CRM IMPLEMENTATION
Getting it right first time

CRM implementation is one of the most difficult and important projects a company can undertake. CRM touches every part of the business. Everyone is a stakeholder and must know where you're going and how you intend to get there.

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Introduction

According to CSO Insights 2016 Sales Enablement Study, full adoption of CRM systems has dropped almost 20% in the last decade. This at the same time when 80% the surveyed companies have implemented CRM for their sales team. The importance of getting it right the first time has never been greater. It starts with selecting the right system, but the best system in the world is only as good as your implementation.

This paper looks at the critical hurdles to successful sales automation as part of your CRM implementation. It's possible to buy a complete book on what the next few posts will cover, so don't consider it as an exclusive guide to getting things right.

CRM systems have been labeled as transformative technology because they literally transform business culture and the way companies operate. Not only is information free-flowing and available to everyone, but processes become well-defined and smooth—they have to be, because they are electronically enabled. If your implementation is for a replacement CRM system then you already know this, and you have probably discovered many or even all of these hurdles.

And you know that implementation won't be pleasant if the CRM project is poorly planned or spins out of control.

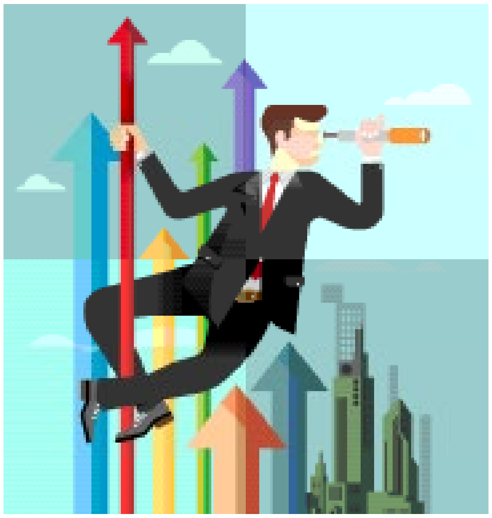
To preclude either of these outcomes, the existing state of the business has to be reviewed in detail to see how

the new technology will fit. Bad procedures have to be cast aside and effort given to developing new ones that will work with technology.

In this first post, we'll look at the vision for successful CRM implementation and how to develop, share, and revise it as you go. Secondly we'll dive into the all-important implementation plan, probably the most important element of your program. The third installment will then discuss reviewing and changing processes, your new and cleaned-up database, laying down rules, sharing the plan, monitoring progress, and timely corrective action.

And finally, we've added a checklist in the final installment so you have a specific task list when you start down the obstacle-filled road of CRM implementation.

Lock in the Vision



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Because CRM technology influences every nook and cranny of an organization, it's important that everyone touched by it is made aware of the changes that might affect them. There should be a carefully documented and well-broadcast vision of the company after the transformation has occurred. A large enterprise will do this through a committee, while a smaller company may rely on the vision of just one or a few top executives or managers.

The main focus of the vision should be on why change is necessary, and the answer will likely be because things are not working well at present. The decision to change is usually not immediate; rather, the impact of imperfect processes, data, and communications develops over a period of time until it is clear that something must be done.

So to start, people are dissatisfied with current processes and systems and CRM is being introduced to fix that. This is why the vision must be written down at the beginning of the project, and must include a clear description of the problems and issues that provoked the change, along with the expected improvements at completion. The vision becomes an important part of the implementation plan.

Develop the Plan

Even before the CRM system is specified, researched, and purchased, there should be discussion amongst all the functional groups within the company that might be impacted, and that will be pretty much the entire company. In these discussions the previously defined vision will begin to permeate through the organization. Just like any project, if there is no plan to translate the vision and change into a working system, things are bound to go awry.

The plan will include an overview of what has to be fixed and a detailed operational description of how and when to do each step. Key people will be assigned as stakeholders and will take charge of the piece of the project that they control or influence. Goals must be set, expectations have to be aligned with real tasks and measurement criteria has to be identified and assigned.

These can vary in scope depending on their expected impact. A sales manager may set down the goal of having an accurate day-to-day bookings forecast available. Someone in sales administration may want to see clean customer information in one place. A CEO may demand real-time information about, well, virtually anything. CRM is so all-encompassing that each company will have its own unique set of aspirations. The important thing is to get them written down in a plan. That is the only way the success of the project can be monitored.

