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Are your customer relations in mid air too?

CRM - maximising business opportunities through excellent customer relations

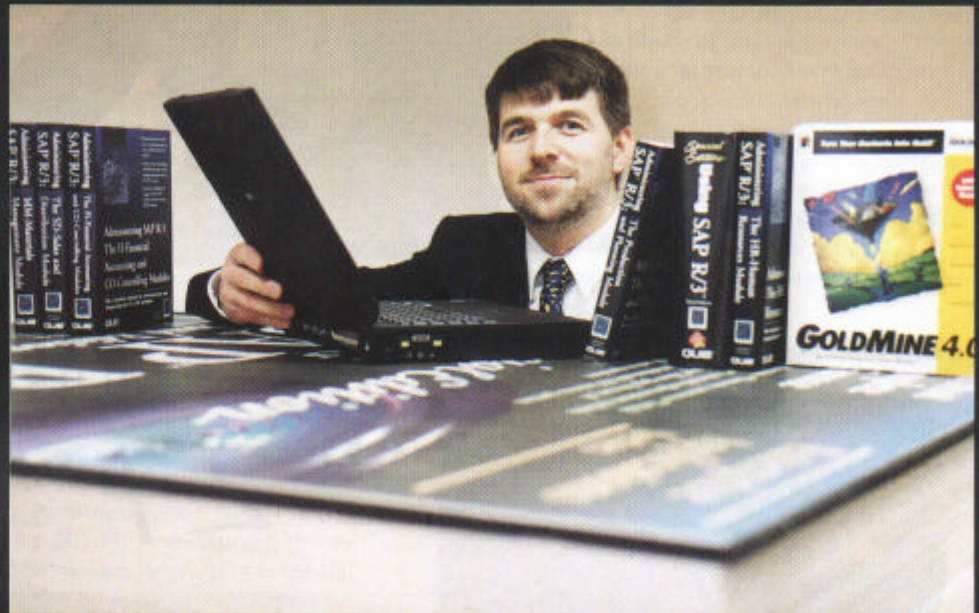
Customer Relationship Management is the current 'hot' phrase on the lips of senior management and IT professionals everywhere. No matter what industry sector you are in and regardless of whether you are a B2B or B2C business, it is highly likely that you will be addressing this subject, if not already, then in the coming months.

CRM, like previous trends such as ERP (Enterprise Resource Planning) and BPR (Business Process Reengineering), is a market, which has been largely created by software companies. Such organisations have developed tools to drive business improvement, previously in accounting and business procedures, and now in the transaction, customer care and customer optimisation areas.

CRM is aimed at improving customer retention and providing exceptional customer service and as a result, you can expect increased revenue and profit margins. This means establishing the systems and procedures to deal with enquiries and orders efficiently, but also to maximise opportunities through the information you have about each and every customer. A properly implemented CRM programme will make them feel more cared for, but make no mistake the business case is a financial one. If you can eliminate mistakes, handle more customer requests, target valuable repeat customers intelligently and improve the skills of your people this is definitely a process worth implementing.

However, if you cast your mind back to the last time your business went through the process of implementing new technology, then you'll know that the process, no matter how essential, can be a painful, costly and lengthy one. Statistically speaking, 70% of technology projects are deemed failures from the customer perspective. The most likely reason for this is a lack of understanding of your aims, people and current business processes on the part of the technology company managing the project.

So how can you ensure that your



project is not another 70% casualty that takes forever to implement and doesn't give the return on investment expected? The answer is that CRM should be approached from a strategic and practical perspective not a technological one. This is where many IT companies and consultants get it wrong, according to Jonathan Blain, CEO of independent consultancy ASAP: "Some companies have a technology bias which means they drive the programme to support the technology they're selling not the customer's business. This can lead to over complication, open ended engagements and a customer that is reliant on the consulting company because their staff aren't trained to work with or maintain the technology."

In sharp contrast ASAP's approach is holistic and is focused on rapid implementation, empowerment and knowledge transfer. "We are in the business of demystifying technology and enabling customers to reap the benefits of their CRM programme. This means first understanding what they want to achieve, evaluating existing systems, processes and people skills and then designing a programme which will get them from A to Z most effectively."

ASAP is able to do this because its business covers services such as training and recruitment as well as IT, CRM and consultancy expertise. Mr Blain explains: "Our recruitment business means we can provide temporary expertise to ensure rapid implementation and permanent staff, if necessary, to ensure the customer is able to make the most of its investment once the project is completed." ASAP integrates best practices with a no nonsense approach and its credentials are supported by the company's business and technology authoring of books, which are read by consultancies and businesses Worldwide. ASAP also has a track record for interpreting and predicting market needs which means it can ensure that its consultants are the best qualified to design and implement projects efficiently and with foresight.

"CRM implementation doesn't have to be painful and bewildering, but it does have to work to achieve your aims and take your business forward at the pace needed to stay ahead of the game. If your consultancy is making it look complex and lengthy, then you might want to take a second opinion." Says Mr Blain

ASAP Group www.asap-group.com