

17 Rules of the Road for CRM







17 Rules of the Road for Customer Relationship Management

When it comes to choosing the right customer relationship management (CRM) system for your business, it's important to understand all the benefits of an integrated CRM system before beginning your selection process.

When you launch a CRM implementation, your choices can impact nearly everyone in your company. That's why we've created this booklet. These 17 "rules of the road" for CRM were collected from executives, managers, employees and consultants who shared their experiences with us. Our goal is to provide you with useful information as you choose your own CRM system.

You may be wondering why a software company like ACCPAC® would distribute a booklet that doesn't promote its own products. We're confident that the more you know about selecting and implementing a CRM system, the more likely you are to seriously consider – and ultimately choose – products from ACCPAC. That's why we have a vested interest in sharing this information with you.

We at ACCPAC look forward to helping you succeed in choosing the best CRM solution for your organization.

17 Rules of the Road for Customer Relationship Management

Before You Start

1. CRM is more than a product, it's a philosophy

When your company chooses to implement a customer relationship management system (CRM), it is taking a dramatic step forward in customer commitment. And, since customers drive your business, you're leaping ahead in your ability to generate and manage revenue, too. The benefits of CRM come not only from the product you purchase, but also from the implementation plan you follow. The more thoroughly you embrace a company-wide CRM philosophy, the more your company will benefit from the features your CRM software offers.

CRM philosophy is simple: put the customer first. This is a modern development of the old "the customer is always right" adage on which so many successful businesses have been built. When your business looks at every transaction through the eyes of the customer, you can't help but deliver a better experience to your customers – which in turn increases loyalty to your company. And, through customer-focused business practices, you often find new ways to streamline old methods and jettison administrative overhead that no longer benefits you or your customers.

2. Customers are everywhere: clients, vendors, employees, mentors

It used to be easy to define the word "customer." But companies are becoming more diverse, with multiple locations, employees who telecommute and vendors who function as partners. The idea of "customer" has broadened to include a wide range of end-users of different kinds of corporate information.

For example, employees are customers when they need self-service information on 401(k) plans or other benefits. Shareholders are customers when they're looking for financial information. Vendors are customers when they need detailed specifications before they can proceed with a project. A colleague is a customer when you need to deliver time-critical data. And, of course, the buyer is always a customer whose experience is critical to your bottom line. With a CRM system, you can serve all of the groups who rely on your company for important, timely information.

3. CRM is not contact management

Many mid-size corporations have used some form of contact management software successfully for years, and at first, CRM may not seem much different.

But if you take a closer look at CRM, you'll see that its capabilities go far beyond contact management. CRM systems contain more information about your customers. With CRM, field sales reps can look up more than just customer contact information before they make

a call – they can also evaluate past sales history, credit information and other financial data. They can even look at information for the company's other offices and run reports to find out what's been ordered and what special prices or terms the customer receives. Open tech support calls or other issues are also visible. And, with some solutions, copies of invoices, e-mails and past proposals can all be reviewed – on screen and on the spot.

Unlike contact management, CRM gives the sales rep a complete picture of the client before he or she walks in the door, while delivering support and service agents immediate access to all the information they need to completely resolve customer inquiries.

4. CRM solutions are different for mid-size companies

Some software companies selling CRM would have you believe that you need to buy what they call an enterprise solution that includes all the bells and whistles required for the largest of global enterprises. But for small to mid-size companies this may mean paying for more capacity than is required. In fact, the price of these systems is often so high that any company smaller than a Fortune 500 firm cannot reasonably afford one.

But other vendors have created CRM solutions with the mid-sized company in mind, offering applications that include virtually all of the features common in enterprise solutions, but at a cost that is reasonable for smaller scale users. Even better, many of these solutions can be scaled from as few as five users to as many as you are likely to need in the future. With a CRM solution designed for mid-sized companies, you can start small and grow big without ever wasting your valuable resources on capacity you don't need. You buy what you need, when you need it.

