



Service Is the New Sales

How CRM can drive revenue from service requests.

By Pam Baker | March 17, 2009

While it's no secret that companies must make the most out of existing customers in order to prosper in this economy, some businesses are unaware of how helpful CRM is in doing so, especially during routine service calls. "CRM allows service professionals to ensure consistent service offerings, pricing, discounts and terms across a range of related service contracts," said RunE2E CEO John Brasch. "Agents can let customers know about offers that they may not be aware of — turning a simple service request into a sale."

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But cross-selling and upselling are not the only ways to net new sales through service requests. "Service warranty revenue optimization is a common benefit of service-related CRM," explained Brasch. "In-house agents can receive alerts when a customer's service contract is about to expire and engage in proactive outreach to ensure appropriate renewal."

Successfully tapping into this potential gold mine begins with understanding what CRM really is. "Adopting a CRM philosophy is not just about buying CRM software. It enables your entire work force to recognize new opportunities and ways to better service your current client base," said Matthew Petrosky, president of Shore Resolutions, a CRM, SEO and Web consulting group. "When every person in your company has access to information about your customers' previous purchases, their pain points and even what sports teams they like, each employee can be part of the inside sales team and help build long-term relationships."

It is vital to ensure this data is pulled together in a highly useable way. "It is important to remember that at the core of an effective CRM program is a cross-functional aggregation of a 360-degree view of the customer," said Liz Miller, vice president of The Chief Marketing Officer (CMO) Council.

Why is this important? "When an individual customer calls, the customer service rep, sales rep or the person who happened to pick up the phone — depending on your company size — knows exactly how to engage, and if there are any opportunities to cross sell and upsell," said Miller.

However, the data is worthless unless it is used proactively when interacting with customers. "Don't forget the basics ... Listen, listen, listen," advised Georgianna Crosby, principal with Customer Value Partners.

Crosby said there are three distinct ways to listen and that each is equally important in netting sales from service encounters:

- 1. Listen to what your customer isn't saying.** Don't just service the request. Listen to what the real pain point is by asking the right questions. So often, the representative responding to a customer's request for service simply answers the question at hand and never takes into consideration what is driving the request. By simply asking for more information — "What pain is this issue causing you? Can I help you with another issue? How will resolution help you?" — you may uncover an opportunity to provide additional services.

2. Listen to your data. Ensure that CSRs (customer service representatives) have access to data about each customer to whom he or she is responding. CRM systems provide a lot of data on customers — but not necessarily in a manner that is meaningful to the CSR. Plan for the opportunity by providing valuable customer profiles with the data that has been captured; then the CSR can then determine what up-sell and cross-sell opportunities may be appropriate for the customer.

3. Listen to the voice of your customer. Leverage your customer satisfaction feedback data to identify opportunities to improve your business processes. Identify real or even perceived pain points by customers and determine what obstacles may have originally kept them from purchasing additional products and/or services — and remove the obstacles.

With the proper CRM tools in place, your service team can successfully double as a sales team.

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