



The Bottom Line on CRM Success

Strategies for Effectively Choosing and Implementing Your Company's Next Customer Relationship Management Solution

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strategies



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Strategies for Effectively Choosing and Implementing Your Company's Next Customer Relationship Management Solution

It happens time and again. With high hopes and great anticipation, a company sets out to implement a new customer relationship management (CRM) solution—one that promises to boost sales and customer service, while dramatically reducing costs.

But a funny thing happens on the way to achieving these benefits. The implementation and acceptance process proves to be rockier than anticipated.

This company has just discovered an interesting paradox about CRM solutions. They promise—and often deliver—a fantastic array of benefits. But they also make some demands in return. For instance, CRM solutions are often more challenging to implement than other solutions. Plus, they frequently require companies to modify some of their fundamental business practices.

Of course, this doesn't mean **your** CRM implementation has to be a challenging process. By following some

practical guidelines, you can dramatically increase your company's chances of getting a high-quality CRM solution.

The road to success begins at the top.

Every major project in every successful organization needs the backing of a high-level decision maker—a person who makes it his or her mission to shepherd the project through to completion. The same principle applies to adopting and implementing a CRM solution. Without the backing of a credible, respected executive, your CRM project runs the risk of withering on the vine or falling victim to corporate inertia.

The bottom line:

Enlisting the support of a senior-level executive dramatically increases the probability of a successful CRM implementation.

objective



Have a clear objective in mind.

If you find a company that's unhappy with its CRM solution, quiz its executives as to why they implemented the solution in the first place. Chances are, you'll get a fuzzy response like, "We did it to increase revenue" or "To increase customer service" or "Because our competitors were doing it."

Those responses imply that the company views CRM more as a magic bullet than an information management tool. The fact is, a CRM solution by itself cannot boost revenue or improve customer service. But it can perform such vital functions as enhancing sales management processes, helping you better share critical information and improving customer access to your company. And *those functions* can help boost revenue and improve customer service.

The bottom line:

As with any other major corporate initiative, you must have a clear, well-thought-out business objective in mind before deciding to implement a CRM solution.

Give your task force ample authority.

O.K., you've lined up the right executive sponsor for your CRM project. You've set clear objectives. And you've begun assembling an enthusiastic task force or implementation team to evaluate your company's CRM needs, study competing solutions and recommend how to move forward.

Unfortunately, this is where many CRM solutions begin to unravel. Why? Because the task force hasn't received the authority, resources or budget to get the project rolling—and keep it moving ahead.

The bottom line:

To obtain a high-quality CRM solution and installation, your executive team must delegate the authority your task force needs to get the job done.

Understand management's view toward large IT projects.

There's no doubt about it: A CRM solution represents not only a major expenditure, but a significant project for your IT department as well. Therefore, an understanding of how management views large IT projects is critical. If IT is viewed as strategically important and technology is viewed as an enabler for larger goals, your chances of a successful CRM deployment increase substantially.

If, on the other hand, management views IT primarily as a cost center, the focus of the project may shift to minimizing costs, which will have a negative impact on the success of your implementation.

The bottom line:

The way in which management views large IT projects will have a major impact on the success of your CRM project.

Establish a baseline for success.

It's one thing to believe that your project is achieving terrific results. But it's another to be able to prove it. So, before diving headlong into your CRM initiative, take the time to quantify your current sales and service levels.

By establishing these key metrics up front, you'll be able to better predict the impact your new CRM solution will have on your business, determine an anticipated ROI for the project and—most importantly—be able to demonstrate quantifiable results.

The bottom line:

To understand where you're going, you must first understand where you are. Establishing baseline sales and service numbers will allow you to quantify the results of your CRM project.

Get sales and service involved up front.

Above all else, CRM is a sales and service tool. And who better to shed light on your company's needs in these areas than your salespeople and service representatives? Sure, it seems like a no-brainer, but you'd be surprised at how many CRM projects begin without the input of these key constituencies. If you want your CRM initiative to succeed, be sure to solicit the input of your salespeople and service representatives early and often. Better yet, put representatives from these groups on your project task force or implementation team.

The bottom line:

Your salespeople and customer service professionals bring a unique and vital perspective to the project. Involve them in the process as much as possible.

Don't underestimate the importance of training.

CRM systems force users to change the way they perform their job functions. Regardless of its benefits, this change has the potential to make users resentful of the new system—and reluctant to use it.

Thus, it's critical to the success of your CRM project that you establish a timely, solid training program. By showing users how they need to change and how they can use this system to their advantage, you'll overcome their skepticism, get them up and running on the system quickly and increase their sense of value to the company.

The bottom line:

Establish a generous training budget and develop a solid training program that helps users understand how they can use this system to their advantage.



training

feedback



Establish a mechanism for honest feedback.

For many corporate projects, the feedback process is merely an afterthought. Don't let that be the case with your CRM project. To obtain superior results from your CRM implementation, you need to consistently solicit feedback—and be ready to act on it.

So, long before you begin implementation, put in place a formal process that allows users to identify issues and make suggestions about your CRM solution. This allows you to make necessary changes to your solution and gives users confidence that their suggestions will receive proper consideration.

The bottom line:

Honest, timely feedback is vital to the success of your project. Actively solicit it at all times—and be ready to act on the suggestions you receive.

Conclusion

As with any other corporate software initiative, implementing a CRM solution is a major undertaking—one that requires generous amounts of time, resources, patience and perseverance. So when you start thinking CRM, remember:

- The road to success begins at the top.
- Have a clear objective in mind.
- Give your task force ample authority.
- Understand management's view toward large IT projects.
- Establish a baseline for success.
- Get sales and service involved up front.
- Don't underestimate the importance of training.
- Establish a mechanism for honest feedback.

By keeping these guidelines in mind, you'll dramatically increase your chances of a successful implementation.

Contact

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