Success can only be judged against initial expectations because things will change. The original proponents may leave the project or the company; original sources of discomfort may get fixed and forgotten; other needs may evolve and take over the field of view. For instance, a CRM project may have an initial goal of consolidating customer information and improving response time in customer service. The expectation is that if this happens, sales will automatically go up. If over time, sales don't go up even though the customer service is much better, the CRM initiative may get blamed.

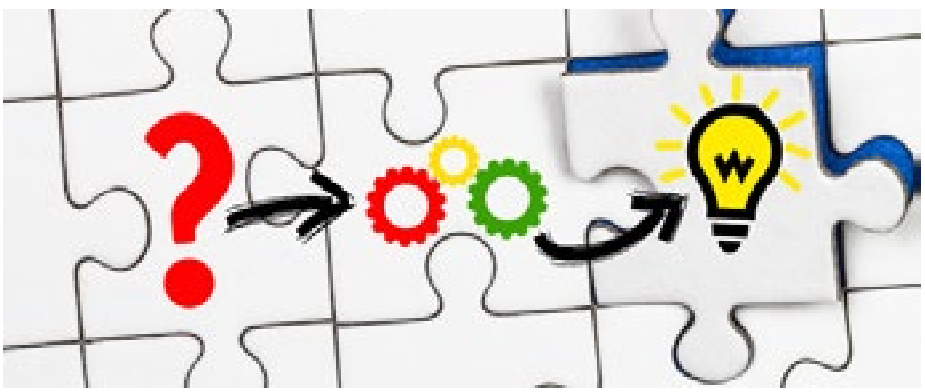
The poor sales could be caused by number of factors and that's why the plan and measurement is so important. In order to gauge the value of the investment, the company must record all the initial expectations and the frame of reference for them to be judged in the future. If expectations get modified because new barriers are exposed, they must also be recorded along with proposed methods of resolution so the plan is an ongoing review and measurement of progress.

Much has been written about the failure, rather than the success, of CRM projects. Much of the problem can be traced to bad or incomplete documentation of goals, expectations, and action plans, coupled with an ineffective review of progress against those documents.

If changes in business culture are necessary for CRM to work, these must be identified and become part of the expectations section of the implementation plan. That way if sometime in the future the CRM project is faltering because the culture was not made to change, the true reasons for failure are apparent, and can hopefully be remedied.

A simple example illustrates this. One of the goals will be to maintain good quality of customer information with no duplicates, no misspellings, and all appropriate contact data available and correct. To ensure this, the team decides that they will only let this information be entered by one person, a database administrator. But things change and there is no database administrator, and all users are allowed to enter customer data any which way they want. Some do this well, but others don't. The data becomes quickly corrupted and incomplete, and everyone gets tired of using it. The Implementation Plan would show what the true problem is. Without it, the CRM system would take the blame.

Top management must sign off on the plan and the vision and there should be provisos for what happens if there is a change in management. Often, CRM projects suffer because the vision disappears when the people who carry it leave the project or even the company.



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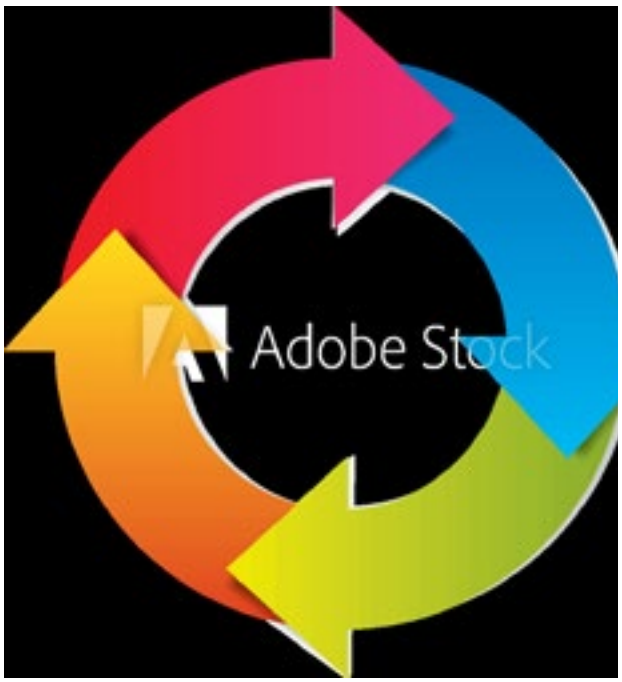
The last piece of advice concerned with planning the CRM project is to not tackle too much at once. Yes, these projects are large, but they can always be planned to occur in a logical, staged order. If good customer data is a primary requirement, do that first, and do processes next. Often the sales team needs to move onto a common sales method ahead of the company-wide roll out to CRM and this will take time to do and discipline to enforce. Identify the objectives, rate them in terms of importance, and then decide if the plan can accommodate a graduated installation of the project.