Another benefit of CRM solutions designed from the ground up for mid-sized companies is that they are easier to implement and are fully functional right out of the box. Maybe larger enterprises have the time and resources to spend tailoring a solution and integrating it into their enterprise. But mid-sized companies want a CRM solution that they can get up and running easily, quickly and at minimal cost. And they want one that can be seamlessly integrated with back office systems such as accounting – without the need for custom programming.

Your First Steps

5. Planning pays

To ensure a successful CRM project, planning is essential. Begin by defining the need for a CRM solution. Arm yourself with the back-ground information to justify the investment costs and to demonstrate where the benefits, savings and ROI will come from.

Next, define the stakeholders in the project and use the needs analysis and benefits projections as a foundation for establishing a common, company-wide goal for CRM. With this groundwork completed, you can now establish a budget, planning for the costs associated with identifying vendors, testing solutions, implementation, integration, training and support. A team should then be assembled to begin the drive towards completion of the project – a drive that begins with a clear description of your company’s CRM objectives and any processes that will have to be modified to make the project successful. Make sure the head of this team is a CRM evangelist – someone who completely believes that CRM will make a difference.

Good planning will involve discussions with internal and external customers. What are the best practices for your sales force, for your marketing team, for customer service? Also consider the various types of data that are important to track for each group involved. Data required by different groups of system users such as field sales representatives may be different from those of customer service agents. Plan for the needs of each group by confirming that your data requirements list is complete. Remember: any person who requires information available through the CRM solution should be considered a system user, whether he or she is an internal staff member or an external partner.

Comparing Options

6. Prepare for product demos

Once possible products and vendors are identified, a demo will be a critical factor in determining which solution is best for your company. But before inviting vendors to perform their demos be sure you have told them exactly what you are looking for. Why waste time evaluating a product that may be very functional but just will not work in your environment?

Also be sure to find out from the vendor what platform is required to run the demo. Again, don’t waste time scheduling a demo only to find out you don’t have the right hardware or the right operating system to support the product.

When comparing several products it is advisable to establish a scoring system that makes it easy to track the various benefits and shortcomings of each product being evaluated. By tabulating these scores, the decision process is often simplified. But be sure to include qualitative information in these lists, such as a vendor’s history of innovation, customer satisfaction, financial stability and so on.

And finally, make sure the CRM implementation team attends the demo, and encourage them to share their concerns and feedback. If the vendor or reseller cannot immediately address any issues raised, make sure they do so in a reasonable time frame. Responsiveness is often a key differentiator in the vendor selection process, so some planned tough questions may be critical to making a selection you can live with long into the future.

7. Implement current technology

When you choose a CRM system, make sure it’s based on current technology. Don’t let a salesperson talk you into product vaporware based on future promises. Insist on seeing a current version of the product as it can be deployed today. Equally important, don’t accept old technology that’s past its peak performance curve. You don’t want to have to replace the system in the near future.

Modern CRM systems are:

- Web-based, so you get 24/7 access from virtually any location, any time.
- Fully integrated with back-office systems at your company, including accounting.
- Easily customizable to meet your company’s evolving needs.
- Able to be implemented quickly with minimal expense.
- Easy to use and intuitive, with little or no training required.

8. CRM is not a point solution

CRM solutions should provide company-wide benefits. But many products that claim to be CRM applications only address a single functional area such as marketing, sales force automation or customer support. True, these vanilla solutions may be adequate for their specific intended purpose. But what happens when your requirements broaden?

If you implement a dedicated sales force automation solution, for instance, and down the road realize that you also need to automate your marketing efforts, you have to start from scratch, looking for vendors, trying products – and wasting time. Plus, you’ll be faced with two separate products, two separate vendors and no single point of contact for support and problem resolution. Even worse, with multiple point solutions, how will you share information across your company? Will information captured by the sales force automation solution be leveraged in new marketing campaigns? Will marketing campaign data find its way to the customer support center where cross-selling opportunities could be made, or lost?

