



CRM Buyer's Guide

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CRM Buyers Guide Volume I: What is CRM and How Can It Improve My Business?

What is CRM?

Customer Relationship Management (CRM) is one of the most widely-used and most widely-misunderstood terms in today's corporate environments. Put simply, 'CRM' is a catch-all term used to describe software and related technologies that manage customer-facing business functions (most notably Sales, Customer Service and Marketing), business processes and data.

When done right, CRM allows companies to increase revenues and profits while lowering the cost of marketing, sales and service. The payoff is clear - by better aligning business processes and managing customer data across all customer-facing functions, companies can build successful, profitable and long-term customer relationships.

Unfortunately, CRM has also gained a bit of a mixed reputation – and one of the most-often-cited statistics regarding CRM is how often these solutions fail to meet their objectives. There is no denying it – getting CRM right is a significant challenge. CRM strategy is about much more than just selecting the right technology - rather, it is a business strategy that may very well necessitate a complete reinvention of how your company does business.

While CRM is not without challenges, it remains a business essential – without it, your business will be unable to provide customers with the level of service they desire. Despite the challenges, the fact remains that many companies have seen tremendous success with CRM.

A Brief History of CRM

The term 'CRM' first emerged in the mid-1990s, created with the intent of describing how Sales, Marketing and Customer Service technologies could integrate into a single system. Prior to the advent of CRM, some companies had begun to deploy Sales Force Automation (SFA) applications to automate the selling process and track prospect data, but that data often didn't leave the sales department – thus when the customer called to complain the Customer Service department would be unaware of any interactions with Sales. This led to many situations where, from the customer's perspective, the company was acting in an incompetent and/or uncoordinated fashion. The result – the 'right hand doesn't know what the left hand is doing' syndrome – would often result in a frustrated customer departing for the competition.

Early customer-facing applications—SFA, telemarketing, marketing campaign management, help desk and others—served their individual purposes, but were

unable to provide the integration that allowed companies to serve their customers with a single face. In response, CRM 'suites' were developed that promised to automate not just one but (purportedly) all customer-facing departments and functions.

Unfortunately, while the idea made sense, the implementation proved much more difficult. Many early CRM initiatives became bogged down by companies trying to do everything at once. Particularly in larger companies, there are many stories of companies spending millions of dollars and years of time in attempts to replace their entire sales, marketing and customer service infrastructures – and becoming overwhelmed by the challenges (sometimes technological, but more often organizational) in doing so. The '360 degree view of the customer' so often promised by CRM solutions became for many an unattainable goal as initiatives grew needlessly complex and prohibitively expensive.

What are the advantages of having a Customer Strategy?

Having a customer strategy enables all customer-facing teams to understand their role when working with a customer. After all, customers should be the focus of any successful business, and a customer strategy should be a major part of this success. The strategy helps individual business units focus on their goal of establishing customer rapport and building customer satisfaction in all three pillars of customer relationship management: Sales Force Management, Marketing Automation and Customer Service and Support. The end goal should be to enable all client divisions to serve, sell, and/or market to their respective client base. A proper customer strategy will help companies reduce operational costs, improve customer loyalty levels, and improve revenue streams. Naturally there is cost involved with all customer strategies. Simple customer strategies geared at single, one-time customer engagements may be cost effective to the company and gain quick wins, when compared to more complex, longer term (lifetime value) customer strategies which will be more costly in terms of labor and understanding across company employees.

Technology and Your Customer Strategy

A variety of technologies exist that can help your business create a high-impact customer strategy, but the benefits you may receive and the costs you will spend will vary. Many simplistic CRM approaches act as little more than an electronic rolodex with basic business card information about clients, doing little to help you calculate the overall lifetime value of a customer, or when, where, and how each customer-facing team interacted with the customer. More robust CRM technologies provide customer methodology functionality, automatic processes and in-depth client knowledge features. These functions help sales, marketing and customer service team members perform daily job activities quickly with the most up-to-date customer

information and analytic tools to analyze all CRM information and make better business decisions.

