



How to choose a CRM Software System

Technology making sales more profitable by automating best practice

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Introduction

Choosing a CRM solution to suit your company's needs will no doubt be a time-consuming process, and the moment it's installed you're expecting to sit back and put your feet up. Cue the great sigh of relief!

The first thing you should know is that this is the time when the real drive is required – from your company as much as from the supplier.

But before we get to the implementation, let's go right back to the beginning to make sure you ask the right questions, and get the ideal product for your business.

Choosing the right CRM software system

It is far too easy to get carried away with the whizzes and bangs that some CRM software solutions offer you. Expect some wonderful promises; the ability to predict your ever-shifting customer needs or identify opportunities and problems at a glance.

Fall for the fizz at your peril, because the likely result is a system which does not actually meet your business needs, and one which leads quickly to disillusionment amongst staff and management. At this point all faith in the new system could well disappear.

The purchase of a brand new CRM software system for your business is a major investment in both time and money. It is vital that, before you go shopping, you clearly assess your company's short to medium term aims, and keep them front of mind during the tendering process. The essential elements of a CRM software system are end-to-end customer management and the ability to proactively manage your business. You also require quick and easy installation with minimal disruption to users.

There are CRM software solutions available straight off the shelf, and there are systems which can be customised to your business model. Off the shelf sounds cheaper, but expect to then spend time customising the system to your own internal processes or worse changing your model to suit the software. It could be just as easy, and equally as quick to opt for a system which is customised to your way of working, as long as you are confident the supplier has a solution which is capable of being configured to those requirements.

We return now to the subject of whizzes and bangs – which roughly translates as interesting ways to capture and view standard information! Don't be fooled by the beauty parade.

No two CRM solutions are the same. It is vital that you have a clear set of objectives and requirements, which are formulated by and agreed with all the relevant people in your organisation. You should discuss these requirements with the potential suppliers to learn which can be met, and by what means.

One part of the decision process will include balancing up the benefits of hosted Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) versus an installed system. With the advent of high speed broadband, hosted SaaS becomes a far more viable alternative to the traditional installed systems. The benefits include low infrastructure costs, and availability from any location at any time so long as you have access to a browser. Additionally this option could mean low or even no new IT overhead costs, a lower cost for terminals, and a low footprint (the amount of disk or RAM taken up by a programme).

Now, while you're checking out the potential suppliers, I recommend that you look at their business as much as you look at their product.

Anyone with responsibility for the implementation of IT within a business understands that as soon as you've paid for software it's heading rapidly out of date. This is the nature of technology – especially when related to business and even more so when related to CRM solutions. Look for a supplier who's willing to work with you and your software system into the future and be fully aware of any additional costs that may be incurred.

There will no doubt be changes ahead for your own business. Don't lose sight of the fact that you can't always predict what the future will bring.

Can you find a software developer who is willing to accommodate the developments within your own business as your targets and markets change? Will the supplier work with you as your processes develop, and if your business grows? The ideal provider of a CRM solution should be a partner for your business, providing a solution that is as adaptable as your company needs to be in its own field. A new CRM solution is a major investment for any company and it is vital that it remains the effective part of your business it was designed to be.

Implementing the new software system

So agree your objectives before seeking a CRM software solution, investigate the relevant suppliers and choose the right system for your business.

Now, let's face it, once installed you're expecting life to improve immediately. The sales manager is picturing himself with his feet on the desk watching the sales conversion graph climb, and then climb a little bit more. No more dissatisfied customers. No more lost sales leads. Here comes the sales bonus.

Not so quick!

You're implementing a brand new CRM software system into your company. The likelihood is that your sales and management teams now have access to a brand new software system which is at best going to be unfamiliar. At worst, the new system is going to require substantial training in order that it complements your tried and tested sales processes.

It is essential that the team who agreed the software choice also agree a plan for implementation within the business, with clearly communicated key actions and milestones.

The likelihood is that your sales team are totally comfortable with their current processes. A new software system requires buy-in from the sales team as early in the process as possible. In order to minimise the resistance to this change, it is essential that they understand fully the company's aims and the benefits the new system gives them. Most importantly, the sales team should feel that they are being listened to during the installation process, and that any questions or queries they have are being addressed.

What you need right now is a 'champion' of the new software within your firm. Empower one person, ideally the leader of a steering group, to drive this new project forward within the company. It is essential that there is a central point of contact for both the staff within your organisation, and the support team from the chosen software provider. Your supplier should be driving forward the training and implementation of the new software within your business, and your in-house champion should match this drive.

Conclusion

CRM projects can easily run out of steam if not introduced with a clear implementation strategy. The simplest things, such as not inputting field names in time, will lead to frustration which will more likely than not be blamed on the new software. This is where those key actions and milestones are essential, and managing the training and uptake of the new software can make the difference between a smooth implementation and one which upsets the sales team.

Know what you want from your software and make sure you're getting it.

Manage the implementation and drive the project from within the business as much as the software provider drives it from without and you will reap the rewards.

At this point you can put your feet on the desk, and breathe a deep sigh of relief!

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Case Study

The Client

The Managing Director of a debt advisory company had established the company having seen consumer debt escalate alarmingly in the late 90's, and recognised a need for specialist advice in this sector. Refinancing, debt redirection, Individual Voluntary Arrangement and bankruptcy are all areas expertly handled by the team of specialists at The Debt Advisor.

The Problem

The Debt Advisor database lacked any functions capable of reporting on the progress of incoming leads, what conversion rates had been achieved or the cost of acquisition of a new client. Manual, daily updates were time-consuming and profit opportunities were missed. Due to the financial nature of the companies activities there were a number of strict processes that needed to be adhered to, without central monitoring there was no way for her to know that these were being adhered to.

The Solution

Serious investment in a workflow based SFA system was deemed to be essential by the company. Five SFA software specialists were short-listed, including; Sales Logix, Salesforce.com and Maximiser. SalesFlow was chosen because it was felt to be the only solution with the functionality and configurability to meet the needs of the business.

Conclusion

In the second year of running the SalesFlow system The Debt Advisor are further developing the system to take over the cash management and reporting functions for Individual Voluntary Arrangement cases, once approved.

The Managing Director is now able to report on the progress of all incoming leads, how many of these are converted into customers and the cost of acquisition of each new client. All of the claims for IVA approval follow a process which allows her to see how many are in the process and at exactly which stage they are at.