



How small firms can get real results with CRM

Dee Blick

Small businesses need CRM (customer relationship management) solutions that are quick and easy to use and deliver results fast. Business writer Rachel Miller reports.

With any business system there's always a trade-off — how much do you have to put into it and how much does it deliver? For small firms, the right CRM system can deliver real results in terms of increased sales but it can still be simple to use.

“You've got to be realistic,” says Dee Blick, fellow of the CIM and author of *Powerful Marketing On A Shoestring Budget: For Small Businesses*. “You need a **robust database** and you need to be able to interrogate it. But as a small business, you can't spend your entire time analysing your data.”

Blick works with many small firms and she says, “If they haven't got a CRM system, it is very difficult to do a joined-up **marketing strategy** with them.”

Knowing your customers
CRM is not just an optional extra, it's the best way to run your business. But whether you start with a paper-based records approach or use a system on your **computer network** such as **Salesforce, Goldmine** or **ACT**, you need to focus on **customer relationship management** if you want to maximise sales and **grow your business**.

“Small businesses need to **know who their customers are**,” says Blick. “You need to know how many customers you have, who

they are and when was the last transaction. You also need to define how 'live' they are. Some of your customers could have lapsed and you may not even know it.” It's important to define **different types of customers**, says Blick. “You've got to be able to spot high value and low value customers, the trundlers and the lapsed customers. Keep it simple. Lapsed customers could be those that haven't bought for six months.”

You'll also need a definition for your **best customers** — whether they're the biggest spenders or the most frequent customers, or offer the greatest revenue potential. They could even be prestigious or key influencers that help to bring in more business. “You need to know who your VIPs are,” says Blick. “At the same time, you need to collect the names of enquirers and prospects.”

Once you have decided on your customer groupings, you need to ensure that the CRM system you choose can store this information and search and **segment by your criteria**. You'll also need to establish that existing information can be brought across easily and that the **computer network** will be able to talk to your own accounting software, so you don't send marketing mailings to bad debtors for instance.

Talking to the right people
Getting your **contact information** right is absolutely vital, says David Castle, data project executive for Royal Mail. “It's vital to keep your data clean and up to date. You've got to know your customers. It's easy to make assumptions and get it wrong so you've got to find out who your customers are. Then you can send tailor-made messages to different sectors. It doesn't matter how brilliant your

message is if you are talking to the wrong people.”

Messages need to be well-targeted and need to inspire customers to act. “You need to create added value communications, such as an **email** welcoming new customers,” suggests Blick. Make sure your materials are creative, focused and interesting.

“I've worked with firms that had been banging out the same old email to customers for years,” says Blick. “When I came up with a new email for one client, we got a 60% response from their lapsed customers. So it is important to ask yourself, is your communication formulaic or is it a passionate customer-focused communication using lots of warm friendly words?”

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About Dee Blick

Chartered Marketer and CIM Fellow Dee Blick is one of the UK's best-selling small business authors. The *Ultimate Small Business Marketing Book* reached number 1 on Amazon UK within 48 hours of its launch and entered Amazon's top 150 books within four weeks. There are currently 36 out of 36 five star reviews on Amazon. Dee has 28 years marketing experience and is the marketing columnist for FMWF part of Mail on Sunday, BT Marketing and RSB. Her book is currently being serialised by Royal Mail. Dee is also the author of another No 1 best seller - *Powerful Marketing on a Shoestring Budget*.

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