The cost of your proposed CRM strategy should be compared to all potential benefits in a way that helps you decide which CRM technology and strategy should be deployed within your customer-facing divisions.

Reduction in Costs

A robust CRM solution coupled with an intelligent customer strategy can dramatically improve your business bottom line. With lower training costs and quicker ramp up time, companies can cover the initial out of pocket technology cost quickly. Cost savings can also come in the form of employee productivity gains when technology is leveraged inside the company to produce quicker, timelier results. Productivity gains may be related to a more streamlined communication with customers, automatic processes implemented in the CRM technology, or better training based on analytics.

Increase in Revenue

Selling is not an exact science. With the various types of selling methodologies, different selling personalities and vast array of markets to sell into managing revenue streams is a difficult task. CRM applications will help produce better selling outcomes with a more streamlined selling methodology and better selling activity management. Technology can help keep sales teams on track and effectively target the correct selling market. Opportunity and Forecast management capabilities help clients understand and manage the overall selling process and differentiate your sales business from the competition.

- Achieve higher close ratios and quicker client response time
- Improved efficiencies and better forecasting capabilities
- Sharing of Best practices throughout the sales organization
- Increase average value of an order

Improved Marketing Effectiveness and ROI

Marketing costs to actual revenue gains are sometimes difficult to establish. It's often a guessing game when attempting to understand which marketing campaigns generated the most revenue, which captured the best qualified leads or which campaigns effectively targeted the install base or new prospect business the best. CRM systems can help in improving marketing effectiveness. Technology will aid in understanding the best targeted market, the lead generation flow and the overall return on investment for each campaign.

- Capture costs vs. actual revenue gains
- Produce well qualified leads based on optimal opportunity characteristics
- Quickly pass leads to sales for immediate selling action
- Analyze marketing characteristics based on actual data vs. assumptions

Improved Customer Service and Customer Retention

As customers become savvier, they expect customer service to keep pace with their expectations. At the same time, contact centers usually have the same budget (or less) as they did the previous year to cover people and technology. CRM technology can help customer service divisions improve agent efficiency, capture service issues through various client communication touch points, and lower the overall cost of service with automated workflows and knowledge management systems available to service agents who need to handle and answer various request quickly and effectively. Every customer service engagement is geared to improve customer satisfaction and retention levels.

- Better customer interaction can increase profitability
- Provide better service to your BEST customers
- Consistent communication from all customer facing team members
- Make it easier for your customers to do business with you

Do I need a CRM System?

On one hand, CRM implementation can reduce costs, improve productivity, and boost revenue. On the other, spending money on technology that will not improve your ability to enhance your customer's experience or your customer facing teams productivity is a very poor investment. Thus we arrive at the most important question regarding CRM system evaluation—does your business need it? If you cannot answer yes to at least one of the following questions, your business probably is not well suited for a customer relationship management system:

Do I have a relationship with my customers? Will they contact me again in the future?

- Do I need to understand how my products meet my customer's needs?
- Am I asked to report on the customer services my team provides?
- Do my customer facing teams have room for improvement?

If you find that you answered yes to some or all of the above questions, your business will benefit from a CRM solution and an overall customer strategy.

Whether you are implementing CRM for the first time, or are already utilizing some kind of CRM solution and are considering a new one, the most critical success factor will be in defining what improvements you want to see, ensuring these are measurable improvements, and communicating these needs to your prospective vendors. Good vendors will work with you to determine whether their products will allow you to meet these goals and to help you make the best CRM choice for your business needs.

CRM Buyers Guide Volume II: What is the Right CRM Solution for Me?

Ten Questions to Ask When Evaluating a CRM Solution

The questions below will help you evaluate what solution(s) best meet your business needs and customer strategy. These are meant to help you organize your thoughts before you evaluate and choose the CRM solution suite that is right for you.

What is the customer's role?