While it is true that custom code can be written to integrate products, a true CRM solution provides the functionality of any point solution, as well as a cost-free, seamless way to add features and capabilities whenever you need them.

So don’t settle for anything less than a comprehensive solution that delivers on the true promise of CRM:

- Marketing campaign management
- Sales force automation
- Customer care
- Contact management
- Task management/scheduling

9. Speed ROI through back-office integration

One area many companies overlook when evaluating CRM solutions is the fact that accounts payable and accounts receivable data are an integral part of CRM. If a customer calls to order a product, for example, wouldn't it be beneficial to instantly know whether that customer's accounts are up to date?

Although some CRM solutions offer patches to link back to an accounting system, others offer this seamless integration out of the box. The cost benefits of this approach are so great that some companies report an immediate ROI because they were able to get their application up and running without incurring the high costs of custom integration.

Look for a CRM solution that provides standards based integration with your other business management applications. Insist on being able to deploy on different technologies (databases and operating systems) as your needs change, support for Web Services, strong Application Programming Interfaces (APIs) for integration, and the ability to integrate out of the box with other technologies – such as your phone system (Computer Telephony Interface) and your Web site (Web self-service).

10. Multi-channel access is the only way to go

To be truly effective, a CRM solution needs to support customers on their own terms. This means delivering the information into the hands of agents who respond to customer inquiries over the telephone, fax, e-mail or written letters. And, of course, in this Internet age, the CRM solution should also support interactive Web chat with customers and make a wide range of information available to them over robust Web sites.

For internal staff, such as field service employees and sales staff, the solution should also support all standard wireless devices; solutions that are restricted to a single device or operating system will become too limiting as this technology evolves. With support for PDAs, for example, sales reps can get real time updates about the prospects or customers they are about to visit – before they walk through the door.

11. A Web-based solution is better than a client/server solution

Originally, CRM solutions were all based on a client/server architecture than enabled anyone on a corporate network to access the solution. But with this approach, every time an upgrade is made to the software, that change needs to be propagated to every workstation. In addition, the architecture does not inherently support remote access for telecommuters, nor does it easily support new wireless devices.

Far more flexible and cost-effective are CRM solutions that are Web-based. With these solutions, the software is only installed on a single server; any changes made to this software will then automatically be distributed through the system each time it is accessed by end-users with their standard Web browsers. These systems are also easily

accessed with wireless devices including PDAs and WAP-enabled cellular telephones.

Web-based technology also costs far less, and is much faster to deploy, than client/server solutions. With a single server to maintain, administration and maintenance is also simplified.

And finally, Web-based architectures are easy to scale as the number of end-users increases. To add users, all that's needed is browser access. There is no inherent limitation to the number of users, so you can start small and increase capacity as your needs increase.

12. High cost does not mean high value

Some vendors work very hard to propagate the myth that if a software package costs more, it offers more features. Savvy companies need to evaluate this statement with healthy skepticism.

First, let's say it's true. Be sure that the features being sold are features that are needed. As mentioned above, purchasing a so-called enterprise solution may be fine for very large, global companies, but for mid-sized companies, the enormous capacity of these solutions is just a waste of money.

The truth of the matter is that pricing is often completely unrelated to feature set and is more a function of market presence. Older, more established CRM vendors often get away with charging higher prices for solutions that are no more functional than those from lesser-known or smaller vendors. Furthermore, older solutions are often based on older technologies which are inherently more expensive than newer Web-based systems.

A Smooth Implementation Ensures Success

13. CRM is not for any single department, it's for the whole company

Often, the sales department will be motivated to implement CRM long before other groups get on board. And it can be a great strategy to implement the new software one department at a time. But don't lose sight of your overall goal, which should be to implement CRM throughout the company.

You'll get immediate results by putting CRM into Sales, Customer Service or Support departments. But when you have everyone in the company connected to CRM – when everyone has instant access to the critical information they need to keep driving business forward – that's when you'll see the most exciting benefits of CRM.

