs to customer quirks and peccadilloes. They're usually on top of employee turnover and changes at customers' businesses that may affect the selling process.

■ **WAREHOUSE/DISTRIBUTION:** If your company has its own warehouse or works with a distributor, this is a good resource for finding information on customer returns, which can be helpful in identifying product life cycles and problems with particular goods or customers.

Using data to recognize strong and loyal customer relationships while shoring up weaker customers, employees and opportunities are great benefits of a CRM system. For example, if your warehouse reports that a customer is suddenly returning a greater amount of product than before, it could mean that there is an issue with the product. It could also mean that the customer has a new purchasing manager who is making changes to the product mix—and that could mean that your company is on its way out as a supplier. Either way, the data reveals something that directly impacts your business and requires action. Spotting such situations early allows you to forecast, thereby preventing losses and increasing sales.

HOW CAN CRM HELP YOU GROW SALES?

WITH IMPROVED CUSTOMER SATISFACTION from CRM-driven customer service, companies can begin to focus on boosting profits through their CRM programs. Profitability is one of the keys to business success. An effective CRM program can be a key tool in increasing profitability by allowing you to develop more effective marketing, better account management, and a greater understanding of your customers' needs and buying habits. All these objectives can easily be accomplished when a CRM program is designed to support them.

Improved Coordination of Marketing and Sales Messages

To be as effective as possible, sales and marketing messages need to mirror each other. If a company promotes its products in one manner and its sales team sells with another, it may seem as though the company's approach to selling its products is inconsistent and disjointed.

How does a CRM program affect this synergy? First, at the most basic level, working from a centralized database reduces basic errors in contacting your customers. Information is generated from a single source, all but eliminating the opportunity for data-entry errors that may misidentify a customer. Of course, this also makes it easier to plan your sales and marketing. You can see how many customers you have and how they break down by the criteria that matter to your company: type of customer, geography, income level and other parameters for "best" customers. This can help enormously when you are planning campaigns, allowing you to set different criteria for different customers to receive specific communications based on their needs. This gives you the opportunity to tailor marketing messages that will be most effective for each group, or to create one overall set of messages or offers.

Most CRM software solutions allow you to segment data based on various criteria. So a chain of hardware stores with locations in various places on the East Coast can create direct-mail programs for Northeastern customers to promote shovels, rock salt and other items needed during snowy months. At the same time, it can create another promotion that touts lawn care products for Southern customers. A financial planner, meanwhile, can segment his or her customers based on stage of life, promoting retirement planning to customers who see their golden years approaching and touting college tuition planning services to those who have young children. Your CRM software solution should be flexible enough to create lists of customers that are as broad or as narrow as you need.

How CRM Helps Sell Customer Benefits

One of the first lessons that marketers learn is to focus on selling benefits to the customer, not features of a product. The bigger your customer and prospect base, the more tempting it can be to slip into the most general type of marketing, ticking off product features and allowing customers to draw conclusions about how those features will benefit them. After all, it can be difficult to craft broad messages that resonate with an equally broad customer base.

Your CRM system can help salespeople track revenue potential for their accounts, as well as determine the probability of closing a sale and at what stage. Most systems have reminder functions to help salespeople better manage key dates, such as deadlines for proposals, pres-

entation appointments and even customer birthdays. Virtual collaboration features often allow salespeople to coordinate their efforts online with members of production, sales, customer service and other departments with access to the system.

CRM systems can also capture information about where business is coming from. Referral sources and influencers are important streams of business. By capturing this data in your CRM system, your sales team can target additional referral sources and influencers to build on these sources of customers.

