

Optimizing CRM strategy at the **point of contact**

CRM solutions are implemented in the hope of better managing information and customer relationships. Unfortunately, purchasing new CRM technology alone does not ensure greater customer satisfaction and wallet share. **John Broderick**, CEO of Cicero, Inc., explores how improved operational efficiency at the point of contact is critical to optimizing your CRM strategy.

Businesses today are utilizing wide-ranging resources to better understand and resolve two critical management issues: inefficient operations in customer-facing business channels that require increasing numbers of employees and resources; and ineffective CRM practices, both which fail to retain customers or grow revenue. As the demand for business stability and growth accelerates, one thing remains constant: business value is driven by the precise combination and maximization of operational productivity.

Many successful businesses have now taken steps to optimize the productive value of their internal business resources with the knowledge that management of these essential business assets (people, processes and technology) leads to operational stability and allows greater focus on managing and growing existing customers. It's no secret that a strong focus on customers and their business relationships will lead to direct growth in revenue. These operational imperatives are the primary factors for strengthening a business' profitability as well as its overall value and position in the marketplace.

Strategic asset management is, in effect, CRM; and in its basic form today, CRM does work. However, ineffective management of internal business resources has served to reduce the CRM value proposition and has led to discussions about the validity and viability of CRM technology.

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The management of your organization's internal business resources drives and determines the value of your CRM strategy and its ultimate success. More specifically, businesses should focus their attention on just how knowledge workers interact with customers through the various channels and then identify appropriate methods of improving efficiency by using their existing internal resources. When a customer speaks with an agent in a contact center, they expect that agent to not only have their information readily available but also be able to handle their request efficiently. This ready access to customer information, immediate ability to resolve customer issues, and seamless transition to offering further service is fundamental to ensuring customer satisfaction. On the whole, CRM has been able to provide some of these features such as accessing information quickly and other shortcuts to

improve productivity, but there is still more to be done.

We have recognized the shortfalls of CRM and applied a solution that significantly improves customer management by creating an intelligent view of the customer. This solution is desktop integration, which extends CRM by providing data and process integration intelligently where and when it is needed most – at the point of contact. By examining how knowledge workers use their current tools to provide service such as CRM and then using desktop integration to incorporate other internal and external business resources such as billing, inventory and others, businesses are able to create intelligent views of information that are specific to the context of their customer's needs.

From a CRM perspective, employees who interact with customers, either face-to-face or by contact media (voice, e-mail, fax, chat, etc.), have richer, more meaningful on-hand information at their desktops that enable them to enhance the customer's transactional experience. These employees are able to affect a higher level of customer service and satisfaction, build stronger customer loyalty and increased customer retention. This, in turn, means increased customer revenue contribution. Customer-facing business channels must establish themselves as major players on their company's strategic management teams by demonstrating that they can achieve the types of operational management gains that drive stronger corporate growth and higher profitability. Understanding and managing their businesses toward an effective and efficiently run operational management platform is an essential criterion for the success of the strategic management strategy.

Desktop integration enables customer contact channels to meet the challenges of creating an increase in customer satisfaction and loyalty while improving employee productivity and reducing overall operating costs. Operations managers are able to effectively balance the strict business requirements of providing solid customer service delivery while managing higher operational efficiency and the effective control of operating expenses. When this balance of customer service delivery and operational efficiency is attained, the bottom-line results will report loyal, more satisfied, customers while operational productivity levels are more efficiently maintained and operating expenses are better controlled.

In today's complex customer contact business world, balancing the delivery of world-class customer service with the corporate demands of operational efficiency management can affect the realization of increased corporate profitability. A 'must have' in today's CRM business world, desktop integration is a business asset and value that not only enhances the customer experience but also adds to your company's revenue. ■