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8 Trends of Successful CRM Projects

Description	This white paper provides a detailed description of 8 common trends of successful CRM Projects with solutions that range from SugarCRM, Salesforce.com, Siebel, and SAP CRM.
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Resources	Executive Leadership, CIO, IT Director, VP of Business Divisions, COO
Product Areas	Siebel 7.0 (all versions) and Siebel 8.0 and Professional, Unlimited, and Enterprise Editions of salesforce.com, SAP CRM, Sugar CRM

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To obtain more information regarding an assessment of these CRM trends to use as a guideline for your business needs, please contact crm@tsgonestop.com and reference this paper authored by Temeko Richardson, Samuel Tolble, Michael Rucker.

Background

Customer Relationship Management (CRM) solutions enable businesses to manage and track the relationships, activity, and history of all interactions with its partners, vendors, contacts, leads, customers and accounts. Thorough reporting and analysis of these relationships can foster crucial decision making surrounding the actual and projected revenue, marketing initiatives, lead conversion, spending constraints for accounts, and customer service quality. Many CRM projects are not successful because the big bang approach is attempted to solve all needs at once. Others are not successful because of politics between IT and business stakeholders. However, there are successful CRM projects that have proven to not be as painful in terms of time, money, and resources.

This white paper identifies eight key trends of successful CRM projects that combat the key issues often found in CRM projects. When creating the CRM vision, taking these trends into consideration increases the chance of success and decreases the likelihood of excessive allocation of spending, time, and resources.

What Are The Trends?

Trend 1. The Right Solution is Selected for Reasonable Implementation Time

If the solution does not fit the business model or revised business processes with out-of-the-box functionality, it should not be considered if it can not be implemented with minimal customizations or integrations with external systems. Executive Leadership, in most successful CRM projects, hire an independent vendor selection committee to work with top business and IT management to determine which solution best meets the business needs. Long-time employees prove to be the worst gauge of what is the best solution for the overall vision. These independent vendor selection consultants usually have implemented several CRM solutions for different companies and utilize this expertise in selecting the right package.

Additionally, all timelines and deadlines of existing work are considered into the planning of the CRM solution to determine an accurate schedule for deployment. The cost of the implementation, while extremely important, never outweighs the reasonable scheduling and deadlines that guide user expectations and staff workload.

Trend 2. Choosing the Right Implementation Vendor Makes the Difference

While it is great to choose one of the Big 5 Consulting spin-off firms to implement the CRM solution, the most successful CRM projects chose smaller referenceable consulting firms based on feedback from prior and existing clients. Smaller consulting firms yield more efficient results from the design to production phases and painstakingly take more pride and ownership in the success of the CRM implementation.

Instead of numerous pages of documentation to pad the timeline and engage more consultants, smaller consulting firms are more cost-conscious and provide comprehensive documentation that address the questions with expert gap, functional, and technical specifications regarding development, data conversion, data integration, data quality, testing, training, and production support. In most of the CRM projects, they provide three times the results in the same time as Big 5 Consulting Firms because their focus is referenceable clients in proposed timeframes rather than keeping employees off the bench.

Trend 3. Negative People Are Never on the Core Team

There will always be nay-sayers but negative energy destroys CRM projects. The lazy, nonchalant, disgruntled employees are better served either removed from the project or engaged at the system testing phase where the negativity will force them to try to break the system, thereby identifying potential bugs and missed functionality that can be resolved before user acceptance testing with additional development.

Any resources that do not want to contribute more than their job requirements fall into this category. Keeping these employees away from the design and build stages proved extremely helpful. Production support involvement with top-notch employees ensures minimal blemishes on user acceptance, management buy-in, and the positive energy required for a successful CRM solution.

Trend 4. Hybrid Teams Yield Better Results

When reviewing the makeup of successful CRM teams, there is always a hybrid approach to implementation from the design phase to the production support phase. Usually there is a counterpart on the client side to the lead developer, lead tester, and lead integrator from the third party vendor. Additionally a business lead or analyst that understands the business process for each system function works closely with technical leads to ensure requirements are met and enough time is allotted for the design, build, and testing phases.