Once you have a CRM solution that can segment your audience and deliver tailored messages and offers to them, you can collect feedback and results, testing which tactics are most effective. Your sales team can access customer records to see which offers have been made or what promotions are being offered to particular clients. For example, a beauty products company may be test-marketing a new line of products sold in packages that fall at different price points. By recording sales data in the company's CRM system, it may find that customers like combinations of soaps and bath gels but prefer to choose their own lotions. Or they may find that packages priced at $19.99 sell frenetically, while anything over $25 sits on the shelf. By capturing this data and segmenting it by type of retailer and market, the company can better customize its product lines so they're easier for salespeople to sell.

All of these features allow salespeople to see promotional messaging and determine whether the offers and selling points used were right for those customers. The data captured from sales calls, call centers and even retail employees can then help you decide whether your messages and offers are working or whether they need to be changed in the future.

Improving Efficiency Through Automation

Another way CRM can improve sales and marketing efficiency and consistency is by automating more of your communications with clients. However, in addition to generating outgoing contact with your customers, a successful CRM implementation can help you automate reports of results, return on investment and other elements of your campaign.

First, you can select specific lists of customers to whom you wish to promote your products or services. Filter your overall customer database to choose exactly the type and number of customers and prospects to which you wish to target the campaign. This allows you to create the most qualified lists possible. Similarly, you can choose specific products and services, customizing your offerings and highlights to each audience. You may choose to send back-

ground and informational literature on specific products or create a specialized e-mail promotion for each group.

In addition, your CRM solution can help you automate the timing of your communications with these groups. Seasonal businesses, like landscaping and pool companies, can send out reminders to customers that it's time to schedule service. Doctors' and dentists' offices can automatically generate lists of patients who are due for appointments. Such reminders could be sent out every other week to customers who haven't responded, allowing them to either take action in the correspondence or ask you to take them off your list. This helps you keep your best customers—or patients, in this case—routinely engaged with you. Other automated communications may include periodic newsletters, e-mail-on-demand white papers or reports, date-related promotions such as birthday or company anniversary discounts, and the like.

You can also automate your calculations of return on investment. Many CRM programs can track budgets for specific marketing programs. Through the use of coded response mechanisms such as coupons, inserts and ads to be returned for discount, as well as special-response telephone numbers, passwords, website promotional codes and microsites, you can measure the response levels to particular campaigns. As these responses are recorded, your CRM system can calculate two very important pieces of data: It can tell you which messages, offers or promotions pulled the greatest response, and it can tell you the cost per sale and return on campaign investment.

These are critical pieces of data for the average business. Of course, understanding the most productive offers may require some analytics—you need to determine whether the offer is the driving factor or whether a particular audience responded well to an offer because of a special circumstance. You may find that your invitations company has had a spike in orders from customers in a particular area. Upon closer examination, it turns out that it's April and people are ordering invitations to weddings and graduation parties. At the same time, the local stationery shop closed. In this case, your CRM system has given you the information you need to capitalize on an important new market opportunity—something you likely never would have uncovered without the power of your CRM data.

In addition, responses can tell you how much your campaigns are costing you and whether the results are significant enough to warrant continuing them. Lackluster campaigns can easily be identified and modified or discontinued. You may also have other methods of measuring the success of particular programs, whether they're sales figures, inquiries or other metrics. Your CRM solution should be able to help you measure the level of success that your program has had.

Creating Loyalty Through Customer Focus

Some experts estimate that the average company loses 20 percent to 40 percent of its customers every year. Since it costs more to find new customers than it does to retain existing ones, it's smart business to do everything possible to keep your customers happy—and keep them coming back to you again and again.

The better you service your customers, the more loyal they are likely to be. Since CRM programs allow you to examine your customers' needs, buying habits and histories more closely, you can create loyalty programs based on their individual patterns. These may include discounts or other incentives that are automatically applied once a customer reaches a certain buying level, or professional courtesy discounts for people in the same geographic area or who run related businesses. Some loyalty programs provide rewards for your loyalty (think American Express or airline travel companies)—when you reach a certain buying level, you get free products or other rewards.

