The Business Owner's Guide to Selecting CRM

A Collier Pickard Publication

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Customer Relationship Management

Many organisations turn to CRM for one of two primary reasons:

- They're in **growth** mode and need to maintain the upward trajectory
- They're in **trouble** and need to retain control and turn things around

Either way, the emphasis is on **control**.

In this short eBook we'll take a look at the decisions you need to make in order to ensure you are in control of every step of the journey when selecting and implementing CRM software.

Primary benefits of CRM

We'll assume that you already have an understanding of what CRM is and the role it can play in your organisation, but let's just quickly review the traditional **benefits** associated with **CRM**:

- ✔️ Better understand your customers and their expectations
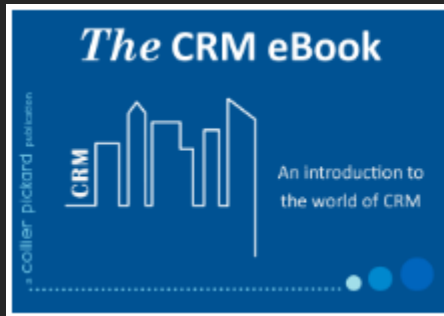- £ Improve the profitability of your business
- 👥 Improve your customer services
- ❤️ Retain your existing customers
- ◎ Find new customers

If you'd like some handy guides to help you communicate the message about CRM and guide your team we have a range of eBooks that can help – starting with *The* CRM eBook – What Works… What Doesn't.

In this eBook we'll cover:

- Challenges you may be looking to overcome with CRM
- How long a CRM implementation takes
- Selecting the right CRM software
- What it's going to cost

But it's easy to get distracted during the research stage of a project, so if you need to cut to the chase at any point just click this **symbol** to talk to one of our consultants.

Or, if you're not ready for a chat with one of our consultants, you can always connect with us on one of these networks:

Or read some more CRM articles on our blog, or just send us an email or drop us a line:

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As your business grows you need to stay in **control**, yet it isn't possible to stay personally involved in every aspect of the day to day operations anymore. Approach any CRM implementation with this in mind.

You need to implement a system that lets you look at the state-of-the-nation at a glance, or drill-down to the minutiae of every deal or customer service case. Any system you implement should provide you with all the **understanding** you need to retain control...

... Including **staff accountability**. Your system should enable you to identify areas where staff performance is exceeding expectations and where it isn't quite up to the mark, allowing you to nurture your team appropriately.

These reports don't have to be complex and highly detailed. Sometimes a simple "white space" report can reveal the most interesting aspects of your system. By noticing the information that is not there you'll immediately see areas in need of **attention**.

The **infrastructure** in your company needs to grow along with the business. If you're not careful you may find yourself using a number of disparate systems, competing against each other for data and attention. This can cause a lot of headaches for any organisation, particularly as unravelling discrepancies between these systems can be costly.

Implementing a single, **unified** CRM system allows your team to access all the data they need in one place – a one-stop shop. With this level of access they can make better decisions and reduce wasted time and effort.

Better yet, a well implemented CRM system will **grow** as your organisation does, adapting to new conditions and integrating with new tools that let you further tailor your infrastructure.

Perhaps you're in a position where you think it's time to start transitioning **power** from yourself to your management team, allowing you to take things a bit easier. A well cultivated CRM system can make this transition a lot less painful than it could otherwise be.

You can focus on the information that's in the system or missing from CRM to inform your **strategy** for handing over responsibilities. And again, you can see at a glance, all the key information you need to see, allowing you to turn your attention elsewhere as you need (or want) to.

Now you can spend your time elsewhere, but still keep a **watchful** eye over the day to day activities of your organisation, without having to call on your management team to report to you at length on each and every prospect, order, customer service case, etc.

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Sales teams across every industry are often weighed down by policies and procedures that can disrupt the actual process of selling. Implementing CRM can help navigate these blockades and help your sales team do what you hired them to do – **sell** more.

Whether it's through **automation** of repetitive tasks like meeting follow-ups, order processing or other administrative tasks, or by offering analytical tools to help sales people discover valuable, timely and insightful information on their prospects, CRM has a lot of offer.

The **analysis** you can perform in CRM can be expanded to create proven best practices for your organisation as well. As your sales team matures they can look back at a detailed record of all past prospects and leads and identify commonalities in won or lost bids and use this information to build a best practice sales handbook to further their chances of closing future deals. This helps keep your existing team on the right path and enables you to rapidly train new sales people to an excellent standard.

But **automation** doesn't have to be limited to the activities of your sales team. Marketing, customer services, accounts, and just about any team with a customer facing role can benefit from CRM.

