
Transforming Customer Relationships and Your Business through Integration: Why Trust Is the New Currency

Executive Summary

Your company needs to earn the trust of its customers; simply because they are a customer does not entitle you to their trust. How your company builds that trust starts with sales and service, not PR and advertisements. Being able to delight your customer and build trust begins with knowing and understanding their needs. This knowledge can only come from a complete appreciation of their experiences with you. These experiences are captured in diverse systems across your business including your customer relationship management system (CRM), your customer service system and your marketing automation system. These may be legacy or new systems, and may be in the cloud or on-premise. Regardless, integrating these diverse, often siloed systems, can serve as a powerful catalyst for making your business more customer-centric and is the foundation for building trust. This white paper is for companies seeking to make customer relationship excellence a core part of their DNA and the essence of their business.

Attributes of Earning Trust

Businesses that excel in customer relationship management make each prospect and customer interaction matter, enriching it with the insight and intelligence gathered throughout the organization. Replicating that level of performance across thousands of customer interactions a day, regardless of communications or selling channels, distinguishes the leaders

and makes their businesses great. To achieve this level of success, these businesses must make both legacy and new applications communicate whether onpremise or in the cloud. This integration of systems is the foundation of the trust that customer-centric businesses forge with their customers. Trust is the new currency and it's time for companies to design their systems with it in mind.

There are seven key attributes of companies who excel at earning trust by integrating their CRM, legacy and customer systems to deliver real-time insights and intelligence. These attributes are:

1. Placing a Very High Priority on Customer Agility

The best performing businesses today anticipate that change itself is accelerating over time. They're integrating CRM, legacy, customer and service systems to stay in-step with customers' expectations. As customers continually seek out new channels to learn about your products, integrating systems to deliver the information they need, when they need it, is critical to exceeding their expectations.

2. Striving to Be Accountable Across All Channels, All the Time

This is only possible when there is real-time integration of CRM, legacy, customer, pricing and service data across all sales and service channels. Social media is urgently forcing this accountability, as authenticity, transparency and trust are the new differentiators companies need to rely on. It is time to step up and accept the challenge of being responsive to your customers across all channels, all the time.

3. Getting Every Person in the Company to Own the Customer Experience

You can feel it when you visit companies that have this quality. There is an emphasis on excellence in customer experience. It permeates these businesses and differentiates them from competitors. The energy, enthusiasm and stories abound of employees going the extra-mile to delight prospects and customers alike. Getting to this level of intensity starts with every employee owning the customer experience and being active on CRM, customer service and training systems.

4. Always Being Ready to Engage, Enrich and Inform Prospects and Customers 24/7

Social media has raised expectations across all industries when it comes to being available to engage and interact with prospects and customers. Only by integrating CRM, legacy, 3rd party, enterprise and cloud-based systems can a company stay in-step with these continually increasing expectations and deliver the level of responsiveness and attentiveness required to build long term relationships.

5. Knowing That When It Comes to Selling, Better Intelligence Drives Better Results

The most trusted companies not only have a passion for delivering excellent service, they also have a passion to teach. They freely share excellent content even if it doesn't necessarily contribute to the sale directly. In pursuing this strategy they earn the role

of trusted advisor with their customers. Being trusted is more important than being the low-price leader.

6. Having Predictable, Reliable Customer Performance

Making each customer relationship strategy solid and reliable starts with well thought-out system and process integration. It's time to quit relying on stand-alone, siloed CRM systems that only provide a partial view of the customer. By integrating CRM, legacy and Cloud-based systems, companies are getting a true, 360-degree view of their customers and excelling on the dimensions of predictability, performance and trust.

7. Making Responsiveness the New Dial Tone in Customer Relationships

Choosing which interactions to automate and which to invest in-person contact via phone, e-mail, chat or face-to-face meetings, has a big impact on earning new sales and keeping existing customers. The insights gained by integrating CRM, legacy, analytics and performance management-based analytics both on-premise and in the cloud are giving companies an idea of which interaction or touch points they need to invest in first. Using integration as a catalyst for gaining greater competitive and market intelligence is occurring at a quickening pace today, consequently guiding selling and service strategies.