While these can be effective, on a more basic level, customers want to know that you care about them. Using a CRM system that captures customer interaction can help you spot complaints in time to remedy them before you lose your customer to a competitor—or worse. Today, unhappy customers have access to blogs and other mechanisms that can broadcast negative information about your company to hundreds or thousands of people. So it's best to take care of problems as soon as they arise.

But what if your customers don't tell you they're unhappy? Many won't. There are other ways you can spot problems through the information that CRM captures:

- **A DECLINE IN ONCE-ROBUST ORDERS**
- **AN INCREASE IN CUSTOMER SERVICE OR REPAIR CALLS**
- **AN INCREASE IN RETURNS**
- **AN INCREASE IN LATE PAYMENTS OR NON-PAYMENT FROM CUSTOMERS WITH ON-TIME REMUNERATION RECORDS**
- **AN INCREASINGLY TENSE OR UNPLEASANT DEMEANOR FROM SALESPEOPLE OR CUSTOMER SERVICE REPRESENTATIVES**

Examining your CRM data for these clues—or better yet, programming the system to note these parameters on a regular basis—can help you actively seek out customers who are unhappy and give you the chance to address their concerns and problems, increasing the likelihood that they will remain loyal customers.

Identifying Customer Needs Through CRM

By housing historic sales information in your CRM system, you can more quickly learn a customer's sales cycle and predict buying habits. This will help you more accurately target the customers who are ready to buy from you and not waste time and resources aggressively selling to customers who are not ready to buy. For example, you may find a great prospect who signs a yearlong contract with an existing provider each June. Spending a great deal of time and resources trying to obtain a buying commitment from that prospect in December is probably wasteful, since he or she won't be in a position to negotiate an agreement with you for several months. In addition, selling aggressively when the customer isn't in a position to buy shows a lack of understanding of his or her company and may actually alienate the customer. By capturing sales cycle information, you allocate enough time to keep in touch with the prospect and know exactly when it's most efficient to increase your sales efforts.

Another area where a well-constructed CRM program can help improve the consistency and reach of your sales and marketing efforts and messages is by capturing cross-channel customer data to give broader insight into customers' needs. Let's say you own a PR firm. Your sales process probably uses an account executive who deals with one or two contacts at your client companies. That person may or may not be tuned in to all the needs of the client company. However, if you're capturing customer data from your website, you might see that another contact at the company used the site to request a free report that you are offering via e-mail about media training or advertising services. This information tells you that the company is interested in that service, and you can inquire about providing it before the client's company hires your competitor to do so.

Many businesses have steady sources of existing or potential referrals, but they may not even know about them. Training employees to capture information about where business comes from is important for many reasons. In addition to measuring campaign return on investment, capturing referral sources so that they can be recognized and thanked can help keep referrals coming in. In addition, such information may lead to other referral sources or even selling opportunities. For example, if a florist finds that an increasing number of big orders are the result of referrals from a local banquet hall, he or she can cultivate the relation-

ship by thanking the manager in some way. The florist may then send samples to other catering halls to interest their managers in passing along the florist's name to people planning parties or weddings.

Finding Strengths and Weaknesses

As we have seen, managing customer and other data through CRM can shine a spotlight on your company's selling strengths and weaknesses. Some other areas that can be illuminated through CRM include:

■ **EMPLOYEE EFFECTIVENESS:** Whether it's a salesperson who is not making an adequate number of contacts or a call-center employee who is brusque with customers, a functioning CRM program will uncover employee performance issues. When the system reveals that a particular salesperson's calls are down 20 percent for the quarter, a manager can quickly move in and find out what the problem is.

■ **LEAD GENERATION AND FOLLOW-UP:** Whether they come from referrals, marketing efforts or trade shows, each lead holds the promise of increased sales. When leads dry up, that can be a death knell for any company. Your CRM system can help you track lead levels and document what happens to them when they come in the door. Through the automating functions of most CRM programs, you can immediately route the lead to the proper salesperson.

