Smart Data, Smart Results: How CRMs Help You Run Your Business Better

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Introduction

We're eyeballs-deep in data. Thanks to advances in technology, you can instantly access information on customers, sales, your competition and your business environment. Most businesses don't suffer from too little information: the problem lies in **lack of access to the *right data*** that allows you to make correct decisions for your business.

Without the right data, a factory manager's badly-timed decision may lead to inventory management problems during peak demand. Bad metrics might lead a sales manager to devote too much time to finding prospects and too little time to closing – leading to plummeting conversion rates despite increasingly heroic efforts.

Decisions made in the absence of good data wastes time and resources, leading to some very dissatisfied customers, cashflow issues and certain catastrophe down the road.

Going beyond spreadsheets

On the flipside, finding and using the right data for your decisions may be the smartest move any manager might make. You simply need the right tool to connect you with the data you need.

Spreadsheets can only go so far to provide useful information. While they have the benefit of widespread usage, spreadsheets have limited visual and relational abilities that diminish geometrically as the database increases in size. Outside of specific, limited purposes – building a customer email list or creating a targeted prospecting list for one's sales team, among others – spreadsheets fail at squeezing new, useful insights from an existing database.

Moving beyond spreadsheets, the smart money leads many customer-centered companies to invest in **customer relations management (CRM)** platforms: software with a database and user interface that provides a 360-degree view of their customers.

Single dashboard, incredible insight

CRMs (like spreadsheets) offer a way to create, update, manage, process, share, and report data. But the similarity ends there.

Unlike spreadsheets, CRMs let you view and manage critical customer information using **powerful,**

easy-to-use dashboards. You can use a CRM platform to see and do much more than even the most advanced spreadsheet.

With a CRM, you can see all your vital customer information in one place: sales, marketing, and applications all combined. You can use the same platform to send follow-up emails, delegate tasks, track performance data, and automate marketing tasks. And the platform's tools allow you to engage your staff and your customers in a smarter way: you'll gain new insights from old data, allowing you to make more timely, more profitable decisions.

And **everyone gets in on the action:** a CRM allows the whole team to collectively manage relationships with customers, prospects and vendors. By allowing everyone on your team to see and manage the same database, a CRM decentralizes the ownership of information, and makes everyone responsible for the enterprise's collective success.

Costs & benefits

Can you afford to use a CRM in your enterprise? The real question is, can you afford *not* to? A recent study by Nucleus Research Inc. found that **every dollar spent on CRM paid back about $8.71**, an increase of about 150% from three years prior.

Even small enterprises with less than 10 in their staff can leverage the power of CRMs. Once thought to be the sole purview of Fortune 400 companies, comprehensive CRM platforms like Salesforce and Microsoft Dynamics now offer their services to businesses of any size via flexible pricing plans.

Whether you're a family-run business with a single small marketing department, or a corporation trying to move their business beyond gut-feel decisions to data-driven ones, CRMs are the smartest move you can ever make.

In the next three chapters, we'll explain just how smart they are.

Dashboards: A Smarter Way to See Your Business

One glance. That's all you need to see your business' performance, summarized on your CRM platform's dashboard.

Dashboards provide a **graphic overview of essential business data**. Like the gauges on an automobile dashboard, a CRM dashboard's graphs, maps and charts summarize important information at a glance, signaling smooth running conditions or alerting a user to potential problems.

Unlike a car dashboard, a CRM dashboard lets users drill down as needed, moving past the one-glance summary into the details.

Dashboards' Customizable Views

Within a company's CRM implementation, users tap **a single database**… but each employee can generate **a different dashboard** that caters to their particular needs. Dashboard components can be chosen and grouped together into sets custom-made for sales, marketing, or service personnel.

For example, a CRM dashboard customized for marketing executives might create a customized dashboard that visualizes the organization's overall ability at generating and converting leads.

Another dashboard for salespeople's use might use the same database to generate an overview of the current sales pipeline, lists of open opportunities and a comparison of the user's sales performance against their quota.

Dashboards for Better Decisions

Each user gets exactly what they need from the dashboard they choose to see.

Looking at her custom dashboard, an executive will know at a glance that a particular campaign is working a certain percentage better than the others – giving her the confidence to invest more money and manpower in that direction.

On a different dashboard, a salesperson will see how much in sales he needs to close by the month's end to meet quota – and zero in on the most likely prospects that can help him reach his goals.

In short, the dashboard's powerful reporting allows each individual to gain better insight and make more effective decisions.

Dashboards for Better Relationships

No matter how many dashboards a CRM implementation generates, they're all based on one company database that serves as a common basis for analysis and action.

With a CRM in place, information is no longer monopolized by managers, but distributed effortlessly to all stakeholders. A CRM uses data to put all executives, sales personnel and support staff on the same page: a cohesive team with a common purpose.

With immediate access to each customer's history, preferences, past sales interactions and even social media presence, CRM users feel empowered to make better decisions for their clients. With a properly-implemented CRM, you and your customers enjoy warmer, one-on-one relationships – to the benefit of your bottom line.

Managing the Sales Pipeline with a CRM

With a CRM platform at your disposal, you can keep closer tabs on your sales pipeline and maximize your ROI – taking the guesswork out of your customer relationships.

