

Tips for promoting CRM to decision makers & colleagues



With commitment shy directors and change fearing staff it can be a challenge to promote a new or updated investment in CRM into your business. With the impact of tough market conditions as well it can seem that a positive outcome is hard to achieve.

We're frequently contacted by managers who have enjoyed the benefits of CRM in previous employment but now find themselves in a business that has an inadequate CRM solution, or worse still, with no CRM strategy.

Often, they've already tried and failed to gain buy-in from their bosses and colleagues to implement CRM and are attempting to build a more compelling business case. What compounds their frustration is the knowledge that without an effective CRM solution the ability to perform and achieve results is restricted, both for them personally and the entire business.

Of course, getting top management to buy-in to a CRM project is only one part of the challenge. Making sure that end users actually adopt the system is every bit as important.

From risk adverse MD's, old-school sales and service staff who do things their own way and IT staff who put down obstacles to progress, the cultural shift that's inherent in even a small scale CRM initiative is enough to stop a project in its tracks.

To navigate the often political issue of getting sanction for a CRM project we've compiled these tips to help you get support for your CRM initiative from the top. We've also included some steps to make sure that everyone actually uses the system that you've battled so hard to get implemented!

1. Put decision makers in customers shoes

It's amazing how disconnected some seniors managers can be from customer touch points within their own business. They often have little awareness of the actual pain points within customer facing areas. For example, how long it takes to serve a customer, the frequency that customer issues get missed, how often the customer has to repeat the same information because its not been recorded and clients being lost simply because you didn't keep in touch.

If you can get decision makers to experience and recognise these issues for themselves they can translate them into problems that every manager wants to solve – increasing service costs and dwindling customer retention rates.

If you can first demonstrate that these problems exist before explaining how CRM can solve them you'll be in a far stronger position to drive home the value of CRM.

2. Push the Metrics

Senior managers and directors love anything to do with business intelligence like reports and key performance indicators. Many of them are already switched on to the benefits of using CRM but just aren't convinced that their staff will follow through and generate better results from a new investment in CRM.

If you're trying to get sanction to upgrade or replace your present CRM solution this can be a tough barrier to overcome. Especially if these decision makers believe they got their fingers burned last time when they paid for a CRM solution that didn't achieve the results they wanted.

A useful way to sell management on a CRM initiative is to present a business case that identifies specific metrics, demonstrates ways to measure them and names the people who will be responsible for achieving these results.

For managers to sign on to a project, they have to be sure that those leading the campaign are going to take ownership and be accountable to ensure that project goals are met.

To begin with, start auditing some current metrics like your total cost of sale, the cost of servicing customers, the return from marketing activities and the current customer churn rate to determine what return on investment can be achieved from a new CRM solution.

If you can't easily assess these and other metrics then it adds strength to the case for a new investment in CRM.

The latest CRM systems recognise that if you are going to improve a metric you first need to measure and track it. As a result, dashboards and key performance indicators across all business areas are available for clear visibility of results and accountability.

Just think how more effective your business could be if intelligence like this was available on-demand enabling your management team to react more nimbly to trends and make informed decisions based on timely and accurate data.

3. Use Peer Pressure

An often missed technique to open the eyes of senior managers and directors to the urgent need for CRM, or a new investment in it, is to have them talk to industry peers and friends who have successfully implemented a similar CRM strategy.

This can act a wake-up call from trusted associates to help them see just how much more effective their operations can be. Also, if it can be seen that the competition is doing it, they're more likely to bring it on board.

Using social networking tools like LinkedIn it's now so much easier to find and interact with those people who can sway decision makers.

4. Take the Quick-Wins Approach

Along with many analysts, we've long recommended a modular approach to CRM implementations as the best way build confidence in the project for everyone involved.

Managing directors and financial directors are more likely to sign off on a CRM project that requires less money up front and that can achieve a fast return.

