

## CRM Facilitates Business Growth

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### **IT and Business Development Collaboration Key to Project Success**

Market research company Key Note, estimates that the accountancy market will reach a market value of £27.25bn in 2015, growing by 25 per cent over the 2010-2015 period. While this is positive, there is guarded optimism in the sector as like most professional services industries, the accountancy sector too is affected by the current, unrelenting financial crisis. Alongside this, globalisation and growth of the Asian economies are forcing a change in the traditional accountancy practice business model. Efficiency is recognised as a major contributor to profitability and growth.

There is appreciation that technology can facilitate smooth business operation and efficiency. Practice management and finance systems are now widely deployed in accountancy firms and business process and workflow technology are creeping up higher on the agenda. Many firms are exploring different infrastructure options such as cloud computing too. Regulatory requirements are further fuelling this approach. For instance, since 1<sup>st</sup> April 2011, accountants can only submit corporate tax returns electronically. Developments like the new code of practice for auditors and supervisors in 2011 from the Financial Services Authority and the Bank of England are also initiating change in the profession, making a case for leveraging technology to ensure for compliance.

In the current market conditions, winning new clients and retaining existing ones is challenging. Companies often comment that it is easy to find accountancy firms, but difficult to choose one. Consequently, customer relationship management (CRM) systems are being considered by business development teams in accountancy practices for client retention, cross selling, focussed marketing and impactful communication with customers and prospects alike. Aligning CRM with business development strategies enables accountancy firms to stand out from the crowd.

CRM systems help firms harness the deep-rooted relationship intelligence that exists in the organisation and leverage it for business growth and competitive advantage. They act as the central repository of data and provide information that goes beyond who knows who, offering a 360 degree view of contacts, customers and prospects and uncovering hidden relationships and opportunities, which is very valuable.

#### **Collaborative approach between IT and business development key to CRM success**

While IT departments are fully involved in the running and maintenance of key business systems, traditionally, they have viewed CRM as a purely business development initiative. This is perhaps one of the biggest reasons why CRM deployments have a high failure rate in accountancy practices. IT can play a substantial role in assisting their firms meet business targets and achieve growth by supporting CRM.

Experience shows that a collaborative approach between IT and business development for CRM adoption delivers the best results to accountancy practices. Whereas business development owns the system and drives CRM use, IT is instrumental in administering the system from a technological standpoint. In addition, IT must integrate CRM with firms' key systems so that the discipline



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underpins the entire business. This is key to maximising the business benefits of a CRM system as it helps create a “winning” mentality in organisations – ensuring client satisfaction and winning new clients doesn’t remain the remit of the business development and marketing teams alone, but the goal of the entire organisation.

Begbies Traynor Group is a case in point. Today, CRM system LexisNexis InterAction is embedded as a discipline across all the business processes at the firm, which has contributed to enhancing its image of a major national, client-focussed practice.

### **Key implementation and integration issues**

Like any technology implementation, deployment of a CRM system and its integration with other business systems is not without challenges, but the end result is worth the effort. There are a number of things that IT must consider not simply at the time of implementation and integration, but as a matter of routine:

**Data** – Quality of data is important, not quantity. Poor data quality can easily result in project failure. Anecdotally, there are many stories about partners writing off entire CRM systems because they were presented with a database of contacts that was out of date and hence not worth using.

A single repository of data is essential to ensuring accuracy and integrity. Closing down additional data sources and entry points is a good way of achieving this. Continual data management is important too. It is advisable to execute daily, weekly, monthly and even annual data management processes to keep on top of data change management. The major best-of-breed CRM systems come with in-built data management tools such as a ‘data change management inbox’ where staff can protect and centrally maintain data.

Further, integrating CRM data with Microsoft Outlook is essential. This gives users direct access to key customer details such as, contact information, mutual connections, dealings with firm colleagues, upcoming meetings and personal notes – much like their own address book. Data is more likely to be clean and accurate as professionals are able to directly make amends, which are then stored in the central data repository.

**Workflow** – The CRM system must integrate with the other business systems in the organisation. This enables information to easily flow from one system to the other, facilitating a seamless work environment across the whole firm – right from marketing, business development and human resources to finance and accounts. CRM then underpins not just marketing communications and business development, but back office procedures too.

Creating new workflows to integrate the CRM system with the practice management and billing system for business development initiatives such as client management, cross selling and business intelligence; and with the internal human resource system are worth considering. The latter ensures that the expertise of internal staff is considered and fully leveraged.

**Compatibility** – Today, given the fast evolving nature of software, upgrading and migrating to newer architecture is unavoidable. Outdated infrastructure costs more time and money to fix when support for the system/software has ceased. When upgrading, compatibility of the CRM system with the new software must be considered. For instance, accountancy practices looking to migrate from Microsoft Outlook 2003 to 2010 must ensure that the CRM system is compatible with the new software. This



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becomes even more pertinent if the CRM system has an Outlook interface as incompatibility can greatly hinder usability.

**Mobility** – There are many elements to this. Given the consumerisation of IT and the Bring Your Own Device trend, it is important to ensure that access to the CRM system is available via a variety of devices such as Blackberry, smartphones and even iPads. Users must be able to access and update data on the move.

Based on many years of experience in advising customers on how to derive the most value from their CRM system, setting up a steering group comprising IT, business development and CRM vendor client advising team members to implement, customise, manage and maintain the system is the best way forward. This approach ensures that the front and back-end tie in tightly together enabling firms to maximise return on investment in the CRM system. In addition, the CRM vendor client advising team offers insight, best practice suggestions and tips and tricks to users, which facilitates firm-wide adoption.

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