1. How do you track your customers today and what information is tracked?
2. What communication channels do you currently support (phone, email, web, etc.)?
3. Will your customers benefit from you a CRM system? How so?
4. How will implementing a new technology or customer strategy affect your relationship with the customer?

What are your goals?

5. Which areas of your Sales, Marketing and Customer service processes could be more efficient?
6. Who in your organization will use the system?
7. What is the projected timeline for deciding on a solution?
8. What are some of the short-term goals to be achieved with CRM technology?
9. What are some of the long-term goals to be achieved with CRM technology?

Upon answering these questions, you should have a better understanding of what you should be looking for in a CRM system and what type of customer strategy you may wish to deploy.

What to Expect During the CRM Buying & Implementing Process

Choosing a CRM solution should be straightforward and based on continuous feedback between vendor and client. But with a myriad of CRM technology in the market today, the evaluation of multiple CRM vendors can be confusing, time consuming and costly to any corporation. The following sample steps will help you know what to expect during the evaluation process.

Step 1 (Self-Evaluation)

Before actively working with any vendor you should answer a CRM evaluation questionnaire or perform a company-wide CRM assessment. You should establish benchmarks and goals to determine if your project is going to be a success. In addition, you should assign an un-biased project manager to help with this initial self-evaluation and eventual CRM project.

Step 2 (Vendor Evaluation)

Develop a weighted evaluation process to determine what is truly important to your business in a CRM solution. Once evaluation criteria is categorized, you should choose solutions to evaluate from both a vertical / industry perspective (best of breed) and horizontal perspective. Each vendor should provide you a high-level business demonstration of their capabilities. From there, you can narrow the choices—typically you will want to eliminate all but 2 or 3 vendors from contention. After a short list is created, you may wish to then re-evaluate goals and benefits based on presentations from each of the vendors.

Step 3 (Configured Demonstration)

Highlight 3 or 4 key business scenarios that are critically important to the success of the project and ask each vendor to demonstrate how they would solve these issues. Along with these configured demonstrations / presentations, a more in-depth look at the technology should be performed so your team can understand the underlying technology limitations (or potential costs with technology configurations).

Step 4 (Proof of Concept)

If you are still not sure of the final solution, you can ask for a Proof of Concept (POC). Most vendors will charge for this, but this is an inexpensive way to reduce project risk if you are not sure about key capabilities. You may wish to further configure the system to support your main business process, import your customer data and report and analyze on the process and/or data.

Step 5 (Decision)

Evaluate the solution based on your trial run or configured demo and, if satisfied with both technology and vendor capabilities, purchase the solution. Ensure the decision is based on the planned lifetime of the technology under consideration and your expected relationship with the vendor. Also, choose a solution which you feel will best adapt to your evolving business needs, or market changes.

Step 6 (Implementation)

Work with vendor or certified partner / reseller to install and configure system. The CRM vendor or certified partner / reseller will be experts in this process and will help you understand the implementation methodology from first steps to go-live support. Ensure your company has a dedicated project manager for the implantation to help guide the CRM implementer and answer any questions or facilitate any potential business meetings to resolve implementation concerns that may arise.

Step 7 (Training)

Outline your training objectives at the start of the implementation. Training can be provided various ways either via online training, instructor led training or train the

trainer methods. Each training method has positives and negatives so it is suggested to take the best training approach for your company. You may want to receive training for your specific business scenarios, data entry and key performance indicators so users can gain a real-life training situation. A phased training approach is suggested (with multiple trainings offered over the course of the implementation), and spend as much time on training as possible to help answer the myriad of questions from your business users.

Step 8 (Feedback)

Provide feedback to vendor based on your real-life experience and offer suggestions for product, training, or solution improvements. It is strongly recommend setting up open communication for continuing dialogue as a CRM implementation is a long term event and both sides will benefit via candid communications. Not only should you provide feedback to the CRM vendor, providing feedback to end users and managers and keeping open lines of communications flowing amongst internal team members about the state of your CRM business is just as important for a successful, long term CRM implementation.