Deploying CRM throughout an entire company across multiple teams in a single phase is a tough organisational challenge and will of course impact on the initial costs and delay the time before a return can be achieved due to a lengthy implementation cycle.

We've always found that it's not simply enough to find a CRM system that will manage long term needs. It is just as important that a business case be able to demonstrate how immediate results can be gained from it.

Many successful CRM projects are initially deployed to no more than a couple of high priority teams where CRM can help them achieve a quick wins. Once the early results are proven and developed, there's a firmer basis to extend CRM into other areas of the business.

5. Choose your vendors carefully

With so many CRM solutions available its easy to build a shortlist that runs to several dozen options.

Decision makers do not have time to sift and choose from multiple 'best of breed' CRM vendors so don't expect a positive outcome if you've recommended as many as 6 or more CRM solutions in your plan. Do your research and narrow the choices that you present.

As a CRM vendor ourselves we have to declare an interest on this tip, but where possible we recommend focusing on independent organisations that cover several solutions on your initial shortlist as they can help you narrow the field and determine potential solutions. Hopefully you'll give us a call!

CRM User Adoption Strategies

Ok, so you've built a solid case for an investment in CRM but if it's approved and implemented will everyone use it?

So many CRM projects flounder because insufficient attention was focused on getting people on the ground to use it. Resistance to change, lack of consultation, office politics and insufficient training are common barriers to user buy-in when it comes to CRM.

Even if you implement the perfect CRM system for your needs, without user buy-in you'll fail to see positive results.

Take the Carrot-and-Stick Approach

Of all the people to sell CRM to the hardest are always sales reps, typically the front-line opposition to any form of business process change.

A common leverage is to adjust the commission structure whereby this will only be paid on sales that are put through the CRM system – or lower rates are passed on sales that are converted from opportunities that haven't been processed in CRM.

Sales staff will typically take the stance that they can make more sales without using the system. It's important that project sponsors stick to their guns because tough tactics like this may be the only way to see utilisation of the system in some quarters and really make CRM work.

The reality is that once sales professionals master CRM they'll soon see their sales cycle shorten and their commissions increase. In no time they'll wonder how they ever performed without CRM!

Keep It Simple

A simplified approach to CRM can make a huge difference to user take-up.

Understand what frustrations people have with their current processes and pinpoint how exactly a new CRM solution can really make their lives easier in the long run. Consult influential people at the outset and deliver an easy to use system that addresses their needs and they're more likely to use it.

It's no surprise that a lot of businesses turn to Microsoft Dynamics CRM because it can be run within Outlook. Because their people already use Outlook this simplifies user acceptance and breaks down the usual barriers encountered when something new is introduced.

Secure Management Involvement

Once top-level management gets involved in a CRM initiative and actively preach the benefits to all employees, mass usage is more likely to follow in contrast to one lonely voice attempting to drive change.

We have already commented on the need for CRM project managers to take personal accountability for achieving results but so too must senior managers be visibly and vocally supportive of the project.

It's therefore not enough to gain a half hearted sanction to proceed. CRM advocates should press for clear support from senior decision makers and ensure they are involved in the project.

With the reporting that CRM can provide to managers it's very easy for them to ask questions like: why were 20% fewer customer issues were closed last week or why 25% of opportunities haven't been contacted for over 2 weeks. This usage and involvement among senior managers is a big prompt for everyone to start using the system.

Go for Role-Based CRM

To get users on board a CRM system needs to be relevant to each business role. In simple terms this may be a case of working with a CRM vendor to develop a database design that's effective and easy to work with for all users.

However, it's increasingly important to ensure that CRM software delivers the diverse functionality that each team needs. This may include marketing campaign analysis, event management, project planning, tracking customer issues in line with service level agreements and many more.

When used effectively, CRM systems can be so many things to different people so it's important to understand and prioritise what functionality is needed across all business roles – even if you only opt for a small scale initial implementation.

Develop a training plan

So you've got senior management on your side and even the sales reps have bought into CRM but so many projects result in failure from this point because people don't know how to use the software effectively.

