

## WHITE PAPER

# You've selected your CRM platform. Now what?

## INTRODUCTION

You did your homework, researching, reviewing and discussing the CRM solution options available today. You made your choice and selected the platform that best meets your needs in your company's quest for operational efficiency and improved customer loyalty. One decision down. Another key decision to go.

So here comes the next big question: Now what? You could implement your solution on your own, using internal resources. Or you could work with an external CRM implementation service provider.

If you choose the latter, it is time for more homework. Because teaming with the right CRM implementation partner with the right level of experience and knowledge can mean the difference between the success and failure of your entire CRM initiative.

This white paper offers guidance on how to choose the CRM implementation service provider best suited to small and midsized businesses like yours.

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## Choose a CRM implementation partner in synch with the scope of your solution

For purposes of this discussion, let's say you have decided to choose an external service provider for your CRM implementation. First consider the type of CRM solution to be implemented. Did you opt for the small enterprise version of a CRM with plans to scale up the tool as your business grows? Or did you choose the full-suite version, taking the strategic long-term view with a CRM solution that touches customers, staff and multiple departments? Whatever your choice, you need to factor in both technical and business considerations before the CRM solution is implemented.

For instance, what business processes or workflow issues might need to be addressed? Is there alignment across all customer touch points within your company? How will your call center staff or your mobile sales team be impacted? Are your management goals aligned with user goals? Forrester Research found that 47% of CRM implementations were deemed failures in 2009. In most cases technology wasn't the cause. Failure was due to a lack of knowledge, planning and unclear business requirements.<sup>1</sup>

## Take the time to develop a clear vision and direction for your CRM activities

CRM is a strategic initiative – one that requires executive sponsorship, strong management and a clear roadmap. Without these, the implementation will undoubtedly take longer than expected, cost more than estimated and employees will become frustrated. Such frustration can negatively impact support from your users and, in turn, their willingness to adopt the CRM solution.

Your CRM vision should include measurable goals that can be tracked against a baseline. For instance, is your goal to increase customer spend by a specific amount in a specific market? Or improve your customer service ranking by a given number of points? Or improve lead conversion by a certain percentage?

Verifying the quality of your data should be a key milestone on your CRM implementation roadmap. This includes not just the intrinsic customer contact data but also the more complex information that spans every touch point within your company. Oftentimes that information is scattered among different systems. Then there's the more

cryptic data, such as relationships a customer might have with executives in your organization. Poor quality data will silently sabotage your CRM implementation. It can increase costs when rework is required and even undermine relationships with your customers. The higher quality the data, the better the CRM solution results.

**First tackle your business processes, then CRM. Not the other way around.**

Traditionally businesses have integrated the marketing, sales and service functions into CRM in order to optimize customer-facing business processes. According to Forrester, companies should also begin to incorporate the related cross-functional processes, such as billing, order management and contract management into a holistic solution – what Forrester calls the “extended CRM application ecosystem.”<sup>2</sup> Do you plan to integrate your CRM with existing legacy systems? Are they off-the-shelf applications or home grown?

It’s vital that you examine, tweak or even redesign existing business processes at the start of the implementation. Keep in mind, your chosen CRM solution is not a panacea for any current problems and inefficiencies. The CRM system is an enabler, supporting your business strategies and processes. It cannot fix what is broken; but planning for its implementation can – and should – trigger a review of current business processes. From there, you can work with your implementation partner to customize the CRM platform to address the identified workflow and process changes that should be made.

Like many smaller and mid-sized organizations, you may lack documentation for current processes and procedures. The good news is your CRM implementation presents the ideal time to correct this situation. Use the implementation as an opportunity to analyze the impact of the changes required, and then formalize your processes while designing your future CRM blueprint.

**On-premise or SaaS—each CRM choice has its own set of implementation challenges.**

Did you select the Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) approach to CRM? In that same 2010 report, Forrester notes that SaaS CRM is becoming the default choice as buyers look to see if this approach meets their needs before they seriously consider an on-premise CRM. But how do you achieve maximum business value from an on-demand CRM solution? You still need to seamlessly integrate it into your environment. You still need the CRM to evolve with your changing business objectives. And as the CRM vendor adds capabilities to its product, you still need your solution to be tuned in order to continually maximize its full potential.

To ensure a unified customer view, numerous steps – sequential and parallel – must be taken before, during and after the CRM system is rolled out into your environment. Planning, configuration, customization, testing, integration and training – all are important implementation components. Data must be synchronized between your CRM and the

other business applications. Turf skirmishes may be encountered as the requirements of each department are gathered and prioritized. Guiding your organization in the appropriate direction will require a CRM implementation partner who is an experienced facilitator.

