



KEEPING YOUR CUSTOMERS SWEET

Every interaction your customer has with you will ultimately impact on your profits. Luckily there is a wide range of CRM solutions to help make that contact a success

More and more companies are realising that Customer Relationship Management (CRM) makes good business sense. The commercial paybacks of a well-designed CRM system can include enhanced customer satisfaction and retention, and an increased level of business revenue.

The importance of trust

Building effective customer relationships relies on gathering high-quality information about your customers. Two hundred years ago that was relatively easy. Then, merchants did business with locally-based people they knew personally. In today's international markets – increasingly driven by the internet – people predominantly deal with strangers. So nowadays trust is the key currency – a sentiment echoed by Ruth Rowan, head of CRM marketing at BT: 'Gaining the trust and confidence of your customers is paramount otherwise they will turn away from you.'

To help them collect and store customer data many companies are turning to IT. But CRM is not just an application, and Rowan believes that some companies jump into CRM technology without thinking why they want to contact customers and what response they hope to get.

Evaluating customer interaction

The truth is there is no 'one-size-fits-all' CRM solution. National Rail Enquiries uses speech recognition to identify a caller's journey plans, while Lastminute.com encourage customers to browse its website. Customers often use a mixture of communication channels. Deciding where to go on holiday might involve online research, an email to order a brochure and finally a phone call to make the booking. 'All of these are CRM but it's critical that all the channels are integrated so that a company has a complete view of their customer interactions,' says Rowan.

Implementing a CRM solution involves time, money and effort so it pays to weigh up all the options before making a commitment.

A range of solutions

Increasingly small organisations, with limited expertise and/or infrastructure, are tending to use managed services. This enables them to rent or own the CRM kit and keep it on-site,

but another company has the responsibility for management, integration and maintenance, such as fixes and upgrades. The budget conscious may opt for a pay-as-you-go solution which allows them to buy what they need as and when they need it. This can suit firms that face predictable peaks, like retailers at Christmas, because it offers the capability to 'flex' their CRM to meet specific needs. For instance, BT recently helped a company with a product recall to bring in 100 extra agents within two days to contact all the customers affected.

For companies with their own IT departments the 'off-the-shelf approach' – where they buy switches and servers and run their own CRM – often works well. It can be cost-effective as the application includes web-based CRM solutions that are easy to integrate within an existing system. Total outsourcing, meanwhile, could lower capital costs and improve efficiency. It offers the benefits of a tried and tested CRM model, plus the expertise needed to manage it. Bespoke CRM software is the most expensive option, but lets a business specify what it wants and the solution is tailored to meet those needs.

'One way to start a CRM project,' says Rowan, 'is to monitor inbound call traffic to identify trends. Some companies start with a pilot project in a ring-fenced area, such as order-taking, that can be easily automated. After that, they can scale up to more sophisticated solutions.'

IP telephony and CRM

One of the first ways to improve your CRM is through the use of IP telephony. The latest range of telephone systems from BT can help ensure that, whenever your customers call you, your business presents a professional image and your customers' calls are dealt with quickly and efficiently. For more advantages **join BT's free interactive web seminar about IP Telephony** on 8 March from 2.00–2.30pm. You can also view the seminar later at your leisure by visiting www.businessclub.bt.com/web-seminars

TO FIND OUT WHAT CRM PACKAGES COULD BENEFIT YOUR BUSINESS VISIT bt.com/talkingbusiness OR CALL 0800 783 8813

> Improving customer service with IP telephony

BT's IP-ready phone systems, such as Business Communication Manager (BCM), have many features that can help you to improve your customer service. These include:

- Contact centre management options such as detailing how long callers wait, how many hang up and duration of calls
- Facility to direct calls to a designated call-handler

- Unified messaging: voicemail, faxes or emails can be sent to you as email attachments
- 'Screen popping' allows you to identify the customer calling and retrieve their details

Make CRM work for you



Customer strategy guru Don Peppers has co-authored eight books with his partner Martha Rogers. Here are his five suggestions to help make your CRM strategy run smoothly:

- Think about how CRM might make things simpler, better, cheaper and more convenient. If your CRM programme doesn't create benefits for your customers, it will collapse under its own weight and fail.
- Link systems and processes – it's no use having new technologies on the customer-facing side of the business if they don't connect to the back-end.
- Where possible, outsource or automate business processes. Your staff are there to solve problems through brainpower, creativity and judgement. That will help to drive a more productive business and people will tend to be happier too!
- Don't ignore CRM. Thinking you don't need to pay attention to CRM in the long-term is like telling a business at the turn of the 20th century, 'Don't worry about this electricity thing – it's a fad and it will go away!' It won't.
- Remember trust is spread by reputation. Go online regularly and read reviews of what people think about your business.

We have 10 signed copies of Don Peppers' book, 'Return on Customer' to give away. For terms and conditions see page 31.

30% off a BCM 400¹ voice and data package
Call 0800 783 8813 or visit bt.com/talkingbusiness

TERMS AND CONDITIONS. 1. Offer ends 31 March 2007. Offer available to all customers. 30% saving is based on BCM 400 Voice & Data package. Cost of buying BCM 400 Voice & Data as individual parts is £4,221, cost of buying together is £2,950 (+VAT). Savings also available on other BCM Voice & Data and IP Telephony packages (between 8–27% saving based on the cost of buying these services together).