

# Information Technology in Customer Relationship Management

Customer Relationship Management (CRM) integrates people, processes and technologies to facilitate and strengthen relationships with customers. CRM is both a management function and a technology that deals with integrating all the business processes that involve interactions with sales, marketing and services. CRM technology should take care of the customer from end to end.

## Keep Customers Up to Date

Email lists and company websites allow small business owners to keep customers up to date on the latest changes or developments. Business owners can use these tools to inform customers about new products that may interest them, or to inform them of sales, store events or other campaigns. Social media sites expand this capability even further. The low-cost nature of these tools means even small or new businesses with bare-bones budgets can maximize customer relations without a major investment.

## Easier Questions and Feedback

Technology now allows consumers to reach a company at a time that's convenient for them, not just during business hours. Using email or Web submission forms, buyers can share feedback or ask questions about products or services. Electronic communication is also cheaper and faster for both parties, and the convenience factor may encourage more customers to interact with their favourite businesses.

## Effective Delivery

The popularity of digital music and e-book readers indicates consumers are eager to try out new forms of their favorite media. Cable companies, for instance, have a long history of poor customer relations and could benefit dramatically from this type of technological innovation. An April 2011 article by Fox News points to the potential for cable TV companies to deliver programming through tablet computers. Consumers would also benefit from a more effective delivery of their favorite programs. Other businesses can similarly

utilize new forms of media and technology to streamline services and bolster marketing and public relations efforts.

### **Customer Service Management**

Customer service management software programs track and analyze data and customer feedback, making this information easier for companies to understand. Using these programs, companies can be better equipped to deliver products and services that consumers want and market them more effectively.

### **Efficiency and Pricing**

Technology can also help companies streamline operations, reduce staff and processes, and cut costs internally, which can then be passed on to the consumer in the form of lower prices. Since many consumers actively seek out value pricing, this strategy serves as an effective way of building customer relations.

### **Social media is a dynamic and interactive environment**

It's easy to forget that social media marketing is relatively new technology. Don't neglect the ways in which its use can strengthen your customer relationships. Be on the alert for mentions, posts, and forums to identify where customers are seeking help or information on your products. Use social to answer queries and see it as an opportunity to connect with your customers and build brand loyalty.

90 percent of people read a review on social networking sites before they decide to buy a product. That makes it worthwhile to encourage customers to post positive ratings and testimonials. You can then add these to your site to offer social proof of the value of your product or service.

Consider all social platforms as a place to connect. For example, according to Sprout Social, 80 percent of Instagram users follow a business on the platform. Users see it as a positive way to engage.

Use technology to automate social media processes, including auto-posting, scheduled posting, and verifying your engagement. Instead of wasting time on the menial tasks related to managing social media

campaigns, you can engage with customers and focus on growing your business.

## Technological Developments in CRM

Customer expectations are always changing, and these needs are being met with a wider range of channels and technology than ever before. Now, all of these interactions, touchpoints, events, and transactions are becoming part of a growing Customer Relationship Management (CRM) ecosystem that can enable all employees to better serve their customers.

CRM technology platforms are applications organizations of all sizes use to improve support during the customer experience. It optimizes the sales process by storing existing customer and prospect contact information, accounts, leads, and sales opportunities in one central location. This data can then be accessed by sales, marketing, service, and other departments to help craft marketing campaigns to potential customers, deals and promotions to current customers, or countless other uses the sales cycles.

CRM products have come a long way in the last 20 years or so from being just a contact database where customer information is stored to being an essential source of relationship intelligence for the entire customer lifecycle. As a result, we have identified four CRM trends and CRM technology innovations that are helping organizations in their quest for better customer experience (CX), improved engagement with prospects and customers, increased opportunity management, and enhanced automation and security.

CRM innovation trend #1: Artificial Intelligence and AI powered customer support

**Artificial Intelligence (AI)** applies across a spectrum of technologies including machine learning, predictive analytics, natural language processing, and robotics. CRM vendors have been investing, acquiring, and building capabilities that leverage AI to optimize customer interactions. According to Teradata's "State of Artificial Intelligence for Enterprises" report, 80 percent of those interviewed were in the process of implementing a form of AI in their organization. In this rapidly expanding scene, we see AI assisting CRM platforms in the following ways:

**Customer service:** As AI chatbots are being deployed to handle more service requests, information is now being captured and leveraged through CRM applications. For instance, let's say an auto insurance claim is initiated via a web chat. During its task handling, the chatbot collects necessary data such as customer name and authenticates the customer and vehicle. Upon collection, the data can be passed to a human associate to complete the insurance claim process. Bots are trained and can learn from feedback based on the customer satisfaction of the interaction. The feedback loop for a bot can lead to improvements after each interaction.

**Lead management:** A sales teams can use AI to score a lead, increasing the likelihood of winning a closed sale. First, AI analyzes the lead and based on interest or buying history, it can provide a score and recommend what steps are needed to increase success. For example, a medical device manufacturer may receive a lead from a hospital. In this case, AI would use sales history, data about the hospital, close ratio of similar hospitals, and the interest level to provide a score. The AI can then recommend different products and features to offer, such as a field service contract for preventive maintenance, which would increase likelihood closing that individual account.

**Next best action:** Using business rules and predictive models, AI embedded in CRM software can recommend steps to sales or service associates to assist with service requests or upsell opportunities. As associates navigate through customer calls, AI analyzes the data they enter in the service request in CRM. Based on certain criteria, the system suggests an offer to sell, an add-on product, or service to the customer. The offers would not be generic but more in-line with the needs or circumstances of the individual customer. The idea here is that the associate does not need to remember to make an upsell offer, as that information is provided to them in real time.

## **CRM technology trend 2: Process automation advances**

Organizations have been using CRM to automate basic workflow, in which events will trigger an action. If a service request had been previously opened and the status has changed to closed, then a workflow rule might state that an email should be sent to the customer informing them that their case has been closed. Workflow is a basic staple of most, if not all, CRM platforms. In the realm of automation capabilities, several new CRM trends have been making headway:

Task automation: Defining work tasks and if they should be performed either by a machine or human helps organizations enable their resources to better serve customers. Task automation also provides the step-by-step instructions of what actions to perform. During an associate's interaction with a customer, the CRM system will direct or guide the associate as to what to say and do to inform the customer. Task automation is structured and prescriptive for what steps to perform based on input received, customer profile, or other business conditions.

The tools to define task automation consist of diagramming like process tools or low-code tools that can be used by business-oriented resources. For example, an organization will have a business analyst define a task that describes how to process an insurance enrollment using a diagram tool that takes the analyst through each step, decision point, and predictive outcomes during the interaction.