Conclusion

This document contains some great questions to ask of yourself when purchasing or implementing CRM solution. Understanding your customer strategy and the role your customers play in your business is the number one item when considering a CRM application and the benefits the solution will provide your company. Take time in establishing your CRM strategy, ranging from the team members involved to the length of the CRM implementation, and choose the right vendor that best matches your company strengths, short-term as well as long-term goals.

CRM Buyers Guide Volume III: How Can I Get the Most From My Chosen CRM Solution?

Steps to CRM Success

Evaluation—check. Implementation—underway. Know how you can guarantee that your chosen CRM solution is providing all the benefits your business desires? The steps below will help you better understand a few key items regarding people, processes and technologies when implementing CRM applications and customer strategies.

Step1: It's all About the Customer

The goal of any CRM system is not only keeping track of customer information, but also enabling ease of doing business for your customers. Enabling customers to work with you more easily and develop a powerful, reliable relationship with your company will have them coming back to you for future business.

Who Are Your Customers?

In order to achieve this open, forthcoming relationship with your customers, you must capture data that helps you better target their needs, allowing your marketing teams to personalize business messages and enabling your customer service divisions to provide offerings that set you apart from your competitors. Understanding client requirements goes beyond capturing basic business card information, such as location information, or contact point information. In today's business landscape of complex business relationships, you must capture more in-depth company information, including purchasing history, lifetime revenue streams and profit information. In most cases, this accounting or ordering information is not driven by a CRM system, but by a back-office accounting or order fulfillment system such as ERP. A CRM system must be able to integrate these systems for you to combine CRM and ERP information together into one easy-to-access, easy-to-view system.

Define Customer Attributes

In order to sell to and service your clients properly, your CRM system must capture all types of company information—everything from address, phone, and email information, to organization hierarchies, past sales, lifetime values, and client issues. Your business should define the information required specifically for the CRM system, as well as key information captured in other systems within your company, enabling customer-facing teams be more successful. Companies with successful CRM initiatives use these client profiles as a corporate memory of every client and prospect. In order for a CRM initiative to be successful, you should leverage this corporate memory to personalize your marketing messages, improve sales relationships and enable your customer service teams to improve service offerings.

Step 2: Build a Business Case

Building a business case for any CRM implementation is necessary to understand how effective and successful it can be. The business case commonly involves a few attributes like project costs, business requirements and key performance indicators and typically has been created during the CRM purchase cycle. Here's a refresher:

Before you can truly obtain a cost analysis, you need to understand what business requirements you are attempting to implement in your CRM system. In order to create a business requirements document, you need to capture and prioritize all the processes for your sales, marketing and customer service teams. It can be as easy as identifying what processes you have today, what you need, and what your priorities are. Structuring these business requirements is a necessity. After the requirements are understood, you must then understand the data required to analyze the performance of your process. This analysis is commonly referred to as key performance indicators (KPIs). Analyzing and reporting customer sales, marketing and service efforts will enable you to understand if your business is on the correct course to achieve revenue goals and high customer satisfaction levels, or if you need to adjust your approach to improve the business. CRM systems can perform many powerful and complex business processes, but do not forget that people are involved in aiding these processes throughout the customer lifecycle.

Technology, People and Process

Implementing a CRM system is not only about building a business case, but also about understanding your business process, the people involved in this process, and the technology used to drive the process. You may often hear the term 'technology' when choosing an IT system. But CRM technology is only a portion of the puzzle. Business requirements and the people driving these processes are just as important as the technology itself, if not more so.

Soft vs. Hard Metrics

There are distinct differences in KPIs. Some metrics involve hard data like a customer's lifetime revenue or actual marketing costs, while others are soft metrics such as client satisfaction levels or sales force productivity. Both measurements should be quantifiable and captured in the CRM application so you can get a clear understanding of how effective your CRM implementation is. A successful implementation should lead to a better understanding of business pains, the ability to leverage technology to automatically alleviate those issues, thorough analysis of the business as a whole, and results that will help employees be more successful.