■ **DATA REQUESTS:** Requests for information may come to your company in many ways— through phone calls to your office or call center, inquiries on your website, or e-mails and other correspondence. When a particular customer requests information, it's motivated by something on his or her end. That something can be benign, or it can mean that your relationship with the customer is going to change, for better or worse. Either way, your CRM system can track this data and determine whether you need to formally follow up on these requests for information.

■ **ORDER FULFILLMENT GAPS:** When a customer places an order and it doesn't arrive on time, that can do serious damage to your relationship. By tracking delivery methods and times as well as customer complaints about shipping, you can determine whether remedies need to be made in this area.

Clearly, an effective CRM system can help you coordinate your sales, marketing and customer service functions through comprehensive knowledge management. By using the data to

identify patterns and become more familiar with any customer's business, companies that properly implement their CRM systems can reap the rewards of capitalizing on opportunities ranging from big-picture trends within their customer bases to microviews of specific customer needs. Ultimately, though, an effective CRM program allows you to focus on profitability. You'll be able to harness information and use it to spot and forecast trends and opportunities, manage your accounts better and improve customer satisfaction, create more targeted and powerful marketing campaigns, and arm salespeople with the data they need to be more effective. The right CRM system streamlines the process, allowing you to reach critical objectives and drive profitability to a new level.

GETTING STARTED WITH YOUR OWN CRM SOLUTION

T o be on the receiving end of the many benefits of a CRM program, the program must get off on the right foot. Estimates of CRM project failure rates range from Gartner Inc.'s widely known prediction of 50 percent by 2006 to as high as 80 percent. However, there's little evidence to back up any of these grim statistics.

Scratch the surface of a CRM failure and you'll likely find one of four culprits: Lack of defined objectives, making it impossible to measure success; inattention to the people component of the process, which cultivates employee apathy or even dislike of the CRM solution; insufficient senior management support, leaving the project without a shepherd at the company; or choosing the wrong software solution.

Components of CRM

Ask five different CRM professionals to define the components of a successful CRM program, and you'll likely get several different responses. However, at its most basic level, a comprehensive CRM program breaks down into the following elements:

- **TECHNOLOGY**
- **PROCESS**
- **PEOPLE**
- **APPLICATION**
- **ANALYSIS**

Without one or another of these elements, the program is incomplete. It may solve one problem or another—perhaps it will provide an adequate customer database for the marketing department or will be helpful in capturing invoicing information for the accounting team—but it will not function at its greatest potential. Each of these pieces plays an important role in generating the most important tool a company can have: accurate, current data about the buying activities of its customers. To ensure that each piece is appropriately engaged, it is important to understand them.

■ **TECHNOLOGY:** It is a misconception that CRM is synonymous with technology. However, the technology component of your CRM program is a make-or-break element. If the software is too cumbersome or inconvenient to use, your employees will struggle with or avoid the chore of inputting information, and the result will be incomplete data.

At the same time, the CRM solution must be elegant enough to provide reports and data that will help various areas of the business, including marketing, sales, finance, customer service, distribution, fulfillment and management. While some companies opt to have their own CRM solutions created, many fine and powerful solutions are available as packages that can be used right away or customized fairly easily and inexpensively. Real-time, web-based solutions built around a central database provide an excellent level of accessibility and ensure that the data is the most current and comprehensive information available from all corners of the company.

There have been many evolutions of CRM technology, ranging from hosted CRM models and customized solutions to off-the-shelf CRM products. Choosing which is best for your business is a matter of looking at your budget, the people who will be using the solution and the goals that you have for the program. Here is more information about the various types of CRM solutions:

• **Hosted CRM solutions:** This type of CRM solution is managed and housed on a third party's server. This eliminates the need for purchasing and maintaining additional hardware or servers, allowing your company to focus on its core business practices. All upgrades, maintenance and other aspects of managing the software component are handled by the ASP. Many hosted solutions are somewhat flexible, but cannot be customized beyond basic parameters, such as choosing from specific reports and, sometimes, choosing various templates for the solution.