Work distribution: Task automation specifies process flow and tasks to perform and may identify that certain tasks need to be performed by other resources based on the skilled employee's availability. The ability to distribute or route tasks is another capability within Process Automation trending in CRM platforms.

Many Business Process Monitoring (BPM) solutions provide work distribution/routing while monitoring the performance of the work that are common in enterprisewide, highly complex integrated systems. And now CRM platforms are starting to provide BPM lite capabilities that are embedded into the architecture with abilities such as task routing, skill prioritization, resource availability, and monitoring of events. Firms can deliver many of the traditional BPM features within their CRM system.

### **CRM trend #3: Data integration**

CRM systems provide and consume massive amounts of data. Traditionally, CRM technology platforms have integrated with corporate systems such as ERP, accounting, claims processing, and billing systems that retrieve transactional data. The integration mechanisms have included an enterprise service bus (ESB), application programming interfaces (APIs), file integration, computer telephony integration (CTI), etc. What we're seeing trending in CRM regarding

integration is the emergence of third-party systems and the Internet of Things (IoT):

Third-party systems: The ability to plug in data from systems such as Google Maps, government subscription services, mobile cellular services, SMS text messages, and so forth are based on the internet and delivered through web services. The use of web services assumes that everything is a resource.

CRM Systems today especially those in the cloud provide communication protocols that enable access to data using web services. This level of collaboration enables an organization to communicate seamlessly with other sources and organizations, such as credit bureaus, to share customer information and expedite the service requests rather than making phone calls or sending emails. This level of integration will enable organizations of all sizes to increase their efficiency in servicing customers.

IoT: Refrigerators, automobiles, medical devices, garage door openers, and many other machines are attaching themselves digitally to the internet. A report by Cisco predicts that by 2021 there may be nearly 27.1 billion connected networks and devices in the world.

These IoT devices can send data about product issues, maintenance needs, improper usage, to an organization's CRM platform. CRM vendors are beginning to provide platform connections to handle IoT feeds. Let's say there are refrigeration units in a hospital that store vital medications. If there is a detection that coolant is low or something critical to maintaining the temperature, the refrigerator sends out a data message. The manufacturer of the refrigeration unit using an IoT platform would receive the message and relay it to the hospital's CRM/IoT system. The CRM system would issue a case and workflow to notify hospital staff and assign tasks to move the medications to another refrigeration unit.

#### **CRM technology trend #4: Blockchain**

Blockchain is an ongoing list of interlinked records called blocks. They create an open, decentralized ledger that keeps track of transactions between parties that is absolutely verifiable. But what does blockchain have to do with CRM? Here's a few instances of how it's providing value to CRM:



**Security:** Blockchain assigns network keys that restrict unauthorized access, the security mechanism of blockchain. Since CRM platforms are in the cloud, cloud security has gotten better, but it's still based on a centralized security system approach. Blockchain is decentralized and distributed through synchronization in a peer-to-peer networking approach. Fraud attempts are far more challenging to penetrate. This becomes a very compelling value proposition for CRM in which critical, private, and highly confidential information is required.

**Transparency:** Blockchain is decentralized and requires no middleman to verify, such as a financial institution, or other third-party broker to provide. This increases speed to securely and transparently engage with customers.

**User control:** Blockchain stores and encrypts personal data and verifies this access without sharing any specifics, thus controlling what level of data is accessed. CRM systems will, in effect, subscribe to customer data as permitted by each individual's grant rights. Users will have the control, as opposed to current CRM systems that provide unlimited access to personal data without any user control.

**Clean data:** Who is tired of how inaccurate your data is in other companies' CRM databases? Duplicates, wrong addresses, wrong emails, and other elements create frustration for customers. Blockchain can store and encrypt personal data and confirm details upon inquiry (such as a mobile phone company verifying your address or current employer) without truly sharing data with the inquiring party. Instead of storing the customer submitted address, Blockchain would confirm the customers' address complies with the mobile phone company need for a valid servicing address.

Blockchain enables customers to have their own personal block that presents companies with a universally accurate profile of personal information, past transactions, education history, and credit reporting. This creates a more trusted data source for customers and the organizations that can quickly access that data.

## **Sales and CRM**

Most people refer to a CRM (customer relationship management) they're referring to software or a tool that enables them to manage and improve their relationships with prospects and customers.

But customer relationship management varies, depending on what department you're talking to. A support team might use a CRM to manage customer tickets, while marketing teams may use the tool to analyze how consumers respond to online campaigns. When it comes to sales, a CRM is used to streamline pipeline management. With a sales CRM tool, you can safely store databases of customer information and drive more sales.

### **Simplify sales**

A sales CRM is a tool for managing all touchpoints with prospects or customers throughout the sales process. A touchpoint could be any interaction—both direct and indirect between sales reps and their leads. The tool tracks communication with prospects, automatically organizes customer data, sends reminders to follow up with leads, and more.

Essentially, a sales CRM simplifies the process of lead nurturing. Both administrative tasks and data organization are automated, so you can spend less time on data entry and focus more on building meaningful relationships with prospects.

### **Centralize sales operations**

Sales reps spend their days juggling everything from prospect research and cold calls to deal management and field sales. Managers also stay busy with monitoring their sales reps' performance, conducting ride-alongs, and coaching their team. Without a centralized system of managing these day-to-day operations, things can quickly become dysfunctional in your department.

Sales CRMs are designed as one-stop solutions for daily workflow. They can integrate with your existing tools and communication channels, making it easy to manage all your tasks from a single, unified platform.

This centralization of data creates a single source of truth across your organization. Sales reps can easily find the most accurate, up-to-date



information needed to properly follow up with a lead or close a sale. And they can engage with prospects across all communication channels, such as email, phone, or the website's chat box without having to switch between apps or browser tabs.

#### **Improve customer data accuracy**

Manual data entry is prone to human error. Say a rep needs to manually record a lead's contact information. They might accidentally enter inaccurate data or simply forget to enter the lead's contact information.

Sales CRMs minimize these errors by automatically recording any action a rep takes within the app, such as initiating a sales call or sending a follow-up email. With Zendesk Sell, those actions are displayed in real-time activity feeds and individual contact cards. If you're looking for specific information regarding a prospect or event, you can easily filter the feed by activity type or user.

Last but not least, many sales CRMs come equipped with data enrichment tools, like Zendesk Sell's Reach. These tools use online databases to automatically populate detailed information into a lead's contact card. Not only does this reduce the likelihood of reps obtaining incorrect data, but it drastically cuts down on time spent researching leads as well.

A sales CRM doesn't just make accurate, detailed lead information more accessible; it also helps you identify underlying performance or operational issues that might be affecting your company's growth.

