

Customer Relations Management Through MSLBMDA Partner



6 Guides for Buying CRM Software

Use this checklist to help make sure you get full value on your investment in a customer relationship management system.
By Michael Clapman

Thanks to its promotion by industry experts and a gradually increasing awareness of its value, customer relationship management (CRM) systems are begin embraced by building material dealers. But executives have good reason to be cautious before committing to a software solution. Making sure the software is a good fit with your business and that your staff will embrace and use the software is critical to a successful implementation. Here are six things to consider to be sure that you are getting full value for your money.

1.Ease of use. Salespeople want to spend their time selling. Anything perceived as getting in the way with face-to-face customer time is a negative. Even though CRM software has demonstrated its effectiveness to increase sales, if salespeople see it as cumbersome, they are less likely to use it effectively. Ease of use is critical to overcoming that objection. The software must be easy to learn and simple to use and at the same time must have the power to provide salespeople and management with the tools to accomplish the goals of increasing sales. My rule of thumb is that if it takes more than 30 minutes to learn the basics and to begin using the software, it's too complicated.

2.Minimal data entry. CRM software should be able to "talk" to your point-of-sale (POS) system to avoid duplication of data entry. Your existing customer database should be able to be imported to the CRM system so the software is ready to use from day one. In addition, it should be simple and fast to add new customers, either through an import from your POS system or mass uploading of prospects. And if you do add customers or prospects one at a time, the process should be fast and easy.

3.Flexible. One of the common aspects of CRM software is its ability to collect demographic information about prospects and customers. However, what information you may choose to collect may differ from company to company. The software should be flexible enough to allow you to designate what data to collect. It should have the flexibility to allow you to decide what data from your POS system you wish to access. The software should be flexible enough so that you do not have to change the way you do business in order to use the software.

4.Response time. I regularly confront software that is slow and that seems to take forever for screens to change or data to update. Software vendors should give you the choice of running their software either on your local network on through the Internet in a hosted environment. Regardless of the choice you make, you should confirm that the software runs fast enough to eliminate response time as an issue.

5.Commitment from all levels of staff. The most prevalent reason for CRM installations fail (and it is not uncommon for companies to abandon the software after a significant investment has been made) is that staff resists using the software. There can be a number of reasons for this it can be cumbersome to use, it may be slow, it may require a lot of time to do data entry. But even if all of these factors are addressed, staff may still not be willing to use the software simply because it is an unknown quantity and one that they were not a part of choosing. It is very important that all levels of staff--from top management to data clerks and secretaries--be a part of the decision process from the beginning. The earlier staff at all levels of the company buy into the software and understand how it is going to help them and the company succeed, the more they are going to embrace the software and use it effectively.

6.Set-up, installation and training. The marketplace offers a large variety of CRM software solutions that give you a number of options for installation and training. Often you are either on your own to do the installation and training, or you end up paying a lot more than you expected when you seek assistance. Look for a package that includes set-up and training specific to your company needs, one that will set up the software to match your company hierarchy and that will pre-load your existing customers so that you are ready to use the software from day one without a lot of data entry.

CRM software can help increase sales and profit margin, but like any software, it is only effective if it is used effectively. By embracing the tips in this article, you are far more likely to have a successful implementation that will enable you to generate more customers, more profit and more productivity for many years to come.

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