The Many Challenges of Becoming Customer-Centric

While these attributes are key in building trust and becoming a customer focused organization, it can be a challenging feat to put them into practice. Many companies experience various difficulties that act adversely towards this larger goal of gaining trust and lifetime customers. With customer expectations growing, and the time to act rapidly shrinking, it is important to identify the common pitfalls negatively impacting an organization's ability become customer-centric.

Inflexible, Internally Focused IT Systems Slow Down Information Flows

Many IT systems designed over the last three decades never factored in the need for real-time performance or even a customer-driven strategic focus. Chief Information Officers (CIOs) cannot realistically rip and replace their existing enterprise systems, yet they need to deliver to meet internal and external expectations.

As a result, CIOs and their teams are turning to integration solutions to unify their enterprise-wide CRM, legacy and service systems so they can continue to meet and exceed customer expectations. Integrations, whether cloud-based or on-premise, of CRM, legacy and 3rd party systems are delivering a complete, real-time view of their businesses. In addition, these integration platforms are making it possible to define Business Intelligence (BI)-based dashboards that include real-time data on critical success factors pertaining to customer

relationships. From using integration to better manage distribution channel selling and profitability performance, to getting a complete view of how customer preference for a new product is changing, integration makes companies more competitive. The CIO and their staff can then compete on intelligence gained from having a complete picture of how the entire business is operating without having to redesign their existing IT or ERP infrastructure.

Lack of a Unified Strategy for Integrating Legacy, CRM, ERP, Supply Chain and Pricing Systems Marginalizes Selling Strategies

Existing IT systems often become a roadblock in many companies quest to become more customer-centric. With no unified strategy in place, sales, marketing, customer service and channel marketing seek individual solutions to their departmental needs which results in an array of siloed systems, many of them decades old. Designed to meet specific business goals and strategies in the past, these systems by themselves are now only delivering a fraction of the value they could if they were integrated together.

Customer relationships in the 21st century are about responsiveness and real-time feedback. Integration helps pre-sales, sales and customer service teams respond with more intelligence, insight, accuracy and speed, thereby transforming the experiences they deliver to customers. By having a unified, enterprise-wide integration strategy that encompasses CRM, selling, channel management and customer service systems, companies are driving up the lifetime value of their customers. Today, companies with solid, scalable and reliable integration strategies are unifying back-end order processing with CRM, guided selling and services systems to further increase Customer Lifetime Value (CLV).

Lack of Customer-Centric Company Culture

The best customer experiences are those that happen when a company is consistently excellent at how they manage every interaction, every day, with each customer. These experiences are highly memorable and build trust. The top-performing companies in each industry share this characteristic. They invest in an enterprise-wide integration strategy to unify all available customer, sales, service and customer satisfaction data into a unified platform, all aligned at getting the right information, at the right time, to the right associate serving a customer.

To make this happen, however, company cultures often must evolve quickly, and there is usually resistance to change. Getting everyone to focus on improved customer responsiveness and exceptional customer experiences is critical, and having integrated information is the core of that change. Once users realize the power of having integrated information readily available, they usually begin to embrace the solution and the cultural challenges lessen. As they see the results of improved responsiveness, the value of CRM and integration becomes clear.

Strategies for Transforming Your Business through Integration

As we have seen, making your business a more customer-driven enterprise is a multifaceted challenge. Using integration as the catalyst to become more customer-centric is delivering significant, long-term results for many companies. Here are several key takeaways based on the analysis of how these companies are connecting, serving and retaining customers.