Step 3: End Users

A common mistake made by many CRM purchasers is a failure to obtain end user buyoff or feedback upfront. Since users are key to creating and capturing customer information while running business processes within the CRM system, it makes

sense to understand what they need and why they need it from the start. The implementation team should consist of users or advocates from each division, including management, and should focus on their business process, not just the features of a CRM system. The individual needs of specific business units must be considered. For example, management generally requires higher-level analysis, while end users typically need help managing day-to-day business. Considering roles and balancing the business requirements when working through your CRM initiative will help you achieve greater success.

Different Usage for Different Users

A successful CRM implementation must take into consideration how different users will use the system. End users can come in many forms, such as executives, customer service agents, marketing managers, or sales vice presidents. Each group of users will leverage the CRM system in different ways. Your CRM implementation should consider this so each set of users is provided the most appropriate data, business processes and reports for them to do their jobs more effectively.

Step 4: Client Communication Channels

After you get a clear understanding of your customer's purchases, locations, and CRM activities, it is then best to understand how those customers interact with you. This will help your CRM implementation in two ways. First, it will build customer loyalty since your customers can do business with you when, where and how they feel comfortable doing it. Second, it will enable you to put your customer-facing agents at the best, most cost effective place for you to do business with them. Implementing cost effective client communication channels is vital to the success of any CRM initiative.

Email, Phone, Web or Self-Service

The key to high customer satisfaction levels and keeping customer interaction costs down is to be open and accessible to all types of customer communication channels. These client interaction channels can include the phone, email, or the web and self-service. Interacting through these various channels enables smarter marketing, more cost effective marketing, better customer service interactions and improved sales revenues. Why? Because your team interacts with their clients how, when and where they wish to be engaged. By capturing customer source information, you can target your marketing communication efforts further. Capturing customer communication preferences can reduce cost of service and enhance quality and time to client resolution. In addition, by keeping the sales force focused on the right client communication mechanism, you will help increase sales and close rates as the sales department can maximize their time with qualified prospects and reduce their time spent with unqualified leads.

Voice Enabled CRM

An important part in any CRM initiative is client communication through various client touch points. One of the most important touch points is the phone. Even with the increase in email, web and self-service usage, voice communication is still the most commonly used communication tool. Integrating your CRM system with your voice systems helps lower costs and improves client relations and satisfaction. With available Voice over IP (VoIP) technology, you can drastically cut costs since calls are made over your existing internet / communication infrastructure and you may no longer be required to pay per minute. You can also boost employee productivity with voice-enabled CRM features such as screen pops that immediately display customer & call information, or skills-based routing which enables the call to be sent to the right employee the first time. Both inbound and outbound features allow marketing, sales and customer service teams to perform their client communications quickly. Not only can you achieve greater productivity internally, externally your clients will be satisfied since they can leverage voice-enabled CRM features like interactive voice response systems, or automatic information updates to obtain or submit information directly to your company quickly and easily. Improve customer loyalty by anticipating customer's needs with voice integration, and analyze client interactions to match client needs, where required and when desired. Voice enabled CRM systems can go a long way in achieving greater CRM success.

Step 5: Drive Sales Effectiveness

Sales Force Automation (SFA) tools can improve efficiency and effectiveness of your sales team by helping sales track client activities, manage customer communications, or maintain a consistent selling approach. Other organization benefits of SFA tools include sales management's ability to understand the pipeline and forecast their business properly. CRM business functions can help increase meeting effectiveness, improve close ratios, and cut sales cycle times.

The Marriage of Marketing and Sales

The key to easy, successful sales can often reside in the hands of the marketing team. Better sales starts with well-qualified leads and those can be created by defining opportunities with high closing percentages. The only way to capture this definition is for your sales and marketing teams to sit together in a room and for your sales representatives to discuss what a high percentage opportunity is, and is not. This definition can then be used by your marketing team to create campaigns with the right target audience, via the right channel and with the right messaging. If implemented correctly, a CRM system can help sales managers easily recognize a good opportunity. Then marketing managers can leverage this definition to create campaigns that are more effective.