In some instances, users quickly give up and fall back on trusted processes or they will only focus on the areas of the software that they understand. The end result is a diluted CRM system with large chunks of functionality unused because no one understands it. In this all too common scenario it's no wonder that so many CRM projects fail to deliver results simply because training was seen as an optional extra.

From the outset your CRM plan must ensure that everyone involved will receive training to make sure that early enthusiasm is translated into user confidence and tangible results.

Carried out on a group basis, training is also a useful way to demonstrate how your new CRM software can deal with your own unique processes but also to collectively agree how it can be used to develop better working practices.

Find a CRM Champion

Combined, these strategies will help people to use the CRM system but there must be someone in the organisation driving the initiative and evangelising CRM.

Finding a champion can be just as essential as choosing the right software. Find someone who holds the respect of their colleagues, who really understands how the organisation works and can champion the benefits of CRM. Most importantly, they will have a track record of seeing that things get done. As you're reading this document it might well be you!

The CRM champion should look for results and take every opportunity to communicate CRM successes frequently. For example, an increase in opportunities converted, a reduction in support call lengths, increased return from marketing activities, increase in customer renewals, and more cross sell opportunities identified.

Summing up

The reluctance to support a new CRM initiative is often based in fear. Fear of change, fear of wasting money, fear of the distraction of a drawn out implementation, the fear of accountability if it goes wrong. The list can go on and on.

The fact is that even in tough times, and indeed because of the challenging trading conditions that we face today, many businesses are implementing and urgently reviewing a CRM strategy because they see this as an essential means to retain customers, win new business and reduce costs.

Unlike virtually any other business strategy, a properly implemented CRM project really can make the difference between survival and failure. As we saw in the previous recession the firms that get it right will propel through and emerge stronger.

Like any project it's fundamental to follow some basic steps to ensure that your CRM project succeeds.

- What are the key objectives of your CRM project
Establish and plan a realistic strategy prioritising short and longer term actions
- Research and narrow a shortlist of potential solutions
- Gain CRM buy-in from senior managers and directors and appoint CRM champion(s)
- Choose CRM system and vendor
- Implement the system and follow through with objectives
Measure, prove results, and make improvements where necessary
Repeat for the next phase

Next step

Find out more by calling us on 0800 381 1000 or by reading our other CRM guides on www.preact.co.uk.



ABOUT PREACT CRM

Preact is an independent Customer Relationship Management (CRM) consultancy working with businesses in the private sector as well as charities and educational organisations.

As multiple award winning CRM architects, we've been helping businesses achieve success from their CRM strategy since 1993. Our experienced team combine strong consultative skills with professional implementation skills and a commitment to customer service excellence.

By working with Sage ACT! and Microsoft Dynamics CRM we offer vendor-neutral advice to help organisations select the most effective solution for their unique requirements.

OUR APPROACH

We take a product agnostic approach to pre-sales to help you choose a CRM solution that will meet your immediate requirements and support business growth. Our consultants will discuss your plans in detail and help you test our recommendations.

Our efforts are focused on developing long term business relationships and we're committed to an on-going evaluation of our performance. We actively seek client feedback to ensure we're delivering on our brand promise of exceeding customer expectations. We were proud to receive the 2011 Sage Circle of Excellence award in recognition of the quality of our service based on independently collected feedback.

All of our implementation team hold the highest accreditations, including Microsoft CRM Implementation, Customisation and Developer Certifications, Microsoft Surestep Project Management, Prince2 accreditations & Scribe Certification ensuring that every requirement is expertly managed at each stage.

We offer a full range of pre-sales, technical consultancy, training and support services to cover every step of your CRM project.

Our recent projects have included implementations for John Lewis Plc, Toshiba Air Conditioning, East Berkshire College, Scottish & Southern Energy, Cranfield University & Europe's largest ACT! implementation for Oxford Instruments Plc.