Automating repetitive tasks can increase the accuracy and effectiveness of your team and free up their time to concentrate on other aspects of their roles. Plus, if everyone is working from the same database and everyone can **trust** the data it contains, you'll benefit from a reduction in errors in order processing, invoice raising and other costly activities.

All of these **improvements** maximise the efficiency of your organisation whilst simultaneously driving down your operational costs.

Now that we've covered a few of the reasons why you might be looking at CRM and the benefits a well implemented system can deliver (remember there's more on both these topics in *The* CRM eBook or on our blog), we'll switch tracks and take a look at how you make the right **choice** of CRM software for your organisation.

A major concern for business owners considering implementing a system like CRM is the amount of **time** it will take to get it right. CRM is often seen as complex, but the truth is that the level of complexity involved varies wildly depending on where, how and why it is being implemented in the first place.

By developing a CRM **strategy** (more on that in our eBook of the same name) and preparing for CRM in advance of trying to implement it you can help to minimise the costs and amount of time required to complete your project.

Plan ahead! You'll be glad you did. If you rush into it without enough thought, CRM is unlikely to work for you and you'll be left with an expensive and underperforming bit of software, reviled by your staff…

Armed with your CRM plans you can now start looking at the available **software**. Sadly though, this can also seem like a bit of a minefield. Software vendors (CRM and otherwise) are pretty much always about the features. They'll go to great lengths to tell you their product can do 'A' and are all about 'B', 'C', 'D' etc...

It can be overwhelming and it can blindside you into thinking you have to look for particular features in the software you select – even if those features really aren't **relevant** to your business.

Stick with your plan! Remember the **reasons** why you've opted for CRM in the first place. Look for CRM systems that meet your criteria and try not to be swayed by all the bells and whistles on offer. The chances are most of those bells and whistles are in just about every other CRM system anyway, in some form or other, even if they aren't labelled the same.

It can be helpful to get some independent **advice** at this stage, so if you'd like some help selecting the right software, feel free to get in touch.

Another thing to consider is whether you want your CRM software installed on hardware in your premises, or accessed online whilst hosted in the cloud. There are pros and cons to both sides – too many to go through in any great detail here, but we can cover the basics at least!

On-Premise is great if you already have the IT setup needed for CRM as this means a low cost of ownership. Also, deployments tend to be favourable for companies with particular security concerns. By keeping all the installations on site, you know you have total control over who can access your data at any given time. You'll need to invest in the infrastructure to support the installation and maintenance of your system however, including hiring staff with the necessary IT and hardware knowledge to keep things up and running.

Cloud deployments tend to be a little more agile. Gone are the costly hardware and technical knowledge requirements. In their place is a sleek CRM system that's kept running by others so you don't have to worry. What's more, it's a system that you can access from a huge range of internet enabled devices, from anywhere in the world, at any time. Provided your service provider keeps the system running.

If you're still looking for help selecting the right system for your organisation, there are a handful of CRM **software comparison sites** online that might be able to help you narrow your choices down. This can be a handy approach as it brings the number of systems you look at down from potentially dozens and dozens to a smaller, more manageable amount.

But these sites can be a little bit **misleading**. Fairly often they'll take your request for comparisons and match you against the vendors' requirements – vendors who are going to pay for your details, rather than matching your requirements to the software. Once your details have been passed on to everyone suitable on their books you can look forward to being hounded by sales teams from each firm for the foreseeable future.

If you're happy to fend off the telesales approaches then it can't hurt to take the comparison site approach, but just be **aware** of what you're getting yourself into!

Whilst you can work out which CRM system you need and formulate your CRM strategy by yourself, you might find (as we talked about earlier) that this is a huge time commitment. Instead, it might be worthwhile bringing in a third party to assist you. An **independent CRM consultant** can not only save you time but **expose** you to the best practices that will make your CRM system shine.