It's great to start your implementation with a departmental focus, but keep your larger goals in mind.

14. Implementation method is as important as product choice

Just as a chain is only as good as its weakest link, a CRM solution is only as good as its implementation. The best product in the world will not

meet expectations unless it is implemented in a way that matches your requirements.

Once you've chosen a product, make sure it will work for your environment by creating a blueprint describing your goals and expectations for the implementation before the implementation process begins. Any questions regarding these expectations should be directed to an implementation team member who is designated as the liaison between the vendor and/or the consultant or reseller handling the implementation.

Beyond loading software on a server and tailoring it to specific needs, a CRM implementation requires the involvement of all employees who will be using the system. Fail to obtain this support and you can safely assume that the system will not be fully utilized. Instead, reassure staff that they will receive all training required and that the system will make them more productive while making their jobs easier.

Make the system even more alluring by letting all stakeholders and end-users know how the implementation process is progressing. The result: they will become eager for the process to be completed and to get up and running on the new system.

15. Training can't be "on the job"

Employee buy-in is the key to a successful CRM implementation. So good training, tailored to the different skill levels of employees, is essential. Don't bore a technically adept sales manager with a beginner's level dissertation on using a computer-based scheduler. And don't intimidate a beginning customer service agent with techno-speak about the ins and outs of back-end integration. Just as you tailor the product for your environment, tailor the training to the end-user.

These training programs should begin before rollout to ensure end-users are ready to use the system when it is ready for them. In addition, this early training will add to the enthusiasm for the rollout and lay the groundwork for widespread acceptance.

16. Test, or crash and burn

Don't overlook the importance of testing the software implementation before rolling it out. A test that involves mock customer data can be invaluable in determining how well the system receives and processes information. Better to find a glitch pre-rollout than to get stuck on one when talking to a customer.

As part of this testing process be sure that all back-office integration is working properly. Make a list of typical operations that end-users will engage in, and test each and every one. Try to access data from the accounting system, for example, before a customer service agent needs to actually do so. Try to update customer data in the centralized database and make sure those updates are available throughout the system.

17. Focus on CRM goals: improve customer satisfaction, shorten sales cycles and increase revenue

Never lose sight of the fact that the customer is the reason for your CRM implementation. Get feedback from customers to see if their satisfaction levels are really increasing, or if there are improvements they would like to see. If you chose your CRM solution carefully, it should be flexible enough to adapt to evolving customer needs.

And don't overlook your end-user groups. Could the sales staff benefit from an updated synchronization system with their PDAs that lets them access contact information directly from PDA software without always signing onto the CRM system? Would the marketing department like to see a new kind of analytical report that links post-sale collections data to campaign type? Keep the communication channels open after rollout and keep your CRM solution rolling along.

Equally important, never overlook the power of CRM to self-monitor. Set up metrics that the system can track and always be sure that you are, in fact, increasing customer satisfaction, shortening sales cycles, improving efficiency, winning customers from the competition, increasing profitability per customer and boosting bottom-line sales.

About ACCPAC

ACCPAC International, Inc., is a subsidiary of The Sage Group, plc, which operates as Best Software in North America. ACCPAC provides small and medium-sized businesses with a broad range of end-to-end business management applications designed to help customers enhance their competitive advantage.

For more than 25 years, ACCPAC has provided dependable software applications optimized to take advantage of new technologies and meet the unique requirements of companies like yours. Look to ACCPAC for fully integrated business management applications that deliver high performance, advanced functionality, cross-product integration and unmatched freedom of choice.

ACCPAC delivers the software applications that work best for your business today, with the ability to upgrade and modify your system as your business expands in the future – which means an investment in ACCPAC is an investment that stands the test of time. With a global network of well-trained and experienced Business Partners, ACCPAC has helped companies around the world take businesses like yours confidently into the future.

ACCPAC, a Best Software company
6700 Koll Center Parkway
Third Floor
Pleasanton, CA 94566

925-461-2625
800-873-7282
www.accpac.com

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software®