#### **Identify bottlenecks in the sales process**

For companies who don't use a sales CRM, analyzing performance issues can be a real challenge. They have to compile massive amounts of data into spreadsheets and wrestle with Excel formulas just to make sense of it all.

The beauty of a sales CRM is that it handles data analysis for you. Customer information is automatically compiled into real-time "smart reports" to provide insights into how your sales department is functioning as a whole.

Sell's reporting capabilities, for example, include the following:

### **Sales funnel analysis.**

This report can show you where prospects are currently sitting within the pipeline, as well as provide insights into where leads are being lost or won.

### **Conversion reports.**

Managers can use these reports to assess how well individual reps are moving prospects through the pipeline. They can also be used to view general conversion rates across your sales team.

### **Forecasted sales**

Your sales CRM can predict expected revenues by analyzing the value, estimated close date, and win the likelihood of sales in your pipeline.

### **Activity overview reports.**

You can view a breakdown of the activities being performed by your sales reps, including number of calls made, emails sent, appointments held, tasks completed, and more.

### **Goal reports.**

Use these to track your team's progress toward revenue goals.

These reports can be customized and filtered by pipeline stages, sales activity type, individual rep, and more. It's up to you how granular you want to get with smart reports, but one thing's for certain: if there are any bottlenecks in your sales process or any performance issues with individual reps, your sales CRM will find them.

The benefits of a sales CRM are endless. Between automation, lead enrichment, and smart reports, your sales team will have everything they need to work more efficiently, and more productively.

### **Shorten your sales cycle with a sales CRM**

Building a loyal customer base is all about developing meaningful relationships. A sales CRM automates the administrative and data analysis tasks that typically bog down a sales rep's time, so they have more time to connect with leads. Meaningful relationships can be

established in less time, with more prospects, allowing reps to move leads through their pipeline more quickly.

#### **Life without CRM**

#### **More administration, less selling.**

An active sales team generates a flood of data. They can be out on the road talking to customers, meeting prospects and finding out valuable information but all this information gets stored in handwritten notes, laptops, or inside the heads of your salespeople.

On top of this your customers may be contacting you on a range of different platforms phone, email and social media. Asking questions, following up on orders or complaining. Without a common platform for customer interactions, communications can be missed or lost in the flood of information leading to an unsatisfactory response to your customer.

Details can get lost, meetings are not followed up promptly and prioritising customers can be a matter of guesswork rather than a rigorous exercise based on fact. And it can all be compounded if a key salesperson moves on.

## **Sales Territory Management**

A sales territory is the regional, industry, or account type assigned to a specific salesperson or sales team. A sales territory owner is responsible for prospecting into their customer base and meeting their territory quota.

CRM systems, the term territory management designates a process of lead routing and account management based on a prospect or customer location. The typical scenario is this a company has substantial national or international presence and a single point of entry for incoming enquiries (like a website or a toll-free phone number). After identifying a prospect or client location, these inquiries are passed only to responsible employees in local offices.

Territory management in CRM software offers a number of advantages. For example, it allows one to compare sales or marketing statistics between different territories. It can show which territories are showing positive dynamics (sales are growing) and which ones are declining, allowing management to make appropriate decisions before it gets too late. Finally, it can help in building accurate sales forecasts for each territory.

Businesses who cater to a large audience categorize their prospects into territories based on similar characteristics such as geography, business type, business size, referral source, needs, etc. Referred to as territory management, this sales practice is an effective way for sales managers to enable sales reps to focus and prioritize on leads assigned to them. Organizing sales teams by territory also helps to identify profitable territories, sales reps who are meeting targets, and the potential sales areas to improve.

Sales managers divide their sales team into specific groups so they can effectively handle their territories and maximize opportunities; however, the process of assigning territories to sales reps becomes a problematic exercise if you don't have an automated system in place. A sales management system like CRM software comes with territory management capabilities to define your sales territories.

With a sales CRM like Freshsales, you can create a systematic sales territory management plan to organize your team, auto-assign leads round-robin, assign phone numbers to territories, transfer calls to territories, limit territory access, and more.

Understanding, planning, and managing sales territories can make or break your sales efforts. Your reps need a firm grasp on the specific customer segments they're accounting for and the general framework of your team's territories over all.

The way you structure, define, and distribute the territories you work with has massive implications when it comes to your organization's sales efficiency and bottom line.

A solid sales territory plan and exceptional territory management can be significant assets to a successful sales team. Here's some perspective on how to do them right.

## Sales Territory Planning

### 1. Define your market.

To effectively set up territories, sales leaders must first understand the environment of their business. There are numerous ways for a business to define a market. Factors could include geography, size, and consumer demographics among others.

Know what is unique to your business and prioritize based on what your climate demands. A solidified market will lead to lowered costs, increased sales, and a foundation for setting up effective sales territories.

### 2. Assess account quality.

After a target market is determined, sales leaders need to evaluate the value of each account. The measurement could be either quantitative or qualitative depending on the product or service the business offers. For example, a beverage company might rank the value of their accounts by net profitability while a company that relies heavily on customer recommendations could focus on accounts that are more likely to provide a referral for their company.

### 3. Assess territory quality.

After assessing the quality of each account, it is important to rank territories. As with the accounts' values, this process is subjective based on different business needs and priorities. If your business sells products across industries, your territories could be divided and quantified by those industries. Determining what sales territory supports which areas of the sales funnel will also help you score territories into high, medium, and low value.

To get a better picture of territory value, include your sales team in these discussions. After all, no one knows the territories better than the reps who work within them each day. That way, you can assign the appropriate reps to maximize the potential of each territory.

### 4. Assess rep strengths.

The next step towards effective territory management may be the most important of all. After determining the quality of each sales

territory, it is crucial that you assign reps with the applicable skills to develop and optimize each set of accounts. For example, a territory that is defined by large enterprise deals needs to be handled by a rep who has experience closing big deals. By strategically assigning qualified reps to accounts, you will empower your reps and ensure the client receives the best possible service.

#### **5. Review and consolidate.**

The four steps outlined above prepare a business to put a sales territory plan into action. The last thing a business needs to do is a final diagnosis of costs associated with each territory. Analyzing cost metrics like comparing ideal versus actual number of visits and mileage per rep in each territory will help managers zero in on specific inefficiencies in the system.

After you have reviewed your plan, consolidate it. By following these five steps, your business will be on its way to having a more satisfied workforce, as well as increased customer growth and profits.

## **Contact Management**

Contact management is the act of storing, organising, and tracking information about your customers, prospects, and sales leads.

Contact management software can help your business build stronger, longer-lasting relationships and close more deals as much as 29% faster with:

The history of contact management stretches back to Rolodex and Filofax systems, developing into desktop-based standalone software and email clients with built-in contact management functionality.