• **Customized solutions:** Customized CRM solutions are built specifically for your business. Because they are completely customized, you can design the program to accommodate any information, reports and other data specifications you wish. These types of programs are usually more expensive than hosted solutions.

• **Off-the-shelf solutions:** Relatively simple CRM software applications can also be purchased. These are limited in how much they can be customized and will require some in-house IT support, but they can be an affordable option.

As your business examines which solution is the right one, it's important to keep in mind that your technology should do several things for you, such as automate customer contact functions, and should enable you to capture and aggregate customer sales information, producing reports that are useful for your business. It should also support your key business objectives. For example, if you've set goals to increase customer retention or create more customized promotions based on customer buying habits, the software should have functions that help you identify opportunities, execute tactics and examine results in those areas. Is the goal to increase automation and serve customers in less time with greater accuracy? Then you need benchmarks to measure your results—for example, the amount of time you hope to save, the amount of errors you hope to reduce and so on.

■ **PROCESS:** Once the technology is set, you need to put processes in place to ensure that you are capturing data in the best and most comprehensive manner possible. That requires examining the activities that will go into data collection and making them as easy as possible, as well as setting clear objectives for the type of data you need to collect. A 2007 study by

Accenture found that managers spend up to two hours a day searching for information, half of which has no value to them. Only half of the more than 1,000 managers surveyed believe that their companies do a good job overseeing information management, including outlining exactly what information the company needs.

That's a lot of waste. So being clear about the information the company needs and communicating those parameters to all employees—not just those who will be involved in the data collection, but also those who may have access to additional information resources—is essential to maximizing your CRM data collection efforts.

■ **PEOPLE:** If technology is the skeleton of the CRM body and processes are what keep it running, then people are its lifeblood and nourishment. When you examine the people component of your CRM program, three elements must be kept in mind. First, an effective CRM program needs a champion. This is someone at a level within the company that has enough influence to implement change. If it's not the company owner, president or CEO, it should be someone at a senior management level. The reason is that implementing a CRM strategy is going to include changes to the way employees collect, access and maintain information. In most cases, implementing change requires the backing of someone with enough organizational power to require it.

However, handing off a new CRM strategy without obtaining the buy-in of at least a core group of employees can create other headaches. Employees who are on the front lines of information gathering should be tapped for input into the CRM program. It is a good idea to create a focus group or committee of employees who will be responsible for gathering data.

By getting the feedback of employees who are doing the face-to-face interaction to court prospects, service customers, and define opportunities for data management and use, you may find that employees are more accepting of the changes necessary to accommodate the CRM system because they understand that the system will ultimately help them do their jobs more effectively—and possibly with less time and effort. Appropriate training should also be part of the CRM planning stages, as it will be important for employees to understand and feel comfortable with the system.

Some companies have had success with employee surveys or focus groups to gather critical information such as how data is received, who is actually capturing it for the company, how it is presently managed and how adopting a new system will affect current working conditions. Factors such as the interface employees use to input data can significantly impact how they do their jobs. For example, customer service representatives may be able to adjust more

quickly if the CRM system is configured in the same format as programs they currently use to capture information.

While one might assume a CRM system is the domain of marketing or IT, that is a misperception. Ownership of the CRM program needs to start at the top, with the engagement of senior management. From there, the goals of the system must be reviewed. You'll also need to select a project leader who will be responsible for regularly reviewing how the system is functioning, handling software issues and monitoring success. It's possible that the personnel with the largest stake in the program—sales or marketing—will take the helm. It may be a customer service or even an IT function.

When deciding who should oversee the CRM system, consider what stake they have in it, as well as their technical ability within that area of the business. This will vary from company to company. However, that does not always mean that the lion's share of data input or responsibility for the day-to-day operations of the system will lie with those responsible for a particular function. Allocate responsibility where it makes the most sense and with consideration for where pools of information exist within the company that would benefit the CRM system.