Integration Creates Intelligence So You Can Sell with Intensity

To become truly customer-centric, legacy systems, applications and the processes supporting them all need to be unified around a common goal of serving prospects and customers with value and insight. It's not about your products anymore, it's about how you sell and service those products. It's also about earning and keeping trust by responding with more intelligence, insight and help than your customers expect – it's about delighting customers.

If you want to survive in the 21st century, forget about competing on price: compete on trust. Invest in intelligence, integration and being the leading provider of quality service. If you put the customer at the top of your integration priorities, many other benefits follow. These include being able to better anticipate, manage and predict the lifetime value of your customers, having greater insight into how your business is really running, and understanding how and why prospects choose you over your competitors. Over the long-term, integrated systems can deliver the most valuable insights into building successful new products (delivering services that are exactly what your customers want) allowing you to continually exceed customer expectations (earning their loyalty in the process).

Audit Yourself Anonymously and Regularly

There are many CEOs who go on CNBC and claim their companies are the most customer-centric ever, yet when you or I as consumers attempt to interact with them, we have disappointing experiences. Why does this happen? It's because they have not taken the time to step outside their companies and realize that despite efforts to consolidate and integrate systems to serve customers, there is still a disconnect.

Consider looking at this as a win/loss analysis and an opportunity to see where you are both strong and weak from a customer relationship standpoint. This gets beyond secret shopper projects as the audits need to test your company's agility and flexibility to deal with non-standard transactions. You have to assume your best customers could be the biggest non-conformists you will ever run into. The good news about that assumption is that if you find a way to serve them well your markets could exponentially increase in size quickly.

No one inside even the most customer-centric companies realizes just how hard they push customers into a box at times. The only way to see this is to audit your company or have a

market research service do the same. Look at this from an integration standpoint and see what you can do to be more responsive, agile across all channels, and capable of staying in step with customers.

Your Customers' Perception of Time Needs to Be Your Own

If you want to excel in managing customer relationships, get tuned in and stay on top of your prospects' and customers' perceptions of time. This includes everything from website performance to how quickly your sales representatives, customer service, warranty repair and 3rd party service providers get back to them based on their phone, social media inquiries, and emails. With responsiveness being the new dial tone of customer relationships, how well your systems, applications and processes are integrated will have an immediate effect on whether you can keep up with customers or not; and keeping up with their pace is critical to retaining their business.

Get Beyond Treating Your Customers Like a Number and Instead Use Analytics to Understand and Treat Them Like People

One of the most important lessons from analyzing companies who use customer information extremely well is that they have progressed beyond seeing customer interactions as transactions. Sure, they are very interested in selling, but they realize that enriching the customer experience with insight, intelligence and relevance to customers' needs is more important.

By integrating previously siloed CRM, legacy, 3rd party and customer service systems, any employee working with a customer on any issue gets an immediate, 360-degree view of their activity with the company. From the simplest question to the most complex purchase, the associate instantly knows how to best service this customer.

This builds trust because the pervasive integration of systems enables customer intimacy and demonstrates respect for customer needs. Customers now know they matter; they are getting the same response across all systems. They become loyal and decide to trust the companies that know them. As a result, these companies grow stronger and more capable of dealing with uncertainty than before. It all starts with a customer-centered integration strategy.

Conclusion

To transform your business and make it more customer-centric, the valuable information your company has locked away in siloed and isolated CRM, customer service and channel management systems needs to be unleashed to serve customers better than before. Responsiveness is the modern dial tone of customer relationships. Getting the right information, to the right person, at the right time, is making the difference between keeping customers, maintaining contracts and winning long-term opportunities to sell into larger enterprises.

It all starts when the full intelligence, insight and customer information your company has, is combined and made available for use during the thousands of customer interactions happening daily. By pursuing an enterprise-wide integration strategy that capitalizes on Cloud-based and hybrid solutions, companies just like yours are excelling at customer relationships and getting smarter every day. Integrating CRM, legacy and 3rd party systems together can deliver long-term competitive advantages that begin with every customer interaction, every day.

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