Contact management software

Contact management software typically allows you to make entries for each of your contacts. This can include contact information such as a name, phone number, email address, or company.

The tools organise this information in a way that makes it easy for you to find the entries again. The data may also be searchable.



Contact management software can also offer features like tracking the interactions between the customer and the business, as well as some scheduling abilities, for example, the ability to organise meetings with clients in a calendar.

Despite these significant technical advances, many businesses find that their contact management systems fundamentally amount to little more than a simple database containing names, phone numbers and notes.

CRM is a much broader concept. At the core, it is the practice of managing and nurturing customer relationships. While it's a concept, it is primarily implemented through a CRM software solution. And CRM systems include built-in contact management capabilities.

However, a CRM does a lot more than simple contact management. It allows you to automate loads of manual tasks, saving you time and resources. The all-in-one CRM has recently entered the market. An all-in-one CRM such as Agile CRM provides built-in marketing automation, sales enablement, and help desk modules.

In recent years, the categories of sales management and contact management software have grown closer together, as enterprises increasingly realise that a more unified system, capable of capturing a wider range of business data, is key. By combining the tracking of contacts, their engagements with your business, the products they buy, the ones they don't and the challenges they face, you can create one, single unified view of the customer. That's vital data not only for a successful sales team, but also in the delivery of excellent customer service.

- 360-degree view of your key contacts
- Mobile access to contact data from a smartphone
- Collaborate with people across your company
- Social—tap into activity on social media sites

## **Benefits of contact management and CRM**

### **1. Better, longer-lasting customer relationships**

A core aspect of contact management and CRM software is that it allows you to store extensive amounts of data about each customer.

This includes demographic data such as name, email, location, industry, age, gender, etc.

It also tracks and stores behavioral data such as when a customer opens an email, clicks an email, visits your website, downloads content, subscribes to your email list, etc.

With all this data, you maintain a much clearer picture of who each customer is, how they have interacted with your company in the past, issues they have faced, etc. This allows your team to get to know and interact with your customers in a more personal way. They see you as human, not just an abstract entity that charges them for products or services. This results in closer relationships, customer loyalty, and builds trust among your customer base.

## **2. Deeper insight into your customers**

As mentioned above, contact management and CRM software allows you to store loads of personal information about each customer. Over time, as you gradually accumulate more data about them, your understanding of who they are gets increasingly accurate.

You come to learn their unique, individual pain points, needs, challenges, interests, and a lot more. Armed with that kind of insight, your sales and customer support reps can enter a customer conversation with all the information they need to form a quick rapport.

## **3. Improved data management**

When you store and manage your contact data in spreadsheets, you run the risk of human error in the data entry process. Plus, if a colleague needs specific contact data, you have to send them the spreadsheet or dig up the information they request and send that.

But when you have a CRM in place, all your contact data is stored in one central location and is accessible by all. A CRM solution removes the risk of human error because customer data is normally collected using web forms and is then automatically added to your database.

All your teams have a clear view of each customer because they are all using data from one central database. And if you use an all-in-one

CRM, all your marketing, sales, and customer support data is stored in that one database as well.

#### **4. Increased productivity**

Another great benefit of using a CRM is that it automates tons of manual processes, which increases the productivity of your team. Features like online appointment scheduling, which automates the entire scheduling process, dramatically increase productivity. Data entry is automated by using forms, as mentioned above. And so on.

Those are just two simple examples of processes that you can automate using contact management and CRM software. When you automate so many processes in this way, your team has more time to spend on higher-value tasks, such as devoting more attention to one-on-one customer interactions.

#### **5. Contact management increases customer satisfaction**

Because everyone in your company can see a full history of each contact's interactions with your business and their personal data, they can more easily cater to each customer's unique needs. This helps customers feel valued and sends the message that you are paying close attention to them and what they need to be successful.

Customer satisfaction is the key to successful revenue and business growth. And these days it's challenging to keep customers satisfied if you are not using contact management and CRM software to manage your interactions with them.

#### **6. Reduced expenditures**

With so many processes automated, you don't need as many employees to man the ship. This leads to less money spent on salaries.

Moreover, if you use an all-in-one CRM that comes with built-in marketing, sales, and customer support automation, you don't need to invest in separate systems to complete those functions. Everything is managed from the same system, saving you the cost of having to invest in multiple systems for various business functions.

Plus, effective use of contact management and CRM software enables you to reach more leads and close more deals with less effort. This

translates to increased revenue. In fact, the average return on investment for companies that use CRM software is around \$5 to every \$1 invested.

#### **7. The ability to personalize customer interactions**

Personalized customer and prospect interactions help you communicate in a more relevant way that resonates with them. This is especially true with personalization in marketing.

With all that personal data stored on each customer and prospect, you can prepare yourself for a call by looking through their interaction history and demographic data. Then you can touch on things that you know interest them, which increases engagement levels.

Plus, customer support reps can maintain a view into the issues each customer has faced in the past. This allows them to gain an understanding of the customer's use case, pain points, etc. before they speak to someone who submits a support ticket. They can then personalize their support to the specific needs of that customer.

#### **8. Better alignment and collaboration across teams**

Aligning your teams' efforts can be challenging. This is particularly true with sales and marketing. Each team has its own agenda and often works in a silo without input or collaboration from the other side.

Contact management and CRM software bridge that gap. Everyone in the company has a 360-degree view of every customer and prospect interaction, all their personal data, etc. Because all teams are working with the same data from the same database, marketing has a view into what sales is doing, and vice versa.

For example, when you use an all-in-one CRM with built-in marketing automation, your marketing team can collaborate with sales on the development of a lead scoring model. Then they can work together to ensure marketing qualified leads are passed to sales as quickly as possible (this can be automated).

Also, with an all-in-one CRM, customer support data is attached to each person's contact record in your database. That includes all past support tickets each customer has submitted. This gives sales reps

insight into which problems each customer has experienced, which aligns the two teams' efforts.

For example, let's say a sales rep wants to reach out to an existing customer to pitch an upsell opportunity. They can check the customer's contact record, open their support ticket history, and see if the customer is unhappy or experiencing an ongoing issue with your product. If they find that is the case, they can delay reaching out until the customer's issue is resolved and they are satisfied once again.

## **9. Improved customer experience**

The customer experience is an increasingly important element involved in satisfying customers and acquiring new ones. Studies estimate that by 2020 the customer experience will overtake product and price as the key brand differentiator. Today's consumers expect attention and will pay more for a better customer experience.

Contact management and CRM software empower you to deliver a world-class customer experience. Personalized interactions—as mentioned above—improve the customer experience. Having all customer data at your fingertips helps you form closer customer relationships, which further improves the customer experience.