Finally, there has to be consideration of the customer. How much information does the customer want shared and housed? What level of contact is best for the customer? It's a mistake to use a newly implemented CRM program to begin flooding customers with e-mail promotions, surveys and information. At the same time, consider what benefits your CRM system can bring to the customer. Can you help them forecast their buying needs to save money and avoid inventory or supply shortages? Think about the needs of the people who buy from your business as part of the matrix of considerations you use in implementing your system.

■ **APPLICATION:** As you develop your CRM program, look for ways it can be applied to automate and better manage various areas of your business. For example, how can purchase and payment information be merged into the system to help sales? Is it possible to segment customers by various parameters—geographically, by industry or by some other differentiating factors—and create customized services or marketing efforts? How can the system interface best be set up so that customer service representatives have the easiest access to the information they need to serve customers? Examine every area of your business and ask the questions, "How can the CRM program help this area?" and, "How can this area help the CRM program?"

This is the phase where CRM program implementation challenges come to light. So in practical application of the CRM program, companies should ensure that they have adequate support from their technology vendors and from the CRM champion, who may need to exert

influence to overcome potential obstacles. If employees were consulted in the earlier phases, then their input should be invited again to address challenges and problems.

■ **ANALYSIS:** Once the system is operating smoothly and the data is being gathered effectively, it's critical to analyze the process and the results. Periodic testing for data accuracy is important—spot-check data against other company records and have employees who are in contact with customers update records. Other methods of data capture, such as gathering and capturing information from returned mail and customer service call centers, should also be put in place.

Continually examine the program in light of the goals you initially set for it, as well as within the framework of how the system is working. Ask for feedback from employees who work with the system to see if it is operating at its highest level of efficiency. If you find that an area is working well, stick with it. As you find other opportunities, test them. Should you find that something you thought would work is in fact not producing results, make changes. It's also important to share the results of your analysis to reinforce employee buy-in. When your staff sees the results of a program that is producing greater efficiency, fewer customer complaints and better results, they're more likely to continue to support the program.

Defining Your Internal Needs and Processes

To create the criteria by which the success of your CRM program will be measured, you must first define your organization's needs and the processes you'll use to make the CRM program successful. What exactly do you want to happen as a result of implementing your CRM program? Within broad categories such as improved customer service, improved sales and marketing coordination, and increased efficiency, be as specific as possible.

A successful CRM program requires clear, defined goals. A good way to determine the goals for the program is for your company to collectively decide on the answers to a series of questions, including:

How do we want the relationships we have with customers to evolve or improve?

What elements of our customer relationships can be automated for greater effectiveness or efficiency?

What kinds of customers are the best and/or most profitable for us?

How and where can we find these customers?

How can improved data collection and monitoring help us improve our level of service to these customers, as well as our business practices?

What sources of data input do we have, internally and externally?

How can we put a process in place that will help us accomplish the objectives that we have set?

Depending on your unique situation, you may have other questions, but the bottom line is to determine what you want this system to do for you so you can construct it in a way that will achieve those goals.

Choosing the Best CRM Application for Your Business

When considering the best CRM software application for your business, a number of factors should be considered. Before you sign on the dotted line or write that check, take some time to think about the following aspects:

■ **PROGRAM GOALS:** Obviously, the first and foremost consideration is what you want your CRM system to accomplish for you. From there, you can determine whether those goals are realistic from the date you deploy the system or whether you'll need to attempt them in stages. Do you need this system to work with other programs in your office, such as accounting software or vendor software to have access to the greatest range of data? Do you need it to integrate off-site computers, PDAs and mobile phones? Those decisions will need to be made upfront.

