

It's all in the Reports

Tapping the power of CRM

As you review CRM applications, you probably have discussed the role reports will play in your CRM strategy. The ability to report on all of the CRM information your users have put into your CRM system is one of the most vital benefits a good CRM strategy can provide you and your company. The difficulty a lot of companies have struggled with in their CRM systems is how to tap the real power of reports. What types of reports should they be running? What is the best way to dissect the data? What type of report writing tool should we be using? We will cover these and many other issues to provide key CRM expertise on how your company can tap the real power of CRM reporting.

How worthwhile is your CRM information? Garbage in, Garbage out. Is this how you feel about your current CRM system? What do you want the end result of a new CRM system to be? When you are devising your game plan for your CRM strategy, we suggest you always keep in mind the specific information you really want to be able to get from your CRM system on an ongoing basis. You want your end result to be beautifully accurate and timely reports that show your company exactly what you need to know right now. This can be accomplished, but only with the right strategy, the right CRM system, and the right reports.

We have spoken with many prospective customers over the years who feel they have CRM information that is not worthwhile and of no use to them with their current, older CRM systems. In order to have the right information in your reports, your CRM strategy must start with the right footing. Throughout your CRM implementation, a company must be thinking about the end report results they wish to obtain. Reports are typically categorized into four categories:

1. Sales Opportunity Reports
2. Activity Reports
3. Marketing Reports
4. Customer Service Reports
5. Management Reports

When you begin your CRM implementation, a key initiative your company must undertake is to gather the requirements from your various departments for reports they wish to have. Once you have these key

requirements from your users as to what types of reports are needed, you will be in a much better position to determine the exact information you will want to collect and process in your CRM system.

How to make sure the data going in your CRM system will help your company

The information in your reports will only be as good as the information your users are collecting in your CRM system. Further, you will need to be certain the data you are asking your users to track in your CRM system serves a purpose that the users will see benefit from.

Users will be much more likely to be diligent about using a CRM system if you make it easy to use for your users, if the CRM system will save them time, and if your users can readily see the benefits that good CRM reports will bring to them.

Let's face it, no one likes to enter information just for the sake of entering information. If you can't show vast benefits, your employees are not likely to want to perform these tasks. Users will always be asking, what's in it for me? What do I get out of this? You will always need to focus on three key areas to make sure your users will use their CRM system for the best benefit of you and your company.

- A. Make sure the CRM system is easy to use
- B. Show users how the CRM system will save them time from other tasks
- C. Show users the benefits that one-click CRM reports will give them

If you can get your users to understand that with an easy to use CRM system, the days of compiling reports for the boss at the end of the month or week are now gone, you will be well on your way. Always remember, if it's not easy to use, it won't be used!

What should I do now with all this information?

Once you have proved to your company that they now have an easy to use CRM system and you're collecting the specific, pertinent information that is appropriate for your company, what are you to do with this new information? This is where your actual report writer comes into play. Hopefully, your CRM system has a good report writer. Some CRM vendors such as

The Microsoft CRM package their CRM solution with industry standard report writing systems called SQL

Server Reporting Services. We certainly recommend this for a number of reasons. With an industry standard report writer, most companies will be instantly knowledgeable about its capabilities and customers may even have experience with these tools. Tools such as Crystal Reports are also very powerful and offer a lot of flexibility for you to configure additional reports in just about any manner you can think of according to your business needs.

However, other vendors have their own proprietary report writers. This is seen quite often in the hosted ASP rental CRM market. While on the surface this may look simple, many companies find that proprietary report tools don't offer much flexibility and you're usually not able to have any sophisticated reporting – it's usually pretty generic.

As you are now collecting all of this valuable information in your CRM system, you will want to make sure your reports reflect the exact business purpose for collecting this information. You will want to make sure your reports are intuitive, graphical, laid out in an easy to review manner, and have an attractive interface so you can see your needed information instantaneously.

Also, you will want to make sure that whenever you execute your reports you can do so with one-click and it has up to the second information. Your CRM system should certainly exceed all of these requirements. If you can dream up the specific information you want to review in your reports, your reports should reflect your exact requirements.

What benefits will powerful reports give me?

Your company's management usually has a lot of the same questions. What are our quarterly sales projections? How is business looking? What's in the pipeline? What's the average length of our sales cycle this quarter? How efficiently are we taking care of customer issues? How is our performance by rep? By tracking the proper information in your CRM system, your reports can give you answers with one click. With the proper CRM strategy, the benefits will always be at your finger tips.

Not only will management have the benefits of instantaneous information, but even individual users will see these results as well. They can certainly run reports with one click to tell them where their deals are at, what customers need service right now, how many leads have they processed this week, etc. Further, these reps can just keep their CRM information up to date and they won't need to fill out manual reports any longer at the end of the week. As long as their CRM information is current, management can run reports whenever they see fit. The users win since they no longer have the task of compiling time-consuming reports for management. Management wins since they no longer have to wait for report information from their users. If a company provides an easy to use system that users will actually want to use, everyone will get what they want when they want it.

Your Next Steps

We have hopefully provided a few key ideas for you to think about regarding proper reporting in your CRM system. We encourage you to promote the following in your reporting strategy for your CRM system:

1. Make sure the CRM system is easy to use
2. Show users how the CRM system will save them time from other tasks
3. Show users the benefits that one-click CRM reports will give them

We encourage you to talk to your staff to ensure your employees will reap the benefits they are hoping for in reporting with their CRM system.



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