A good consultant will bring a wealth of **knowledge** to the table. From the right way to optimise the design of your system to a detailed knowledge of the inner workings of leading systems that may reveal features and functions you didn't know were there.
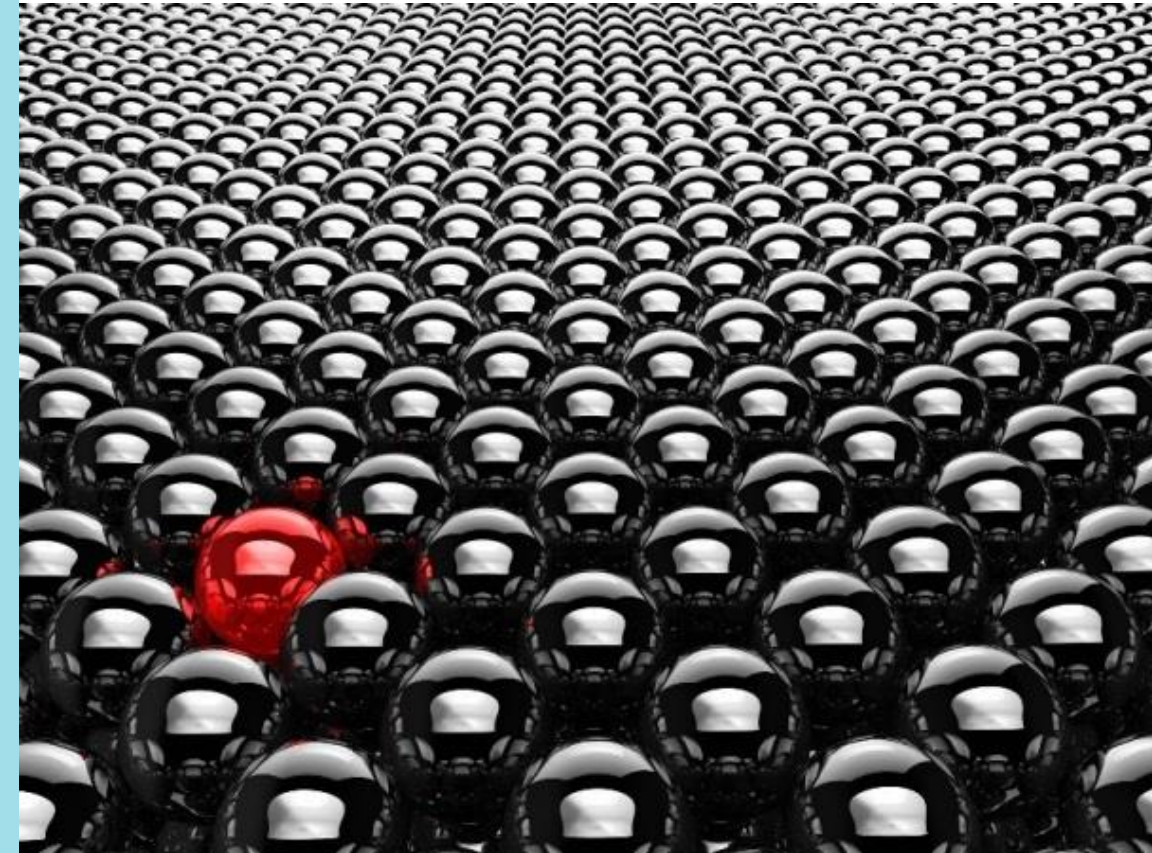
A great consultant will also be able to help you with more than just CRM. Customer Relationship Management systems don't sit in isolation anymore. Instead, they are the core of an expanding **universe of systems** designed to optimise your business and your customer's experience working with you. From marketing automation to back office integrations, your consultant should be able to make CRM a living and breathing part of your organisation.

When you consider a third party consultant, check their **background**. Do they have experience in your industry? Can they offer you client references? Do your research before-hand then reap the rewards.

How much will CRM **cost**?

It's really difficult to answer this question, unfortunately. There are a lot of **variables** to consider. Most of the leading cloud based systems now offer reasonable PUPM (per user per month) contracts that can make working out pricing a bit easier, but be careful of hidden costs! There are still a number of vendors (including at least one major system that we know of) that offer seemingly cheap rates that mask a multitude of hidden charges.

On-premise solutions require hardware to maintain the systems and the training of staff to handle all the administrative and technical side of things. Cloud CRM can be a cheaper approach, with the elimination of expensive hardware and maintenance requirements, but you'll need to consider how your staff would **access** the system from anywhere at any time. Who will supply the devices they use? Will you have to pay for them?

Don't be put off by this, though. CRM needn't be the expensive behemoth of a system it's been perceived as in the past. It can be **flexible** and suited entirely to your budget – particularly with the aid of an experienced consultant to help you keep costs low.

Whichever route you choose it's worth calculating the total cost of ownership for each approach over 3, 5 and 7 years. You may be surprised by the result!

Where now?

Hopefully we've covered a number of pertinent areas today. CRM selection is an area we can (and often do) talk about at great length and there just isn't room in this introductory eBook to address everything.

So if you'd like more **information** on CRM, here are a few more resources we've created to help you:

eBooks   **Videos**

Or if you'd like to talk to one of our consultants about your CRM project you can arrange a free, online consultation here:

Consultation

Or if you'd like to sit back and let the information come to you for a while before you make any big decisions, you can connect with us on these social networks...

Or subscribe to our blog. That way you'll receive a steady stream of CRM information that you can dip into as your time and interest allows!

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All that remains to be said is good luck with your CRM project!

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