■ **BUDGET:** How much will you spend on the program? Depending on the solution you choose, implementation will include either the cost of software or hosted application licensing fees. If you choose customized or off-the-shelf applications, factor in the cost of the hardware you'll need to run the system. There may also be fees for upgrading software or for customizing interfaces or other aspects of the program, as well as the cost of in-house or contract IT personnel to manage the system. You'll also need to consider the cost of training your employees and any downtime that will create. Deployment of the system can take anywhere from two to nine months, depending on the size of your company and the complexity of the system.

■ **USERS AND TRAINING:** How open are your employees to using a CRM solution? How tech-savvy are they? Determining how adept your staff is at adopting technology solutions will help you forecast how intensive the implementation will be. Adequate training is essential for efficienct adoption and high-quality data. Most applications come with a measure of vendor-provided training, but additional training may be necessary to ensure that employees fully understand and are comfortable using the system.

■ **IT RESOURCES:** The more complex your application, the more you will need to rely on in-house or contract IT services. Hosted CRM solutions largely eliminate this need, while customized software may require intensive IT support.

Taking the time upfront to ensure you're creating a CRM program that will benefit your company now and in the future will save time and money in the long run, allowing the system to adjust to the needs of your growing business. With a solid foundation, the benefits of your CRM program will assist and facilitate that growth for years to come.

Having a strong understanding of how CRM can benefit your particular business and doing your homework to research options and implementation are key elements of a successful CRM program deployment. A properly implemented CRM system can result in a substantial return on investment by letting you manage information to spot sales opportunities and trends, maintain existing customers more effectively and cost-efficiently, prevent duplicating efforts when managing information, and create more customized, targeted promotional campaigns. All these factors can significantly impact your company's bottom line, making your CRM system a profit center as well as the key driver in running your business better.

Chapter 6
CRM RESOURCES

Associations

AMERICAN MARKETING ASSOCIATION (MARKETINGPOWER.COM): The AMA, one of the largest professional associations for marketers, has 38,000 members worldwide in every area of marketing. For more than six decades, the AMA has been the leading source of information, knowledge sharing and development in the marketing profession.

CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION (CRMASSOCIATION.ORG): The CRMA aims at representing the industry as not only a purveyor of knowledge and information, but also an action-oriented association that will protect and promote the interests of CRM and its institutions and provide members with the tools they need to enrich and improve that customer experience—be it the member's direct customers or the customers of the member's customers.

DIRECT MARKETING ASSOCIATION (THE-DMA.ORG): The DMA is the leading global trade association of business and nonprofit organizations using and supporting direct-marketing tools and techniques.

Magazines/Newsletters

CRM EWEEKLY (DESTINATIONCRM.COM/NEWSLETTER): Covers the latest trends, new products and the most influential leaders in CRM

CRM EXPERT (HTTP://CRMEXPERTONLINE.COM): An online CRM information resource focusing on capabilities, challenges and solutions

CRM MAGAZINE (DESTINATIONCRM.COM/ARTICLES/MAGAZINE_INDEX.ASP): Aims to help organizations leverage their customer knowledge to better identify, sell to and service their clients' needs and improve profitability through higher levels of customer interaction

CUSTOMER INTER@CTION SOLUTIONS (TMCNET.COM): Presents information—such as marketing strategies and telemarketing approaches—to help build profits for every type of business, including B2B and B2C firms

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ELECTRONIC CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT (INDERSCIENCE.COM/BROWSE/INDEX.PHP?JOURNALID=199): Gives insight into the experiences of companies worldwide that are setting the standards for selling more products and services through better management of their external relationships. Helps companies make strategic marketing decisions and guides them to a customer-oriented position.

JOURNAL OF MARKETING (MARKETINGPOWER.COM): Published by American Marketing Association, this journal is designed to bridge the gap between marketing theory and application.