## Look for these 10 key traits in your implementation partner

Whatever your CRM solution approach – be it a smaller off-the-shelf package, a designed-to-grow solution, or today's SaaS option – you will want to keep these considerations in mind when you choose to outsource your implementation to a third-party partner. You can use these characteristics to build a profile of the ideal partner – one that's right for your business. You want to work with a CRM implementation partner who offers:

**1. Communications savvy.** From your initial conversation forward, communications – or the lack thereof – can make or break your project's success. That's why your chosen CRM implementer must be a good communicator and someone with whom you can easily interact and collaborate. You want to team up with active listeners who are good with both business and technical people. Look for a partner who is demonstrably practiced in requirements gathering techniques and comfortable leading discussions around all things CRM. One tip: Meet your implementer's team lead or project manager before you get going. Taking the time upfront to make sure you are a good match pays off in the long run.

**2. Responsiveness.** Choose an implementation partner that is responsive to your scoping parameters, questions and budget requirements. You want to work with someone who listens to your concerns and makes every effort to understand your business and always gets back to you quickly on all issues big and small.

**3. Budget clarity.** Being clear about budget expectations and parameters upfront is a sure way to avoid having to deal later with hidden costs or other fiscal surprises. Most CRM implementation experts are available at a fixed fee or on a time-related fee structure. As appropriate, you want your service provider to sign an upfront service level agreement (SLA) to define costs and turnaround time and to formalize the process for adjustments that may need to be made according to unanticipated shifts in your business needs. Always make sure the terms are explicitly clear going in to the implementation project.

**4. Experience.** You want to team with a service provider that has proven experience with your chosen CRM solution. Ask for client references. Look for case studies and success rates from prior implementations that incorporate the same application and a similar technology environment, scaling requirements and implementation or integration challenges that you face.

**5. Standardized methodology.** The ideal service provider should present a standardized process for approaching CRM implementation. This eschews ad hoc implementation in favor of a proven, rigorous approach to all phases of the implementation – from application review to documentation and execution. Such a standardized methodology establishes best practices and, in turn, is much more likely to deliver measurable business results and predictable costs.

**6. Long-term commitment.** Particularly if yours is a larger, integrated CRM implementation, you want a partner that demonstrates a commitment to developing a long-term relationship with your firm – one that can also provide consulting and end-to-end services to continue to support your business growth.

**7. Skilled workforce.** Know what kind of workforce the service provider brings to the implementation table. A highly skilled, proactive pool of service professionals – with the necessary certifications as applicable – can reliably improve your return on investment while minimizing risk along the way. And if yours is a company with global reach, you should team with a partner whose people are capable and comfortable working in a cross-cultural, multi-language environment.

**8. Realistic delivery schedules.** You and your service provider should be on the same page when it comes to deadlines, goals and resource planning for your CRM implementation. Unrealistic timeline expectations – yours or theirs – can lead to real problems that can affect project quality and outcome.

**9. Industry expertise.** A partner with experience in your industry is an added advantage. And overall it just makes sense to collaborate with a service provider that has had success in managing deployments in your industry under similar circumstances.

**10. Reliability and financial stability.** You want to partner with a firm that's here today and tomorrow. So make sure your partner can go the distance on a foundation of proven financial stability. Ask for company details – locations, employee count and number of years in business – to help you assess the service provider's reliability.

## Always plan before your implement

You took time to research and select your CRM solution – so don't rush now as you get ready for the crucial implementation phase. Time spent planning now can reduce unwelcome headaches and business-disruptive risks down the line.

Where to begin? Before you start contacting potential service providers, consider drafting a request for proposal (RFP) that details key project requirements and other selection criteria. The more clearly you outline your goals and objectives, the more likely you are to team with the service provider that best meets your needs. What's more, the goals you set now will provide a baseline for measuring results once the implementation is complete.

**Remember, you can't ask too many questions.**

At every phase of your CRM service provider selection process, ask questions – detailed questions specific to your environment and your work flow. Asking the right questions first helps reduce any misunderstandings or delays that can cause more problems the deeper you are into the implementation project. And be satisfied with the answers you get from the service provider. If you're not, then take this as a sign that this is not the right implementation service provider for your business.

This way, you can move ahead with confidence knowing you have chosen an experienced, consultative partner to deliver a successful CRM implementation.

## Summary

You've selected your CRM solution. The next big step is figuring out the best way to implement it. As you build an implementation plan of action, keep these key points in mind:

- Before you choose your CRM implementation partner, look closely at your business goals and set achievable, measurable benchmarks for success for your CRM program.
- Incorporate the review and documentation of existing processes as you begin the implementation phase to save your company time, money and implementation pain down the road.
- Look for a CRM service provider that is responsive, experienced and clear about what they can and cannot do for you. You want to partner with a team that is proactive, collaborates with you, and views your success as their success.

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<sup>1</sup> CRM Failure Rates 2001-2009, ZDnet; <http://www.zdnet.com/blog/projectfailures/crm-failure-rates-2001-2009/4967>

<sup>2</sup> The Forrester Wave: CRM Suites for Midsized Organizations; June 16, 2010