

## How Will The Latest CRM Trends Affect Your Organization?

Only a very few industries demonstrate the same continuous fast-paced development as information technology. The same can be said for customer relationship management (CRM), and the ever-expanding Internet has contributed significantly to this trend over the last decade.

If your business strategy is to grow in order to outpace your competition, you need to seriously consider the fact that just producing high-quality goods is no longer sufficient. Customer relationship management has evolved into a truly complex science with foundations built on automated solutions present in almost every organization today, whether in the form of a simple client database or a sophisticated software system. Let's have a look at some of the current trends and buzzwords to determine how they might affect an organization's long term CRM strategy.

### CRM 2.0 or Social CRM

Facebook, Twitter, blogs, Internet reviews, forums, social networks, etc. are important areas that deserve the attention of marketing professionals as well as adequate resources – provided that a sales team really wants to succeed over their competitors.

Internet users can today discuss products and services using an endless range of platforms. They can recommend different products and services to their friends using various social networks, compare features and quality, or they can become fans of popular brands on Facebook. You might think such an uncontrolled universe of opinions, information and different links is certainly apt to become a nightmare for individual companies that work hard to present their products in a neat and consistent way. The contrary might be the case; prepared businesses that have their fingers on the pulse of what's happening will be able to quickly maneuver to take advantage of the social network boom.

Social networks represent an ideal tool for a company's CRM activities and offer a wide possibility to have open and honest two-way conversations with customers. In this way, businesses can obtain valuable input and opinions from customers who in return have the opportunity to test products and services in a familiar environment. CRM solution providers are aware of these benefits and many of them provide discussion forums or integration with important social platforms as a regular part of their solution. Within the context of social networks on the Internet, the traditional marketing expression "customer centric organization" takes on a completely new dimension.

### CRM Process Automation

Process automation is normally looked upon as an absolute matter of fact. This functionality is included in the initial business requirements of almost every company that has decided to purchase a CRM system. Though frequently available, practice shows that process automation is often not used at all, or not used to its full extent.

Looking at CRM from an automation point of view, we can divide CRM functions into two basic categories:

1. The first category covers creating the customer information database with addresses, contact information, company data etc.
2. The second category captures specific processes, for example, marketing campaigns, sales lead generation, on-site service visits, and others.

#### About Epicor

Epicor is a global leader delivering business software solutions to the manufacturing, distribution, retail, hospitality, and services industries. Founded in 1984, Epicor serves 20,000 customers in more than 150 countries, providing solutions in over 30 languages.

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The second category is usually more demanding in terms of administration and time, normally strong reasons for automation. When automating such activities, an organization will be able to dedicate more time to its customers and focus on tasks that generate true added value. For example, if the business leads entry process is not automated, records can be lost somewhere in the process and the salesperson might never receive any knowledge about their existence which means that they will not attend to the lead, hence losing out on a business opportunity. Who can afford to simply throw away even a single business opportunity in today's challenging market?

Most CRM solution providers offer a free download for temporary use with limited functionality or a limited number of users. It's worth taking advantage of this to review the system and test whether it will match your requirements, including process automation, before splashing out. Don't forget to ask about the possibility of purchasing additional functionality or user licenses at a later date.

### CRM for Free – Open Source CRM

Open source (or free) CRM represents an interesting alternative, especially for smaller businesses as many of these systems were designed to address their specific CRM needs. However, the benefits offered by open source can also be leveraged in large companies, perhaps for less critical applications.

Open source solutions are by nature affordable and allow companies to make unlimited modifications as well as have unlimited user access without the necessity of on-site maintenance. The limiting factor, just like with the SaaS (Software as a Service) alternative, comes when an organization want to integrate it with an ERP or enterprise application system.

### Mobile CRM

Only a few years ago it was unthinkable that almost every person would have a mobile phone, and above all, use it for taking photos, making notes, connecting to the Internet or reading email. In today's world we

take these activities for granted. However, until recently it wasn't possible to connect to CRM in any other way than in the office and remote workers had to copy information from the system while in the office, travel to meet customers, then return to the office and enter the collected information back into the CRM system. With the expansion of mobile communications, including notebooks and "smart phones", a salesperson on the way to a business meeting is now able to download customer information while waiting in the car park, for example, and prepare for the meeting, enter data and new information on the spot, and then enter new sales orders directly from the mobile phone once out of his meeting.

With mobile communications CRM is accessible and easy to use for everyone, not only for a salesperson or manager, regardless of what the business happens to be – selling baked rolls, computers, or complex electronic applications. CRM significantly reduces the time needed to enter business communication or create proposals and orders, and it helps drive efficiency through the entire sales process.

### CRM and Business Intelligence, Analyses and Forecasts

Reports, Forecasts and Analyses - these also fall under the salesperson's work load. An up-to-date CRM system is expected to offer every user a set of optimized tools for business data collection, analysis, interpretation and presentation. Whoever the user might be - a sales representative working in the field, or a sales manager at his office desk - both users will have access to their own standard reports which can be run on a daily basis or sent to them weekly by email.

Either way, CRM should offer a sufficient suite of tools that enable compound views of all activities, business cases, meetings, requisitions, etc. There is perhaps nothing worse than a CRM system where all users are pushed to enter large amounts of data but where they cannot obtain relevant information as and when they need it.



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## On-demand CRM and SaaS (Software as a Service) CRM

CRM and SaaS (Software as a Service) is a huge topic of interest and a dynamically progressive area. It is hailed as a great proposition for small and medium businesses, and entrepreneurs, because installing this type of CRM solution excludes a lengthy and costly implementation process which might have a heavy economic impact on the company. A smaller company doesn't normally have to worry about limited customization possibilities or overall adaptability to match the company's exact business processes, but is often looking for ways to change and improve their processes as a result of implementing a new system.

Perhaps the weakest point of on-demand CRM is the difficult integration with an existing ERP (enterprise resource planning) or SCM (supply chain management) solution, or with other key business processes and people. This problem may appear especially in companies trying to enforce product differentiation strategy (unlike companies who decide for a low-cost strategy), where CRM and the integration play a key role in providing a singular product or service distinct from the competition. A unique product or service typically requires process customizations which could be problematic if using a SaaS CRM model.



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