JOURNAL OF RELATIONSHIP MARKETING: INNOVATIONS & ENHANCEMENTS FOR CUSTOMER SERVICE, RELATIONS & SATISFACTION (HAWORTHPRESS.COM/WEB/JRM): Supplies practical, applied literary resources to professionals in a wide range of industries on customer-client service, quality enhancement, and value for services and products purchased or provided

Websites

BETTER MANAGEMENT (BETTERMANAGEMENT.COM/TOPIC/DEFAULT.ASPX?F=488): A resource for management that includes webcasts, articles and conferences

CIO – BUSINESS TECHNOLOGY LEADERSHIP (CIO.COM/TOPIC/1465/CRM): The online incarnation of CIO magazine, this information portal includes product reviews, white papers, blogs and podcasts, as well as information from the magazine.

CRM MARKETPLACE (CRMMARKETPLACE.COM): A leading sourcing site for the CRM industry. Provides a supplier directory, product showcase and offline search service.

CRMTODAY (CRM2DAY.COM): Good overall CRM website that addresses multiple management techniques

CUSTOMER SERVICE MANAGER (CUSTOMERSERVICEMANAGER.COM): An e-magazine and community

CRM SOFTWARE ON DEMAND (SALESFORCE.COM): A resource for CRM software

MYCUSTOMER.COM: This site offers downloads, news and reviews on CRM.

SAS (SAS.COM/SOLUTIONS/CRM): With 30 years of experience, SAS delivers solutions to access relevant and consistent information throughout your enterprise, giving you the ability to make the right decisions and achieve sustainable performance improvement.

Books

CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT by Francis Buttle
PUBLISHER: Butterworth-Heinemann; 1 edition (December 3, 2003)

CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT (CRM) by Samit Chakravorti
PUBLISHER: VDM Verlag Dr. Mueller (October 26, 2007)

CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT (THE BRIEFCASE BOOK SERIES)
by Kristin L. Anderson and Carol J. Kerr
PUBLISHER: McGraw-Hill; 1 edition (September 2001)

CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT: A DATABASED APPROACH
by V. Kumar, Werner Reinartz
PUBLISHER: Wiley (June 2005)

HANDBOOK OF CRM: ACHIEVING EXCELLENCE THROUGH CUSTOMER MANAGEMENT
by Adrian Payne
PUBLISHER: Butterworth-Heinemann; 1 edition (June 2005)

HARVARD BUSINESS REVIEW ON CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT
by C. K. Prahalad, Patrica B. Ramaswamy, Jon R. Katzenbach and Chris Lederer
PUBLISHER: Harvard Business School Press; 1 edition (January 2002)

IMPLEMENTING CRM: FROM TECHNOLOGY TO KNOWLEDGE (JOHN WILEY SERIES IN INFORMATION SYSTEMS) by David Finnegan and Leslie P. Willcocks
PUBLISHER: Wiley (May 2007)

PRINCIPLES OF CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT
by Roger J. Baran, Robert Galka, Daniel P. Strunk
PUBLISHER: South-Western College Pub; 1 edition (March 2007)

THE CRM HANDBOOK: A BUSINESS GUIDE TO CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT (ADDISON-WESLEY INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY SERIES) by Jill Dyché
PUBLISHER: Addison-Wesley Professional; 1 edition (August 2001)

CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT by William Wagner and Michael Zubey
PUBLISHER: Course Technology; 1 edition (November 2006)

Software

OVERVIEW ON MICROSOFT DYNAMICS CRM 4.0: microsoft.com/smallbusiness/products/ dynamics-customer-relationship-management/default.aspx#overview

BUY MICROSOFT DYNAMICS CRM 4.0: microsoft.com/smallbusiness/products/ dynamics-customer-relationship-management/default.aspx#Buy

TIPS ON CRM: microsoft.com/smallbusiness/products/dynamics-customer-relationship-management/default.aspx#Tips

MICROSOFT DYNAMICS CRM LIVE: http://offers.crmlive.com/page.aspx?QS= 5c591a8916642e73dc88987fd638a889888e0e22d77a174b706d48c754b0c168