In the case of hiring an implementation consulting firm that uses an offshore development team, there are usually two employees or consultants that work on behalf of the client to propose changes and challenge findings of the third-party vendor – a Senior Project Manager that understands developing checkpoint analyses, scorecards, and detailed project plans and a Technical Lead (consultant with years of experience in delivering the CRM solution) that leads the offshore team and determines what complex logic needs to be developed in-house. This prevents the business logic from being lost in translation.

Trend 5. Bad Processes are Eliminated as Part of CRM Readiness

The CRM Readiness project seeks to remove all potential problems for a successful CRM vision. All business processes in successful CRM projects are evaluated before the project begins to identify the ones that require re-engineering, removal, or postponement of adherence. If the business process is poorly designed (requires long turnaround or processing time, involves too much politics, or proves to be costly), it is reengineered or eliminated altogether as part of the CRM Readiness effort.

Successful CRM projects have executive stakeholders that understand a bad process implemented in a CRM solution is nothing more than an automated bad business process that requires more customization – ultimately spending more in time, resource, and budget.

Trend 6. Data Quality and Reliability Is Planned In Early Phases

Recognizing that data conversion must be planned and developed at the same time of development is key to a successful CRM vision. Migrating data from old systems to the new solution is often planned with data quality (cleansing) initiatives at the forefront of the design stages. Integration with external systems is strategically planned with data experts to ensure there is no loss of data reliability when the new CRM solution is implemented.

Once all data points are identified that require de-duping, conversion, and integration, a mapping process is begun to point out any loopholes or gaps where data might be missing or not accurate for visibility and reporting in the new CRM solution. Gathering this information at an early stage allows business sponsors to quickly realize an ROI for collecting data in one system.

Trend 7. Reporting Is Not an Afterthought

Most CRM projects undertake reporting as the last phase but successful CRM projects keep the purpose of management visibility in the forefront of all planning and designing. Since this is always a priority and top reason for implementation, reporting is planned early in the design stages. To accomplish this goal, there is usually an ODS (operational data store) and DW (data warehouse) expert that can gauge the accuracy of data reliability from the new CRM solution and determine if it fits the existing reports and how many, if any, reports must be revised.

Needless to say, effective reports depend on data quality and data reliability and the ability to capture data based on functionality in the CRM solution. Planning to change reports ahead of time with accurate schedules that meet end users' expectations is essential for a CRM win.

Trend 8. Testing Time Is At Least Double the Development Time

Too often testing is performed in a crunch period with no time for regression testing and user acceptance testing. The standard rule of allotting two times the development time for accurate testing still applies. Testing involves unit/functional testing, system testing, user acceptance testing, and regression testing to re-test errors that are resolved by the development team in the areas of programming, database performance tuning, scripting, customizations, database development, or other external coding/mapping.

The most common traits of successful CRM projects have five testing cycles to test the following areas: 1) data quality and conversion – pointing out problems with duplicates, wrong fields populated, data not visible, data mapped incorrectly, 2) data quality, conversion, and functionality – regression testing of #1 with the testing of the system functionality as intended to meet business requirements, 3) data quality, conversion, functionality, reporting and integration – regression testing of #2 with testing of reporting and data integration (passing data from/to external systems), and 4) regression testing of #3 and user acceptance testing, and 5) regression testing of #4.

Conclusion.

In summary, CRM projects can be a success and do not have to be over budget, amassing resources and time indefinitely. CRM projects do not have to be lengthy implementations if the big-bang approach is ruled out and an approach that is manageable and can be handled in as little as three to six months. Executive leadership and business stakeholders can use the aforementioned trends experienced across multiple CRM implementations to ensure they are traveling down the highway of CRM success.

For an assessment, contact TSG One Stop at 310-860-4795 or send a request to crm@tsgonestop.com.