A CRM platform segregates the sales cycle into opportunity stages that track your prospects from the initial contact to the final sale. Once you map the CRM to your own specific opportunity stages, you can use the CRM's specialized tools to develop your leads at every stage until they sign on the dotted line.

You'll be able to refine your approach to individual leads at every stage of the pipeline. You can connect your leads to the right salespeople at the right time. And you can track your marketing campaigns' reach and impact in minute detail.

Let's take a look at the CRM's toolkit for staying on top of your sales pipeline.

Lead nurturing is a marketing automation tool that connects leads to targeted communications corresponding to their stage in the sales cycle. By sending focused marketing and communication keyed to individual prospects' needs, you can move them through the sales cycle until they connect with your salesperson.

A well-crafted lead nurturing campaign can keep non-sales-ready prospects within the sales pipeline, maintaining awareness of your product through targeted emails or white papers that retain the feel of personalized, one-on-one communications. Prospects on nurturing tracks get the information they need, keeping them more likely to make a purchase when the time is right.

This kind of attention pays off: In a recent Forrester survey, nurtured leads were found to provide up to 20% more sales opportunities than their non-nurtured counterparts.

Lead scoring assigns points to leads corresponding to their value to your sales organization. Variables that determine their point score include company size, website visits, email clicks, and activity on social networks.

The scores indicate the prospect's interest and their place in the sales cycle: the CRM can use the score to determine what actions you can take with each lead, and what priority each action should take.

With a lead scoring system in place, your sales staff can save time and energy engaging with leads that promise the best results, leaving aside less promising leads with lower assigned values. You can customize your approach to your prospect based on their score, hastening their progress down the pipeline.

Lead scoring and **lead nurturing** work hand in hand: together, they help your sales team identify the most promising leads and keep them engaged with prompt and relevant communications.

A Smarter Way to Collaborate

How do you bring dozens of sales and marketing people together towards a shared goal? The toolkit in a CRM platform **makes collaboration almost second nature**, even for large and geographically distributed teams.

A quality CRM centralizes customer information and shares it seamlessly across the organization. The CRM's dashboards and apps provide relevant and updated data to both new and experienced team members: the latter can be more effective in reaching out to their leads, and the former experience need less time to be brought up to speed.

Data for Better Collaboration

This data-driven approach revolutionizes collaboration across the board. With access to up-to-the-minute customer information:

- salespeople enjoy improved leverage in their customer relationships, responding to the latter with better planning, communications and problem resolution.

- Managers now have an objective basis for constructive coaching conversations with their salespeople, using facts derived from the CRM to guide their charges towards improved outcomes.
- And executives can make better-informed business decisions based on the inputs of productive team members across the board.

Immediate Access from the Cloud

The best CRMs were built as natives of the cloud – further eliminating any geographical barriers between their users. For mobile-first CRMs like Salesforce, the platform's dashboards and apps can now be accessed anywhere with an Internet connection via laptop or mobile device.

The cloud offers other advantages for CRM users besides mobility and ease of collaboration.

By staying in the cloud, CRMs can keep costs low, by eliminating the need for special hardware installations or software updates, and permitting flexible pricing depending on the feature set and the number of users.

Users also enjoy flexible functionality and scalability to boot: you'll pay only for the features you need, while retaining the ability to scale up as business improves.

The Smart Move: Getting Started with CRM

You may need a CRM if...

Your team has difficulty collaborating. Customer information is stored in multiple locations without a unifying platform to see them in, such as individual emails or spreadsheets stored in different computers. As a result, your team has no basis for collective analysis and action.

You can't adjust service according to each customer's needs. Because you lack the insight to customize your approach to each customer based on their needs and their value to your company, you treat all customers the same way, even customers in wildly different stages of the sales cycle.

Your team can't access data they need, *when* they need it. Even the most hard-working, productive salespeople can get stymied when their valuable information is locked away in Post-its, PCs or unwieldy spreadsheets. How can you respond to customers in a timely manner without a platform that unlocks all that useful data?

You're drowning in busywork. If you spend too much time generating reports and too little time moving your sales forward, then something's gone terribly wrong. These ancillary activities may prevent you from investing enough time managing prospects and finalizing sales.

Are any of these true of your business? If you say “yes”, you're ready to see how a CRM can resolve your issues.

Get a Grip on Your Data

At All Covered, we're ready to help you unlock your team's full potential by bringing your rampant data to heel. We take CRM platforms like Salesforce and Microsoft Dynamics and brainstorm its implementation with your staff, resulting in a CRM solution that corresponds with your company's challenges and objectives.

CRMs only reach their fullest potential when their tools are customized for your particular needs. Throughout the adoption process, we'll tailor your preferred CRM's data fields, workflows and reporting to your specifications; manage its deployment; and provide advice as you transition into implementation.

Whatever your size, whatever your comfort level – whether you're starting from scratch or migrating from other legacy platforms – All Covered’s people can steer you through the complex adoption process.

Once we're done, you'll have a fully customized CRM at your disposal, so you'll be able to get a grip on your data – instead of the other way around.

Ready to get started? Contact All Covered’s Salesforce consultants at 866-446-1133.