If you use an all-in-one CRM with built-in customer support capabilities, you can use features like dedicated help desk groups to improve the customer experience. Learn more about dedicated help desk groups.

These are just a few examples. The bottom line is that with your teams aligned, processes automated, and more time freed up to interact one-on-one with customers, you'll deliver a better customer experience. That wouldn't be possible without contact management and CRM software in place.

## **10. Insight into your results and data-driven decision making**

Contact management and CRM software provide extensive CRM reporting, metrics, and analysis. You can keep your finger on the pulse of how your teams are doing, which lets you identify weak links in the chain so you can help them improve their performance.

With metrics like revenue predictions, sales funnel analysis, campaign performance metrics, etc., your company's leaders can make data-driven decisions. The data does not lie and making strategic decisions about the future growth of your company is challenging without metrics to inform those decisions. But when you have a CRM solution with a customizable dashboard that displays the metrics you need to see and can be accessed in a moment's notice, making data-driven decisions is a breeze.

## Different levels of e-CRM

### features:

- Customer management:

Provides access to all customer information including enquiry status and Correspondence

- Knowledge management:

A centralised knowledge base that handles and shares customer Information

- Account management:

Access to customer information and history, allowing sales teams and customer service teams to function efficiently

- Case management:

Captures enquiries, escalates priority cases and notifies management of unresolved issues

- Back-end integration:

Blends with other systems such as billing, inventory and logistics through relevant customer contact points such as websites and call centres

- Reporting and analysis:

Report generation on customer behaviour and business criteria



In addition to building sales and increasing profits through the gathering of data, CRM systems are also valuable for maintaining and nurturing a loyal customer base. But how is the architecture of such a system designed, and how does each part integrate with the others?

### **CRM categories**

CRM system architecture can be broken down into 3 broad categories:

- Collaborative
- Operational
- Analytical

#### **(I) Collaborative**

All communications between a business and its customers are recorded, organised and processed in the collaborative section of the software. This means communication by telephone, in person, and by email.

Customer relationships can be nurtured using data already provided by them which demonstrates their shopping patterns and behaviours, likes and dislikes, the times they are most likely to buy, and how much they spend on average.

Businesses use this information to provide enhanced customer service, cross-sell products based on previous buying history, and offer targeted deals to segments of their customer base. Customers can be segmented by various criteria including geographical location, age, gender, and profession, and can be targeted via personalised emails or newsletters offering discounts and deals.

#### **(II) Operational**

This category within a CRM system deals with the automation of business processes including customer service, data on competitors, industry trends, customer account information and management.

Data is collected and stored within the database, ready for use in day-to-day operations such as management of customer accounts, in addition to overall strategic planning. Detailed information about special customer needs, destined for the sales force, is also stored

here. Use of this type of data further enables a business to personalise its approach to customers.

### **(III) Analytical**

Analytical CRM might result in cross-selling certain items to particular customers based on their previous buying habits, or imparting information relevant only to certain segments of a customer base.

This part of the CRM architecture is also invaluable for identifying changes in the industry as a whole, so that businesses remain agile and respond quickly to changing market demands. Data can be analysed in a number of ways, and graphs, reports and diagrams produced to better illustrate the results.

This is the basic architecture of a customer relationship management system, but the rise of social media and mobile working has brought other, more defined systems to the market. Popular ‘add-ons’ to the basic structure of a CRM solution might include cloud based systems that are accessible from any device.

The key word in CRM is integration – integration of data so that it can be put to use in a way that benefits not only the business, but also customers, suppliers and the workforce. Using mobile technology and social media was the obvious next step in this process, and targets a whole new potential customer base.

### **CRM Architecture as a whole**

The underlying aim of a well-structured CRM system is to provide an enhanced customer experience and enable businesses to gain valuable information as their customers shop. Business owners can use this data to increase sales and boost their bottom line, analysing marketing campaigns, and offering added value to existing and potential customers.

## **Important CRM Software**

### **HubSpot CRM**

HubSpot's free CRM is a top-notch system for startups or anyone looking to get acquainted with CRM tools.

HubSpot CRM helps you manage your sales pipeline, create automated email sequences for your leads, communicate with your prospects via live chat or emails, and track customer interactions across email, social media, or calls.

HubSpot CRM is free for contacts up to 1,000,000. As your company grows, you can upgrade to other marketing, sales, and customer service packages, or you can integrate other third-party products with the tool.

### **Zoho CRM**

Zoho CRM is one of the products from Zoho's exhaustive business suite. Zoho CRM offers features that are suitable for both SMBs and large-scale organizations. The CRM application comes with sales automation, pipeline management, marketing automation, and process management features. You can connect with your leads across different platforms through a single interface.

Zia – Zoho's AI bot helps businesses with identifying trends, predicting sales, and data enrichment activities.

Companies can get started with Zoho CRM for as low as \$18/month and upgrade as they move along.

### **Freshsales**

Freshsales is a sales CRM by Freshdesk. Features such as event tracking, phone, emails, workflows, etc. enable you to track your leads and deals across their purchase journey.

Like HubSpot and Zoho CRM, Freshsales offers mobile CRM and a range of products for business, making it easy to build a comprehensive MarTech stack.

Freshsales is perfect for SMBs and mid-market enterprises, and you can get started with the tool for \$18/month.

### **Salesforce Sales Cloud**

Salesforce Sales Cloud is a CRM tool offered by Salesforce. The CRM tool covers the entire purchase journey and includes features such as account and contact management, opportunity management, lead management, intuitive workflows, file sharing, and sales forecasting.

Business owners and salespeople can manage their sales activities on the go through mobile CRM.

Beginners can opt for the Salesforce Essential plan at \$25/user/month (paid annually). Users can avail add-ons such as Sales Cloud Einstein (Salesforce's AI tool) and Pardot (Salesforce's marketing automation platform) at an additional subscription fee.

### **Mailchimp**

Mailchimp is primarily a MAP that also offers specific CRM capabilities. Mailchimp is perfect for freelancers, startups, and SMBs as it provides the ideal blend of features that are useful for both sales and marketing departments.

Mailchimp has a free plan for a list size up to 2000 contacts with bare essential CRM features and paid plans starting \$9.99/month.

Mailchimp is widely used among startups and SMBs because of its capability to integrate with other enterprise CRMs such as Salesforce.

### **Important:**

#### **Customization**

No two businesses are the same, so the best CRM software can cater to your business's unique needs. Some CRM solutions let you choose which features to include in your package, and some also allow you to customize basic areas, such as with the abilities to add contact fields, choose which data to show on your dashboard and create custom reports. You can also customize with extensions, plugins and other add-ons to expand your software's capabilities.