Sales Coaching: Guided Selling Tool

Your CRM system can be used as a sales coach. Sales methodologies and systematic processes can improve selling capabilities and can be implemented

directly into your CRM application. Any relevant task, meeting or sales activity within each selling stage can be automatically exposed to the end user so they retain key steps, ultimately allowing for better management of the entire selling process. Companies that leverage a sales methodology are proven to increase sales revenues. Major successes of your CRM initiative can be tied directly to closed deal performance and the increased revenue gained by implementing a proven sales coaching mechanism.

Step 6: Marketing Costs vs. Revenue / Profit

CRM systems can enable marketing managers to understand the measureable benefits of any marketing campaign. CRM systems can tell marketers what leads were generated from a campaign, the source of those leads, how many leads were converted to opportunities, and how much revenue was generated due to that activity.

Marketing Campaigns and Analysis

CRM initiatives can benefit marketing teams by enabling marketing managers to initiate and automate the campaign process within a CRM system. CRM systems should provide features to maintain marketing activities, associate costs and expected returns on the campaign, process the lead flow through various client channels such as the web, email or phone, as well as build the lead and opportunity pipeline. A CRM application can help automate the marketing launch with features such as email / word-merge, lead distribution and capture from all channels, and the automatic routing and ranking of leads. Moreover, in order for you to understand the revenue stream generated from a campaign, the CRM system can be integrated into your revenue booking systems so the revenue orders linked to the campaign can be calculated.

Marketing analysis within a CRM system should enable marketing managers to work closely with sales and customer service teams to determine how their expenditures and efforts are resulting in improved sales revenue, increased customer loyalty, profitability and lifetime value. Your marketing success can be determined by trustworthy lead to revenue information, win / loss ratios, as well as lead source and interaction analysis.

Step 7: Leveraging the Loyalty Effect

Studies show it can be 7 to 10 times more expensive to secure new clients when compared to keeping your existing customers. Customer service features of your CRM system can help your business manage tasks such as issue tracking, service activities, call-volume and time-per-call for customer-service representative. "Soft" metrics can be achieved as well through improved customer loyalty and client satisfaction, achieved through improved service efforts from the CRM system process and control.

Customer Service for Your Other Teams

Nothing can ruin a sales meeting like lingering client issues that have not been addressed by your company. CRM systems help your customer service teams manage not only the service process and costs, but also the customer service information can be shared across other customer-facing teams within the organization. By allowing your sales team to view open client service requests and issues, the sales agent can address any customer issue upfront—before proceeding to offer the client additional goods and services. Not only can customer service features help you sell better via the sales team, your CRM system can help improve your wallet share by enabling the customer service agent to create quick, easy-to-sell and easy-to-close opportunities from their normal service job responsibilities. The sales of additional or extended warranties or small add-on services to a client's existing portfolio can go a long way in adding new profit streams to your bottom line. These selling opportunities can be quick and painless, and can help turn your service cost center into a profit center. In addition, marketing managers can use the information stored in your customer service process to help create up-sell and cross-sell goods or service promotions. In order for CRM initiatives to be successful, all business functions across sales, marketing, and customer service teams need to come together to measure the success from the entire customer relationship lifecycle.

Step 8: The Right Tool and The Right Approach

One of the more important factors driving CRM success is having your CRM strategy led by the business executives who manage customer interactions, more specifically Marketing, Sales and Customer Service. But don't forget about IT. The IT team should treat CRM as they would any other technology purchase, like security and infrastructure management, evaluating its features and benefits, how it works with the overall IT infrastructure and the key technical requirements to fully implement.

Choosing the right approach to CRM and defining appropriate business drivers and requirements provide much of the criteria for your ideal CRM solution. CRM manufacturers provide multiple methods of accessing CRM business functions over the web, while mobile or in the office, and choosing the right access method plays another part in the success of your overall CRM initiative.

