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OUTLOOK

# Managing relationships

A well-designed system is vital to satisfy your customers and retain their loyalty

**Mike Smalley**, chairman of the Holbrook IT Group, looks at how getting the right Customer Relationship Management software is helping business of all sizes to meet customer needs.



**Solutions:** Mike Smalley, chairman of Holbrook, advocates use of CRM software

**C**RM - Customer Relationship Management - is probably one of the least understood and most maligned business processes by those who have not experienced the benefits of a well designed and implemented system.

Unfortunately, software solutions offering little more than a way of storing customer contact details have passed themselves off as CRM systems with the inevitable result of tarring the whole industry with the same brush.

As with most business processes, technology is the final part of the solution and should be used to make the whole process more efficient.

All too often businesses are lead into buying the IT product first, in the hope that it will improve an inadequate business process. In those circumstances, what you actually get is a faster mess and a poor reputation for the product concerned.

Organisations which have developed a relevant CRM solution, supported by all the Board

and embraced throughout the business, rely on it totally in deciding which products or services to offer to its market.

Just ask Tesco who developed their system over ten years and totally attribute their number one position to CRM.

Customers (or clients or

members or whatever you call them) are key to all businesses regardless of size or industry; successful businesses build their success based on long-term relationships with their satisfied customers.

How many times do you hear business people complaining

there is no customer loyalty any more? What that really means is that customers have become more discerning and better equipped to evaluate the products or services which you offer.

If you have processes in place which enable you to service each and every customer in

accordance with their specific needs, then you won't have any problems with customer loyalty. CRM is a business philosophy not just a technology, understanding your customers' needs enables you to build better relationships and increase sales.

Good business processes help you stay close to existing customers and win new ones, and although a sound customer relations strategy has to come first it can be effectively supported by CRM software, particularly if this is integrated to existing business process software such as distribution and financial systems.

At Holbrook we still find that most organisations who invite us to investigate their IT utilisation have disparate systems and databases spread throughout the organisation.

This inevitably leads to multiple entries of the same information, duplication of data and a failure to share information with people who need it i.e. anyone who interfaces at any point with customers.

Everyone knows it is much more expensive to find and develop new customers than it is to service existing ones, so why not invest in ensuring existing customer satisfaction? It will pay you back; just ask Tesco.

Having secured our customer

base, we all want more, so how can a good CRM system help us to do that? Well, it's based around the same problems once again. We constantly come across companies who have bought or built databases of prospective customers and market to these in specific sectors or geographic regions.

Typically, the data for each campaign is cleaned and results monitored for a time after the campaign is finished. However, this information is often kept separately for each campaign and the results not effectively analysed so data "islands" exist which are not capable of supporting one another.

This results in inefficiencies being duplicated and the whole process continues without improvement (If you always do what you always did, you'll always get what you always got!). Typically, these databases grow large and become unmanageable if not incorporated in an enterprise-wide system that everyone uses all the time.

Focus on what type of CRM system you need... generic, special customisation, real time access to sales staff in the field.

Does it need to integrate with existing accounting or ERP systems and, most importantly, what are you trying to achieve?

## Complete solutions for offices

AFTER decades of supplying work space solutions, Sheffield-based Dale Office Interiors has launched Elevate Office Environments to offer a complete office interior solution to businesses of all sizes.

The Elevate team help local companies to create efficient and motivating work spaces through designing, planning and project managing office expansions, relocations and refurbishments.

Steve Bricknell, partner of Dale Office Interiors, said: "Optimising the work environment, not only boosts employee performance and motivation, but portrays a professional image and instills confidence with your potential customers".

A recent survey conducted by the Spaceworks Project Team at Sheffield Hallam University, which asked 342 senior human resources professionals in the private sector, showed 92% believed the physical working environment impacted on the wellbeing of employees and 82% thought it affected job satisfaction.

The survey also recommended businesses give more consideration to the working environment in order to maximise productivity and wellbeing, knowledge sharing and collaboration plus recruitment and retention of employees.

Since Dale Office Interiors was acquired by the Bricknell family in 2003, it has continually developed its range of products and services and has worked hard to move with the requirements of a diverse market.

For further information, please contact Elevate Office Solutions on telephone: 0844 499 6270 or email: info@elevateoffice.co.uk.



**2007 style:** Part of a new-look office environment from Elevate



**first impressions count**

Elevate Office Environments has been launched by Dale Office Interiors to offer a complete office interior solution tailored to your company's budget and timeline.

Whether you are expanding, relocating or refreshing your existing space, Elevate's experienced team of Office Interior Specialists will work with you to design, plan and transform your work space to reflect the individual style of your business.

For further information or to arrange a free no-obligation consultation, please call **0844 499 6270** Alternatively you can email us at **info@elevateoffice.co.uk**

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