#### **Workflow automation**

CRM software can make your life easier by automating your workflow. Look for software that lets you set up custom rules and comes with sales force automation to help you and your team be more productive.

By using rules, you can set your CRM software to automatically perform a specific action based on triggers or events, such as these:

- When a potential customer fills out a contact form on your website, the CRM software automatically directs the message to the right sales representative or department.
- When a sales representative receives a message, the CRM software automatically sends a preset response to acknowledge the message.

### **Third-party integration**

Connecting your CRM software to other solutions you already use can save you tons of time and money. Most CRM programs offer third-party software integrations; the key is choosing one that's compatible with the software you use and easy to implement. For instance, popular CRM software Salesforce has its own marketplace called AppExchange, where users can easily connect Salesforce to solutions such as QuickBooks accounting software, Mailchimp email marketing software and DocuSign electronic signatures.

Here are a few things you can do with the right third-party integrations to make your life easier:

- Run CRM software straight from Outlook, Gmail or other email clients so you don't have to keep switching between apps.
- Automatically sync sales and order information with your POS system and accounting software to eliminate manual data entry.
- Automatically build email lists and launch email marketing campaigns from either your email marketing software or CRM software so you don't have to open both.
- Back up and sync data with Dropbox, Box.com and other popular cloud backup storage services.

### **Employee tracking**

CRM software is a great way to track employee activity and performance. Choose software that gives employees their own accounts where they can individually track their hours, tasks, meetings, sales numbers, goals and other items. The software should also give supervisors and upper management access to dashboards that let them view individual employee goals, completed tasks and

other metrics of productivity. This can help managers write employee performance reviews, create incentives, reward strong employees, and identify those who are struggling and address areas of improvement.

### **Social media**

A CRM with built-in social media monitoring features can save your marketing team time, because they won't have to switch platforms to perform the essential task of monitoring your company's social media.

Salesforce, for example, has tools for you to perform these social media tasks:

- Get in tune with what people are saying about your brand through social listening.
- Gain insight into the numbers of social media actions your brand gets, such as comments, shares and mentions.
- Check every social media channel (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.) to customize your social media strategy accordingly.
- Get insight into who your customers are.
- Identify and leverage your brand.
- Manage the day-to-day tasks of posting to your social media accounts.

### **Customer service**

CRM software can help you acquire and retain customers by providing excellent customer service. Look for the following capabilities that will allow your sales reps and customer support team to perform their best:

- Gives you a 360-degree comprehensive view of customers that shows everything there is to know about a customer from the first point of contact
- Automatically tracks all points of communications, from lead acquisition to closed sales and sales histories
- Logs all incidents, website visits, purchase histories, and other activities for future reference and to keep all reps on the same page
- Uses customers' first names to personalize all correspondence



- Has unique reference numbers for each account, customer and help issue
- Automatically sends customers acknowledgments of their inquiries and messages so they don't feel ignored
- Supports premade email templates and call scripts that answer the most common questions

## • **Lead Management**

- Leads are the lifeblood of any business no matter how big or small. Leads are potential customers who have shown an interest in your solution but haven't made a purchase yet. When you first start a new business, you begin with a handful of leads. As you begin to grow and scale, your sales team begins to receive more leads than they can handle. Your team can then no longer manage leads properly and equally in terms of giving them the attention they need, and things begin to fall through the cracks.



- Lead management is a systematic process in which incoming leads are qualified, analyzed, and nurtured so that they can be converted into new business opportunities. In a typical sales process, leads from multiple channels enter your lead management system, and the sales-ready leads are converted into deals. You need to have a lead management platform in place if you want to make the most of prospects who are interested in your product or service.
- **Step 1: Lead capture**

- Businesses generate leads through various online as well as offline sources such as email, social media, webinars, paid ads, trade shows, and a lot more. Manually adding these leads into your CRM software is not feasible, especially when the volume is high. A good lead management system ensures that every lead is automatically fed into the system from web forms, emails, and chat, preventing leads from falling through the cracks. It also captures the source, so you know what marketing campaigns are working and what's not.
- Irrespective of the size of your business, you most likely use email every day for contacting customers, reaching out to new prospects, following up with inquiries, etc. Email clients (like Gmail, Outlook) let you send and receive emails. They also allow you to include attachments, categorize emails into folders and search emails. While a standalone email client works great for communication purposes, it falls short when you compare it with email management with a CRM.
- **Step 2: Lead enrichment and tracking**
- Once a lead enters the sales cycle in Freshsales, the lead's profile is automatically enriched with publicly available information such as their job title, company name, and social media profiles. This ensures your sales team don't have to spend time and effort on research and manual data entry.
- **Step 3: Lead qualification**
- An effective way to qualify leads is through Lead Scoring. Lead scoring is a methodology for ranking leads in order to determine a prospect's sales-readiness. Leads are broadly scored on the basis of the interest they show in your product/service, their current place in the buying cycle, and their fit in regards to your business. Businesses score leads by assigning points, implementing rankings such as A, B, C, D or using terms such as 'hot', 'warm', or 'cold'.
- **Step 4: Lead distribution**
- When your business is small, you know your sales team inside out, so manually assigning leads to the right sales reps is easy. But with the growth of your sales team as well as an increase in the number of leads, this old-school method will delay the lead response time. The sooner your sales reps contact the leads, the more likely they are to buy from you. Ideally, a good lead management system should have the capability to automatically assign leads to sales reps based on certain set criteria. By

distributing leads to the right territories and sales reps, your sales team can prioritize their leads better.

- **Step 5: Lead nurturing**
- In an ideal world, every lead would be one that converts into a paying customer. But, in reality not all your leads are sales-ready. Many of them could still be in the research or awareness phase, figuring out if your product/service would serve their needs. With a lead management process in place, you can send nurture campaigns to these leads. You can educate and demonstrate the value of your product/service by sending your leads relevant content, promotional offers, etc., that nudges them forward in their decision-making process.

## Relationship Marketing and CRM, Relationship Development Strategies

**Relationship Marketing** was first defined as a form of marketing developed from direct response marketing campaigns which emphasizes Customer retention and Satisfaction rather than a dominant focus on Sales transactions. According to Liam Alvey Relationship marketing can be applied when there are Competitive products alternatives for customers to choose from and when there is an ongoing and periodic desire for the product or service.

CRM is based on the principles of **relationship marketing**, so a brief review of the development of marketing is helpful to understanding the evolution of CRM. As industries have matured, there have been changes in market demand and competitive intensity that have led to a shift from transaction marketing to relationship marketing.

The emergence of CRM as a business strategy has radically transformed the way organizations operates. There has been a shift in business focus from traditional to relationship marketing where the customer is at the centre of all business activity and organizations are now desperately trying to restructure their processes around the needs of their strategically significant customers.