Sharpen Up The Processes

Process is intrinsic to CRM systems—they live and breathe through process. But these are not processes based on moving paper around from desk to desk, these are electronic processes that moves around instantaneously on a computer network. Existing processes will inevitably need to be tweaked or changed before the CRM project gets underway, and new ones will need to be developed to take advantage of the technology. The better and more freely-flowing the old process, the easier it is to duplicate it on the computer.

Bring the groups together that are responsible for processing all of the customer's transactions and look



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how information flows between them. Is it efficient, and does it work? How will it work when the computer is pushing digits instead of people pushing paper? When you try to move a paper system to an electronic one, current problems will surface very quickly. Moving to CRM provides an excellent excuse to get on a new page and to fix the disruptions, road blocks, and delays caused by established bad or poorly-defined practices.

Develop the Database

Inadequate, non-existent, or unobtainable customer information is one of the prime incentives to move to CRM. The challenge is creating a new customer database from their legacy information, whatever and wherever that may be. It is probably going to come from multiple sources including paper files and computer records from both the Front and Back Offices. In the case of the sales team, the data may be dispersed in the files of whatever contact management application each salesperson uses.

A great danger lies in imposing a new set of data on everyone only for them to find that it has lower quality information and stuff belonging to other folks that they don't want to see. Don't invent new information. Take the old, then sift through and cleanse it. The more carefully and accurately this is done, the better.

It's better to favor economy rather than try to include too much of the old, bad stuff. Develop and implement some sensible rules for cleaning information. Use the computer to correct batches of data or remove duplication. Excel or any spreadsheet works well for this. Appoint a Database Manager who believes in the vision, and who knows that clean data is integral, and give them the power to control the situation.

Once it's clean, keep it that way.

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Lay Down the Rules

In the sharing culture of CRM, everyone has to participate, even though they may not want to initially. When you have a common vision there can't be any deviations. Most salespeople have large egos and will want to do things their own way. If they learn the advantages of working in a team, they will join in. If they don't, they will have to be managed by rules. Anarchy cannot be the order of the day. The Sales Manager has responsibilities, and has to report performance up to the boss. This job gets tough if there is no consistency simply because each salesperson sees their own way as the best.

At the outset of the CRM project, the vision has to be carefully articulated with an acknowledgement that

change is always difficult, but that the end result is worth the pain. The benefits to the individual, by working as a team, have to be laid down. If the team does not naturally evolve under the new environment, rules may have to be enforced to encourage the process. And rules are easy to set and enforce in a CRM system.

One way to ease in the rules is to blend them into administrative processes. The "you can't do that until you have done this" philosophy works well in practice. For example, getting sales opportunities logged and worked early in the sales cycle is a huge advantage. Usually, in the early stages of their buying process, customers request product information. Make a rule that says that any time a customer requests product information, an opportunity must exist in the CRM system. If one doesn't, then it will have to be created.

Experience shows that when rules are applied through process, there will be initial resistance from salespeople, but that quickly dissipates as time goes on and the benefits materialize, and they will with a properly designed and

functioning CRM system.

Share the Results

Everyone that the new system touches has a stake in it and can influence its success. They have to know how the project is progressing. Hold regular meetings to review the original expectations along with the current measurement of success. If people are experiencing a bit more process to guarantee that customer data is getting better, then they should be shown directly the improvement. Is there more data? Is there cleaner data? Is the transaction flowing faster? Is the information easier to retrieve? These issues will become apparent much quicker than the macro effects such as improved forecasting or increased sales revenues.

Monitor Progress

The implementation plan is the best way to monitor progress. There should be regular reviews of vision, objectives, tasks, and achievements, driven by what is laid down in the plan. In these meetings, issues are identified and

a plan is set up to take care of them. The project will have tentacles reaching out to everywhere in the organization, and the best tactic is to elicit help from all the people they touch.

If It Starts to Fail, Put It Right

CRM is here to stay. There is nothing mystical about it. It is just a way to do good business and if you haven't got it, your business is working under a huge handicap.

If past projects have failed, you can be sure something in this paper was neglected or not done correctly. If your project hesitates, take a deep breath, don't panic, regroup and start again.