

Deploying a relationship management solution can be fraught with difficulties. Here are some suggestions on how to decrease the risk and increase the success of your next deployment...

By Phillip Paton

BEATING THE ODDS

10 Tips to Successfully Implement a Relationship Management Solution

What does it take to successfully implement a Relationship Management solution? Why is it that some implementations fail to deliver the expected benefits? Even if the software you select provides the required functionality, why is it that some users refuse to use the solution? Here are ten tips for getting it right.

1. Spend the right amount of time scoping the solution first

Even if you have already purchased your CRM software, resist the urge to start configuring and using the software before defining the

scope. Relationship Management is first and foremost a business strategy and each business will be different. Sales, marketing, services and other activities are critical to most businesses. Before you start configuring software, document the main objectives of the solution. Create a list of up to twelve key objectives and agree with your team the priority. For each primary objective, document the processes and data that will need to be collected. Also consider what is important and what can be left for later. As an example determining your customer segmentation will be much easier to decide on a whiteboard than when setting up the software.

A well defined scope sets the foundation

for the implementation. It means that most of the hard thinking is done up front. When it comes time to configure the software, the decisions will be mostly made and hopefully a matter of configuration. It also focuses your attention on your business rather than a bunch of features that your software provides. A good scope document should cover core objectives, roles and responsibilities, output requirements, potential software issues, business improvements or process changes, decisions that still need to be made, data conversion, integration requirements, end user training requirements and post go live opportunities.

Keep it simple. Document your output in a Word document. Involve senior management in the core objectives and ask them to sign off. If you get this right, you are well on the way to reducing the risk in your implementation.

2. Determine the 'what's in it for me' factor

Consider the key types of users and their roles. Think about each of these roles and the "what's in it for me" factor. If you cannot provide something important that helps them do their job then why would they use the solution? A large New Zealand company recently implemented their sales solution and a key factor was that they provided access to their customer's previous purchases. This allowed their salespeople to easily understand when leases were due and when they should engage. Even though they had access to this information in their ERP system, they would rarely bother as it was too hard for them to use. By providing easy access to this information it guaranteed that salespeople would use CRM. It sounds pretty simple and it is.

3. Implement in stages and deliver something quickly

Don't lock away a project team for months to deliver the solution - by the time you go live, the business requirements would probably have changed. If you do nothing else, deliver in stages with each stage taking no longer than two months. Focus on getting the core functionality and data correct and then move on. The Scope

should allow you to prioritise and ensure that you get the basics right.

4. Prototype the solution and involve key users along the way

Keep key users involved in the implementation. If you prototype the software and involve the users in regular reviews, you will have a much better chance of delivering something that they want to use. It will also allow you to make minor changes as you go. These users will also talk to their colleagues and help create momentum for the implementation.

5. Select your technology carefully

Rather than selecting your technology by attending a slick sales presentation and getting excited at the pretty charts and graphs, provide the vendor with some key processes for your company and ask them to demonstrate these with your data. This will allow you to understand not only the capability of the software, but also the capability of the implementation company to understand your requirements. Focus on a software solution that is easy to use, works with the desktop software that you already have and that will provide agility and flexibility. Most importantly you need software that can easily be changed as your business requirements change and one that you users will want to use. Recognise that change will still happen for many reasons and that your company's success is linked to its ability to rapidly and effectively adjust to change.

6. Good enough is good enough

Don't evaluate software by looking for every possible feature that you might ever need. The software should be able to be customised to provide new functionality without the need for the vendor to necessarily release new versions. Focus on how easily your users will be able to use the software, how much training will be required and how it works within the existing tools they use today for office productivity. Often good enough is good enough. It's much more important to select a tool that people will use. Many companies select software with every

option in the world and then only implement a fraction of the functionality. More features do not equal more chance of success. Longer implementation timeframes and over engineered functionality will increase the risk that your project will be unsuccessful.

7. Focus on user adoption

Focus on a tool that works the way your people work. If they are used to sending an email or booking a meeting with a customer in a particular way, then CRM should not change this. If possible reduce the number of applications on the desktop. The user needs to be educated on what they need to use CRM for, but with minimal training they should be able to easily pick up the use of their CRM and see value within their own role in using it.

Focus on some key outputs in Stage One that delivers insight on the business that was previously not available.

8. Align business and IT

Relationship Management needs to be driven by the business as well as IT. It's important that the business signs off its business requirements. Ensure that appropriate divisions of your company are connected when determining the overall Scope and Stage One deliverables. It is important that IT is involved in the selection of technology that fits their environment, is easy for them to support and integrates with other systems. It's probably more importantly the software manages the right information and supports the necessary business processes. Remember that Hosted CRM is just a "how" – not a "what". Whether your system runs on your local servers or runs over the Internet there is a lot more to CRM than just buying a product. Focus first on the kinds of CRM capabilities and functions your users will need, both in the short term and over time.

9. Go Live doesn't mean it is all over

Many organisations believe that once they have gone live with a CRM solution they are all done, however Relationship Management will continue to evolve within any organisation.


New types of customers, products and ways of conducting business will occur over time. It's important to advise management that they need to continue to invest in CRM on an ongoing basis. When the initial implementation is completed your requirements for subsequent stages will be much clearer. Ensure that you review the success of the initial implementation and plan to provide extra training to staff after Go Live. Continue to review the ongoing priorities within the business.

10. Develop internal capability

Lastly, ensure that your implementation partner trains your key people so that they can continue to enhance your solution without the need to engage the partner every time you need a minor enhancement. Also allow enough time for your people to check that the benefits are being delivered so that you can fine tune your future enhancements.

Summary

It's also important to understand that Relationship Management isn't just about customers. It can also be used for Supplier Management, Channel Management, Partner Management or be used to implement a specific industry solution where customers may or may not be included. Maybe a better acronym should have been xRM where the x could mean almost anything.

The above tips are my views based on a few years of practical experience and I hope that they help in any future implementations. 

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

> Phillip Paton is a Director of Altair Computer Systems, a New Zealand based consultancy firm. He has been actively involved in implementing CRM for a number of companies. He recently left Microsoft where he was responsible for the launch and ongoing development of Microsoft CRM over the last three years.