The dynamics of the business ecosystem have changed the way in which companies do business both in relationship management and the streamlining of their operations. Relationship marketing is

emerging as the core marketing activity for businesses operating in fiercely competitive environments.

The practice of relationship marketing also has the potential to improve marketing productively through improved marketing efficiencies and effectiveness.

Retaining and developing customers has long been a critical success factor for businesses. In that sense, Customer Relationship Management (CRM) is not new, previously falling under the guise of customer satisfaction.

Relationship marketing seeks to change this perspective by managing the competing interests of customers, staff, shareholders and other stakeholders. It redefines the concept of 'a market' as one in which the competing interests are made visible and therefore more likely to be managed effectively.

Relationship marketing emphasizes two important issues. First, you can only optimize relationships with customers if you understand and manage relationships with other relevant stakeholders. Most businesses appreciate the critical role their employees play in delivering superior customer value, but other stakeholders may also play an important part.

Second, the tools and techniques used in marketing to customers, such as marketing planning and market segmentation, can also be used equally as effectively in managing non-customer relationships.

#### **Relationship Marketing Strategies:**

##### **1. Make Every Customer Interact:**

The first strategy to build a strong customer relationship and make every customer interact. Each and every interaction with a customer is a gift and should be valued. Getting into the mind of customers and knowing their needs will help know what the customer want and try to give that.

##### **2. Follow through on Commitments and Claims about Products or Services:**

The business must make a specific promise to the customer and deliver on that promise if it intends to win the heart of the customer. False claims however should be avoided at all cost as it can harm the credibility. Promise made must be fulfilled.

### **3. Offer Benefits and Product Value that Responds to the Customer's Desires:**

Another positive step to build a strong customer relationship is to offer value to the customer. Customers should know that firms provide the best quality.

### **4. Treat Customers as Individuals who are Respected and Valued:**

An retailer knows how difficult it is to find a customer and further retain such customer. Each customer is an individual his needs and preferences differ. His tastes and likings differ. Retailer has to understand such individual differences and try to meet each individual customer need.

### **5. Listen to Customers:**

If complaints are handled properly and quickly then they become a gift to the retailer. Retailer should be available and accessible when customers have questions, concerns or comments. If the shopkeeper can listen to the customers that itself will help to develop a bond and relationship between them.

### **6. Build a Strong Brand Identity:**

The customers should identify the products in the midst of the crowd and that is possible by creating a winning slogan, tagged with a catchy logo and a unique theme. Most important, if a specific promise is made, they have to deliver on that promise.

### **7. Surround your Customers with Valuable Information:**

Keep the customers informed on the latest trend, price or development by using emails, website content, social media and other methods of outreach. The firm must also make it easy for customers to reach them. Customer should be regularly updated with product its marketing and any change in that.

## **8. Business must have a Website:**

The firms should consider making their website user – friendly and easy to navigate for new and existing customers. The World Wide Web (www) is making it easier for businesses to build a strong customer relationship with their customers.

## **9. Reward Loyal Customers:**

Most of the business goes after new customers while forgetting that the existing customers need to be taken care of. Introducing a loyalty program is an effective relationship marketing strategy. Nothing strengthens a bond more than appreciation.

Thanking the customers for sticking to the brand will go a long way to make them know that they are very important. A simple thank you package might be all the business needs to connect personally with the existing customers.

### **Notes on CRM:**

Customer Relationship Management (CRM) can prove a vital tool in ensuring the success of a business through enhancing customer loyalty. CRM recognizes that customers are the core of a business and that the success of a company depends on effectively managing relationships with them.

It focused on building long-term and sustainable customer relationships that add value to both the customer and the company.

The probability of selling is to a new customer standing at just 15 per cent, while the chance of selling to an existing customer is 20 per cent. Also, a typical dissatisfied customer will tell eight to ten people of his or her experience, with the primary reasons for dissatisfaction including, lack of customer services or poor customer services and busy phone lines and unanswered e-mails.

Seventy per cent of customers who complain about products or services are likely to conduct business with the company again if, the complaint is addressed quickly. 90 per cent of existing companies do not have the necessary sales and service integration to support E-commerce. Introduction of CRM to a business could address these problems and improve relations with the customers.

CRM overlaps with the concept of relationship marketing, but CRM has a broader take on the concept since it included a one-to-one relationship, focusing on the philosophy of treating every customer differently.

A company must continuously interact with customers individually as this kind of marketing can create high customer loyalty and in turn, help to add to the company's profitability. However, as the world has turned more and more towards ever-advancing technology for solutions, many companies who have used CRM are now taking the concept to the cyber-world, through E-CRM. Through internet technologies, customer data can be easily uploaded into marketing, sales and customer service applications and analysis.

## **Business to Business CRM**

In both B2B and B2C sales cycles, the idea is to guide potential customers through a series of messages and (tailored) content that starts with generating brand awareness and leads all being well to a sale. If this sale is followed up with comprehensive customer care, it can also lead to repeat customers and brand advocacy.

In order to be successful, excellence in customer service begins at the start of every new sales conversation. Because B2B transactions are larger in value compared to B2C, B2B organizations are looking to improve the B2B customer experience by focusing on customer-centric sales strategies. From B2B lead generation to understanding the buyer journey, a sales CRM system helps maintain a reliable business database, streamline activities and focus on customer relationships.

The specific challenge of the B2B environment is that a business is much more complex and multifaceted than an individual customer (who already typically has a complex intersection of needs).

Companies are likely to have multiple considerations and requirements at each touchpoint, which can make it difficult to figure out what they need and where. This is where the CRM system comes in.

By compiling the information mentioned above, the CRM system enables marketing and sales team to track individual leads in detail



and figure out exactly how and when to influence them to move to the next stage of the funnel and also to automate specific tasks.

Though CRMs are generally designed with the intention of helping businesses streamline their sales activities, not all CRMs make sense for all businesses. A B2C CRM is very different from a B2B one. The functionalities, features and use cases would differ on both the platforms and if you are planning on buying a CRM, you need to be able to differentiate between the two.

The reason the two CRMs are designed differently is simply that the customer acquisition process in both these industries is completely different. Let's first see how they differ.

Business to business (B2B) companies, sell their products and services to other businesses and organizations instead of to an individual. Examples of B2B businesses are IT services, website services, corporate insurance companies and the like. These businesses are more contact-based and cater to a smaller audience.

Business to consumer (B2C) is the model where businesses sell directly to the end-user of their products or services. Examples of this business model would be restaurants, hospitality businesses, telecom industries, and more. Of late, this model most commonly refers to e-tailers, i.e businesses that sell their products to consumers online. They are more lead based and cater to a much wider audience.