For many businesses, flexibility, adaptability, integration and economies of scale play important roles when choosing a CRM solution, with each option requiring a bottom line investment. There will be benefits obtained from your CRM initiative, and there will be costs. The cost/benefit analysis must be another important attribute for your implementation as it not only aides in the overall structure, but a cost/benefit analysis can also help prioritize business needs during your implementation phase.

Phased Approach

CRM implementations are proven to have a higher rate of success when the implementation is done via a phased approach. Do not boil the ocean and try to accomplish all your sales, marketing and customer service needs during one, big bang CRM implementation. During your requirements-gathering stage you may have prioritized each requirement. This prioritization will help you understand which aspects of a CRM initiative can immediately help your organization, and which requirements may be better delivered at a later point in the implementation. CRM is a journey involving people, processes and technology; it is not just a single event undertaken by the IT department.

Key Initiative Attributes

Key attributes to your CRM implementation should include an easy-to-use user interface, a secure, real-time analysis platform, and a configurable (both simple and complex) application ranging anywhere from the screens and labels to third party system integrations. Multiple access options are essential to the process since users need ways of getting to their data in different environments.

Step 9: Build the Team

Gaining buyoff from top to bottom within your organization is important. Even though not all of your teams sign the check for a CRM initiative, securing stakeholder engagement from each division can be vital. You should assemble a CRM evaluation team and discuss desires and requirements with team members before you purchase the technology, not after. Unfortunately, some companies do just the opposite; purchase the technology first, meeting their immediate requirements, and then assemble the team. This could wind up costing more in the long run if you don't ensure you capture everyone's needs in the up front requirements spec.

Where to Start? Management Buyoff

It is important to start with leadership when preparing a CRM initiative. The project will have a much higher rate of success if you obtain management buyoff, and more importantly a CRM champion from management to help drive the process. This person can play an important role as the overall owner and internal advocate of the project.

The Team

Other members in your organization to round out your CRM project team should include Sales, Marketing, Customer Service, and IT. Even if your CRM initiative is heavily weighted towards a sales force automation implementation, your marketing and customer service teams should also be involved as you may find these divisions can benefit from other aspects of CRM such as a centralized customer database or activity management. They can also prepare for future integrations to their systems, or potential process automation for that division into the CRM system directly.

Financial, executive and legal teams should also be involved to help insure that the investment is sound and the client – vendor / manufacturer relationship is constructive.

Step 10: The Experts

After you get your local input, gain the global view too. In today's climate, most companies operate on a global basis and the input and the perspective of teams outside of your own can add immeasurable value. Companies who succeed with their CRM initiative enlist outside expertise to help in decision making, requirements gathering, process understanding and advice. Expertise, knowledge and learned lessons from prior CRM initiatives can be invaluable. This advice can also be obtained from the vendor / software manufacturer, industry reviews, industry associations, and peer-to-peer relationships. Honest input can be found in these areas listed, but the clearest inputs can be found internally. Leveraging both internal and external resources will help your CRM initiative be successful.

Conclusion

Your business can establish a successful CRM initiative and customer strategy with a few easy-to-leverage steps. CRM systems play a vital role in marketing, sales and customer service business functions. They can help manage processes across teams, accelerate client interactions through all communication methods, and capture all customer sales, marketing and customer service transactions. CRM applications will help you analyze and report on every component of your customer process so you can make well-informed business decisions and improve your entire customer-facing business. In order for you to execute a successful CRM initiative, you must leverage knowledge gained from people, establish a clearly defined process, and implement the right technology.

About FrontRange Solutions and GoldMine® CRM

FrontRange Solutions USA Inc. provides CRM solutions used by more than 130,000 companies and over 1.7 million users to automate and manage customer-facing initiatives. GoldMine is designed for businesses that want a complete and customizable solution that manages every aspect of the customer lifecycle with a quick time to benefit and low total cost of ownership.

For more information visit www.1stdirect.com

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