

CRM and your business channels: It all starts with data

Expectations of branded communication are higher than ever. In a busy world, we expect brand to make information easy to find, answer questions promptly, and communicate efficiently. Enter CRM, and why, if adapted and structured correctly, it can largely replace advertising in a business.

 By [Carmia Lureman](#) 6 Jul 2012



Here's a look at some core elements involved in implementing CRM for marketing success:

Understand your customer

The most effective marketing has become the marketing that isn't marketing, or at least doesn't feel like marketing. Informative content that help us better utilise products, or enhances our chosen lifestyle in some way; efficient customer service - from solving product issues to helping us track delivery; loyalty discounts and apps and utilities that make life easier, are all much more likely to result in customer appreciation (and revenue) than an ad. However, to implement any of the aforementioned activities in a way that is useful and relevant to the consumer, you first need to know who they are.

Your database can, and should, be the holy grail of your marketing activities.

Develop a database

The best databases are built in-house organically and usually consist of two segments: existing customers and potential leads who signed up to some form of brand communication (like an email newsletter, or submitting their details to attend an event).

- A database enables you to customise and personalise your marketing, moving it from a bulk-blasted promotion, to something that might actually resonate with a smaller, preselected group.
- Your database can become the basis upon which your loyalty programme is structured.
- From assimilated data, you can draw insights to help you better understand your customer needs, and where your product or service is falling short.

Build relationships

Define the relationship. The basic premise of introducing a CRM plan into a business is to build strong customer relationships. First, you need to define what an ideal customer relationship looks like for your business. What would make customers want to stick with your business? What relationship would enable

you to deliver the best possible service to your customers?

Once you have that vision in place you need to take a closer look at what your relationships currently look like, and how these could be improved. Importantly this view should not come from your brand, but straight from the client's mouth - and this is where your data comes into play. Often what customers say in their feedback is not what they show in their user or shopper behaviour. Analysing all available data in conjunction with consumer feedback will help you put both in context.

Aim to build a comprehensive communication plan. So often we see marketing, sales and customer service/support teams working in silos, with none knowing what the others are doing. The result is endless streams of outgoing customer communications that don't tell a comprehensive story.

The rise of social media has worsened the problem. With more and more communication channels being implemented to meet customers on the platforms of their choice, it becomes difficult to keep a comprehensive log of all a customer's interactions with your brand.

Determine customer value. Customer value scoring is made possible by data analysis, and is helpful when building loyalty or reward programs. It's the criteria by which you assess what the value of a particular customer is for your business. This is based not only on the monetary value of the customer's purchases, but also on their propensity to make purchases repeatedly, as well as their likelihood to promote the brand and their reach and influence in doing so.

Until recently, brands neglected evaluating a customer's social influence (online and off), digital interaction (online purchases and interactions with digital campaigns) and conversation (how many acquaintances they have referred to the brand via word-of-mouth) as part of this value scoring.

Implement early

It's easier to implement CRM when the business is still smaller. Rather pre-empt growth than play catch-up at a later stage. The following initial steps can be taken:

- If you have a social media presence, capture social data as part of your sign-up process and factor that into your social media strategies.
- Implement ORM systems to monitor your online conversations - there are basic solutions available online at a minimal fee, and most do offer free trial accounts.
- If you run email campaigns, keep a close eye on subscriber interactions. Keeping track of which product or content a subscriber shows interest in can help you market to them more effectively in future. Many email marketing providers also offer integrations with data systems.
- Make sure your marketing, sales and support teams collaborate on relationship management. This means logging all customer interactions, and keeping each other abreast of new campaigns or promotions as they are implemented.

Furthermore, collating all these conversations in one space assists you in facilitating continued conversation with consumers, right down to an individual level.

Yes, implementing a CRM plan is daunting. For many businesses data integration means developing complex systems. However, remember that the long term effects can greatly impact business growth.

ABOUT CARMIA LUREMAN

Carmia Lureman is a rapidly evolving online geek. A writer from a print media background who stumbled into the online industry by chance, she is embarrassingly enthusiastic about email marketing, integrated digital marketing and branding, social media marketing and online PR and reputation management. She currently works for GraphicMail, an internationally represented email and mobile marketing platform and can be contacted at carmia@graphicmail.com.

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