A B2C CRM is built exclusively to handle the business requirements of customer facing businesses. The sales cycles are generally shorter, and the lead sources are numerous, which means that one person could be coming in through various sources. The CRM should be dynamic enough to identify where the sales are happening and which source gives the highest revenue. Since B2C CRMs need to handle large volumes of data, the internal search engine should be very efficient and the segmentation of data should also be well-structured.

B2C CRM also needs to be able to handle bulk email campaigns, as opposed to B2B where the email communication is usually on a personal level. Additionally, B2C businesses also need to attribute the lead source to find where the leads are coming from.

Most people think that all CRMs perform similar functions. But that is not the case.

### Need of different CRMs

With different approaches to selling, the CRM that B2B and B2C businesses use would also differ. For a business that sells payroll management software, they have a smaller audience to target and fewer contacts to store. A CRM designed for such a business would have the ability to store fewer leads and their nurturing capabilities would also be designed keeping such businesses in mind.

Imagine a business that sells furniture online and actively promotes the products on various channels such as email, social media and through PPC ads. They would be getting an inpour of leads, and a B2B CRM with a limited storage capability cannot possibly handle such a large inflow. They would need a CRM that is designed to handle a large database of leads.

If buying a CRM, then you need to identify the type of CRM it is. There are some basic differences between a B2B and B2C CRM. Here is a complete list for your perusal.

## Customer Relationship Management through Information Technology Tools

### CRM Software Based on the Type of Installation

We can further segregate this type of category into two types:

- **On-premise CRM Software:** Companies that handle sensitive customer information such as financial or healthcare institutions prefer on-premise CRM software. These systems incur a hefty upfront investment as it includes infrastructure as well as software development costs.
- These CRM systems are rigid in terms of functionality as adding a new feature is often expensive. Further, the organization itself must take care of data maintenance, security, and disaster recovery plans. Organizations can outsource these services to a third-party vendor, but they incur additional costs depending on your requirements.

- **Cloud-based CRM Software:** A business can use web-based/cloud CRM at a monthly recurring cost.
- Compared to on-premise CRMs, cloud CRMs are more flexible and budget-friendly as these CRMs are device-agnostic, and the service provider offers maintenance and data security.

These CRMs take a one-size-fits-all approach. Therefore, customizations may not always be possible. And since your data is stored at the vendor's servers, you are at the mercy of the vendor in case of a server outage.

### **CRM Software Based on Functionality**

There are three types of CRM tools based on their functionality:

- **Operational CRM:** These CRMs help businesses run their routine sales, marketing, and customer service operations. An operational CRM system enables you to track the customer journey through activities such as contact management, lead generation, lead scoring, and marketing automation.
- **Analytical CRM:** Analytical CRMs collect and analyze heaps of customer data and help businesses make data-driven decisions. These CRMs offer data management, customer acquisition, and retention activities through data mining, sales forecasting, conversion attribution, etc.
- **Collaborative CRM:** Collaborative/strategic CRM software enables organizations to share customer data across internal departments and external stakeholders (vendors, partners, etc.) to enhance Customer Experience (CX). While operational and analytical CRMs are also capable of information sharing, collaborative CRMs emphasize, particularly on the CX aspect.

### **Benefits:**

- **360-degree Customer View:** This is an exhaustive view of a customer, including their contact details, past communication, campaign history, and other pertinent information.
- **Automation:** Sales and marketing activities such as email campaigns, contact management, activity tracking, etc. that can be constantly monitored by the system.
- **Contact:** An entry that stores an entity's name, email address, phone number, physical address, and other information. The

entity could be a customer, prospect, company, partner, or a vendor.

- **Contact Management:** It refers to organizing, updating and storing contact information in the CRM software.
- **Dashboard:** It's the landing page when a user logs into the CRM software. The dashboard displays crucial analytics information and sales data and navigation options.
- **Deal:** Also known as an opportunity, a deal is a potential sale that has moved to the last stage of the sales funnel.
- **Integrations:** This is a feature that lets you connect the CRM software with other software applications in your MarTech stack to enable seamless data import and export. For example, you can integrate your CRM system with a Marketing Automation Platform (MAP), social media management tool, etc. to get a holistic picture of the customer.
- **Lead:** A lead has expressed their interest in your offerings. Leads are generally at the first stage of the sales funnel.
- **Lead Conversion:** Lead conversion signifies the conversion of a lead into a customer
- **Lead Management:** Lead management/nurturing activities help users stay in touch with leads to ensure that they don't drop-off from the sales funnel.
- **Pipeline:** Sometimes referred to as a funnel, a pipeline shows various stages of the purchase journey. A pipeline is generally divided into four stages, viz. lead generation, qualification, proposal, and sale.
- **Prospect:** A prospect is a sales-ready lead that is interested in your product and can purchase it.

## **Uses:**

### **Contact Management**

All the essential information related to a lead/customer's contact such as their name, email address, phone number, work details, past communications, etc. should be easily accessible and modifiable.

### **Lead Management**

Keeping track of leads can often be tedious if you're still relying on spreadsheets or other incompatible tools. The lead management feature gives you an overview of your leads with their status, lead

score, etc. By clicking on an entry, you can view their profile, recent activities on your website, prior communication, complaints, and so on.

### **Pipeline Management**

The pipeline management feature gives you a visual representation of your current leads and deals. The deals are segregated according to the stage of the sales pipeline. This makes it easy for salespeople to understand the status of each lead and helps them decide which leads to pursue.

### **Sales Automation**

The sales department is possibly already taxed with too much work. The addition of repetitive administrative tasks such as sending invoices or following-up with a cold lead can negatively impact their productivity.

With the sales automation feature, salespeople can automate repetitive tasks so that they can focus on hitting the sales target. Automation workflows are initialized based on triggers or rules. For example, if a lead hasn't replied after three days, the follow-up workflow will be activated wherein a reminder email will be automatically sent to the contact.

### **Sales Forecasting**

A CRM tool processes tons of data daily. The sales forecasting feature uses this data to predict future sales. This way, salespeople can get an approximate understanding of their pipeline and how efficiently they can push sales. Salespeople can effectively use this information and convert hot leads.

### **File Storage and Sharing**

Rater than relying on external file storage applications, salespeople can store important and frequently required files such as quotes, feature sheets, sales scripts, etc. in a centralized repository and share them with co-workers instantly.

### **Email Management**

You can integrate your email with CRM so that you don't have to jump between multiple tabs to send an email. With the email management feature, you can send emails right from the CRM interface, mark the status of the lead, mention a remark, and prioritize emails. This way, you won't miss out on connecting with any of your leads.

### **Reporting and Analytics**

This feature summarizes sales performance in a single dashboard. You can customize or create new types of reports based on your requirements and export them in different formats.