

CRM - Don't let anyone tell you it's something new . . .

I've just read the most classic description of CRM in a 'Dictionary of Comms' published in a UK communications magazine. It reads:

“CRM – Customer Relationship Management. Generic term for applications designed to streamline interactions with customers. CRM software allows you to . . . “ – and so it goes on.

Talk about missing the point. Fundamentally, CRM is not and never will be about applications, or software, or phone systems, or computers - or anything to do with IT in fact. CRM is about doing, in the immortal words of Ronseal, 'exactly what it says on the tin' – managing your relationships with your customers, properly. Granted, there are software tools out there to help you, but proper customer service and customer management should be a business ethos, a core belief on which your company is built. True CRM has been around since long before computers were invented.

The business world has been alive and kicking ever since Fred Flintstone's ancestor swapped the stone wheel he'd invented for the sheep that his mate next door had just killed. But as soon as you have a customer, you need some 'customer service' if you're going to keep the first one - and find a second!

When did you last try to find your own website via a search engine? Then fight your way past the flash intro? Or navigate successfully around the site to find a particularly obscure piece of information? Even more basic than this, have you tried to have an intelligent conversation with your voicemail system recently? If you can't do these things easily, you can bet that a fickle prospective customer won't waste his time trying, but will move on to the next supplier on the list - probably your main competitor.

To attract and keep customers in the real business world of today, you have to get back to the simple rules of customer service. Things that have been around since your great-granny used to sit on a wooden chair by the counter at the local grocery store and drink tea while 'that nice young man' took her list and packed up her shopping for her. You have to be easy to communicate with, simple to do business with - and be prepared to go the extra mile to provide what your customers need in a straightforward and hassle-free way. As you've heard it said so often, it's not rocket science, so why are many companies so bad at it?

CRM isn't really about computers, loads of expensive software or costly implementation fees. It's all about getting back to basics and transporting yourself 'into the audience'. Put yourself in the shoes of your customer or prospect and think about the experience **you** would like to have when buying something – whatever that might be.

Make that a reality first and they will soon notice the difference. Then you can start to think about the range of clever packages out there which will enhance and manage the relationships you have with your customers - but don't expect the software to miraculously do it for you by itself, because you'll be in for a disappointment.

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