

CRM: before you buy, here are some valuable tips from the experts

Act quickly on what they are saying about you



TRADITIONAL CRM systems focus primarily on management of customer relationships, not on the relationships among customers.

But every day customers create terabytes of data about companies and their products and brands in blogs, on Facebook, Twitter or other social networks. Not only do most of these conversations essentially take place without interaction from the companies, they do not even have them on their radar let alone the ability to respond.

It starts with "listen first, then react"!

Social CRM simply begins with listening and

then following up on conversations with the help of "monitoring".

In order to localise and analyse the vast and growing number of conversations, it is necessary to implement a social media monitoring tool along with an intelligent text analysis tool.

With the help of semantic technologies, posts from a wide variety of sources are analysed and classified to mine valuable, relevant information. Companies receive important, actionable information about customer satisfaction, loyalty or sentiment and benefit from early warnings for potential risks, from product launch monitoring, quality and competitor analysis and identification of possible new product innovation demands.

Armed with this valuable information, skilled staff can actively interact in the dialogue. Also required is cutting-edge software capable of managing workflows that push relevant information to customer support, that can relay

information to legal, marketing, PR or other departments so they can react and contact customers with corresponding reactions.

Practically all communication processes, supported by an integrated ticketing system, should be able to be tracked by the contact centre. Every user has access to all customer activities, has insight into responses from the service team, past queries and other essential information about the customer. At a single glance, staff can see which queries must be answered, which ones are in progress and which ones are completed.

If a system of this nature is integrated with a CRM system, every single interaction can be personalised and can be tracked. Service staff obtain important information about the customer's profile from both social media and CRM sources and are in the unique position to combine the information to optimise customer interaction. The CRM system becomes the central information hub, combining all existing internal and external information, to ideally manage customer relationships, thereby transforming potential buyers into customers.

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Before choosing, ask yourself these questions



Usability The fastest way to CRM failure is to present agents with software that is not intuitive to use. A good system will include information such as when the last time a customer was contacted or bought something. It will also make it easy for your management team to track sales and agent performance without needing a degree in IT! Make sure you trial software before adopting it.

Social media No call centre can afford to overlook a CRM system's social media capabilities. Social media has fundamentally changed the way customers engage with firms. By raising consumer expectations and shifting behaviours it presents a major challenge for companies on who should manage it and how.

The most advanced software can help organisations seamlessly integrate social media enquiries into the customer service environment, where they are presented and processed like any other enquiry. This is an area where we are leading the way.

To truly realise the potential of social media, CRM software needs to be fully integrated with other customer service software, such as web self-service. This means that agents have access to a comprehensive knowledge base and ensures that – no matter which channel the customer comes through – the timeliest and relevant response is always used

Beyond the software Consider also what a potential vendor offers besides the actual tool and investigate whether online help, training or support is provided.

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THE quick way to polarise opinion in a room full of call centre managers is to say "CRM". For some it's akin to swearing, but for many it is the catalyst for better sales, RoI, and customer service.

At its heart CRM is about making better use of information to build better relationships and ultimately sell the right product at the right time to the right customer. But call centres also need a complete view, and a multichannel one at that, of every interaction a customer has had with the company.

Identifying that your centre could benefit from a CRM system is the easy part. Making sure you select the right one takes time.

Traditional CRM systems suited for sales and marketing initiatives don't deliver the relevant scripted responses, service level tracking, workflow and knowledge base features which are fundamental to call centre performance. Today's email management systems provide this and CRM functionality and can provide a better alternative for smaller call centres.

Know what you want to achieve

Understanding your business requirements and how these are likely to change in the next couple of years is key to selecting the right CRM system. For example, do you have a rapidly growing customer base and you need to manage relationships more efficiently?

CRM: hosted vs. onsite?



SHOULD you host your CRM? It's rarely an all-or-nothing decision; a company that initially opts for hosting may later take the system in house; and it's not uncommon to have a mixture of both.

Deciding on your best approach should cover company size, growth, how far you are on your multichannel journey and, perhaps most importantly, your preferred commercial model.

A hosted service, fully managed and with equipment, software and technical support, is up and running in weeks, even days. Hosting can provide a fast-track route to multichannel; a low-risk approach to proving the benefits of a CRM system, before being tied to a long-term contract or a lengthy deployment and evaluation process,

This needn't be forever though.

Having the commercial flexibility to bring it onsite once its RoI has been proven is critical. You could, for example, introduce web chat to your customers. Once its value is evident, the business case for making that financial commitment onsite is established.

Of course, hosted to onsite migration isn't suited to everyone. A key difference in the hosted vs. onsite debate is pricing; the two

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