

*Effective CRM Implementation***Contents**

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Effective CRM Implementation

Successful CRM system implementation is critical to ensuring that the recipient organization receives the features and resources required to succeed. Staying involved ensures the organization receives the product and services expected.

Without careful focus on implementation, the resulting CRM system can vary widely from the organization's expectations set during the initial selection of the software. The result can be that your CRM users will lack the features or training required to make effective use of the system, as well as potential timeline and cost overruns. This can lead to a solution that feels more like an expensive mistake than a useful tool for the organization.

You are already a CRM Expert

A common assumption during implementation is that organizations are not skilled in developing a CRM. Organizations feel that they must leave CRM implementation to the technology experts. However, technology is only one critical part of a CRM solution. A CRM combines an organization's business rules with technology for managing information to support those rules. Only the organization knows its own business rules best. Therefore every organization implementing a CRM is an "expert" in this process, and must work closely with the technology partner.

Take Your Time

It takes time to determine requirements, then to select a system and implement it. Set aside enough time to make strong, thoughtful decisions, informed by complete information. Rushing through this process often makes the entire project much more costly and time consuming in the end.

Elements to CRM Implementation

CRM implementation is the process of getting a CRM system up and running for the organization. Depending on the CRM system, and the agreement between the CRM vendor and organization, the details of the implementation process will differ. Most implementation processes require a focus on the following elements:

- a. Vendor Contracting and Software Licensing
- b. Project Management
- c. Software Development
- d. Data Migration
- e. Training and Support

The sections on the following pages take a closer look at each element above.

Vendor Contracting and Software Licensing Explained

After selecting a CRM system, the process of contracting and licensing begins. Both processes are vital to setting expectations for what kind of CRM system will be implemented, how it will be supported, and costs required. CRM implementation projects that are not supported by clear contract and licensing terms often result in significant cost increases and missed timelines.

Contracting Explained

Contracting involves negotiations with the CRM vendor or outside consultant for services and support required to successfully implement and maintain the system. Some CRM systems require that the software vendor provide implementation and support in order to receive the software. Other systems may be supported by third party consultants, who themselves are not paid by the software vendor. For some organizations with the proper skills, some CRM systems can be implemented directly by the organizations with no outside support required. Strong contracts are not just legal language, they include a human readable work plan.

Licensing Explained

Licensing are negotiations covering intellectual property rights, usage rights and cost with the CRM software owner over their CRM product. A customer's license to the CRM software describes what they can and cannot do with it. CRM licensing is often incorporated into a contract with the CRM vendor. Some CRM vendors retain all ownership rights to the software, and protect their code from being changed by their customers. Some CRM systems are offered "open source", allowing users to modify the code extensively with minimal restrictions on the customer. Maintaining CRM software license requirements may require one-time and/or ongoing payments, or may be free of any financial cost.

Key Elements To Contracting and Licensing

There are several factors to consider when contracting and licensing software.

- a. **Always Negotiate a Contract:** Never begin a CRM implementation without an agreement on a contract. All contracts are negotiable, clearly articulate what you need and ask for changes required to the language to meet needs.
- b. **Know All Costs:** Every contract should clearly specify what the costs are for getting the CRM system completely installed, and what licensing and support costs are required going forward.
- c. **Determine a Timeline:** Ensure clarity on how long the project should take and a delivery date.
- d. **Clarify Communication:** Agree on a point of contact with the vendor or consultant, and what updates will be provided ongoing. Ensure these updates will address changes in cost, features and timeline expectations.
- e. **Identify a Process for Quality Control and Testing:** Most CRM systems will require some unexpected changes during implementation. Clarify what the process is for identifying these changes, and how much of this cost must be born by the customer.
- f. **Establish a Data Migration Plan:** Moving customer information into a new CRM system can be a very time consuming and technically advanced task. Identify the vendor or consultant role in this process.
- g. **Know Customer Responsibilities:** All customers must be involved in the CRM implementation process. Understand testing periods, data migration responsibilities, milestones for customer approval and sign-off, and training opportunities.

Project Management and Communications

Implementing a CRM is a time consuming and costly process, with many activities often happening at once. Ensuring strong project management and following a communications strategy helps to keep every participant well informed of their responsibilities and the next steps in the process.

Both the CRM vendor/consultant and the organization should pay close attention to the contract and work plan. The organization should ensure that regular communication happens with the vendor, and that questions raised in the organization are addressed. Typically a formal communication once per week or every other week is reasonable to keep up to date with the progress of the CRM implementation. The organization should follow all costs closely to ensure the project is on track financially.

Strong project management requires that the organization identify a staff person in charge of this task. Typical tools of a project manager to help keep the project on track include:

- a. **Calendar:** Keep track of meeting dates for all participants, major project milestone dates including the final launch of the CRM
- b. **Work Plan:** Typically the part of the contract that specifies what will be built/configured, what vendor support will be provided, what the overall timeline and cost should be, and the basic obligation of both the vendor/consultant and the organization.
- c. **Budget Spreadsheet:** A list of vendor/consultant costs, software fees and other costs per month during implementation
- d. **Task Lists:** A list of tasks for individual staff to complete, such as reviewing CRM functionality, making decisions on reports, testing, etc.

Software Development

Some CRM software require only basic setup and preparation before organizations can begin using it, while others require some or substantial customization before it can be used. In most cases, the development work substantially affects the final CRM product, and is the most significant cost component to implementation.

CRM developers require a clear understanding of an organization's business rules. The organization must work hard to clarify any informal or undocumented processes that affect the development of the CRM, and clearly explain these to the developer. The organization should review the work of the developer at regular intervals to ensure the task has been completed to satisfaction.

Elements to consider during software development include:

- a. **Explain What, and Why:** Conversations with developers require a focus on what feature should be built, and why it is important from the organization's business perspective. Leaving out the why can lead developers to make wrong assumptions about how features should work, resulting in costly overruns.
- b. **Get Involved:** Organizations should review features in development, even if other parts of the CRM are not ready yet. This helps avoid mistakes from growing into costly budget items or missed timelines.
- c. **Track Accomplishments:** Ask the vendor/consultant to document the features they have worked on, and what they accomplished in each case. This helps organizations understand the costs of specific features, and what it will cost to continue working on them. This also helps confirm that the vendor/consultant is on schedule.
- d. **Clarify Change Requests and Bugs:** Be sure to identify issues that appear to be "bugs" (ie something broken the vendor/consultant should fix within the budget) and "changes" (ie work that may or may not cost the organization extra). Agree on this before proceeding to work on these.

Data Migration

Many organizations have information in older systems they wish to move into the new CRM. Often this information is organized differently than the new CRM system, and requires some work to get it to fit inside. Focusing on migration strategies early can help ready your information for a smoother transition later.

Vendors/Consultants require a close partnership with the organization to properly understand who has which responsibilities for migrating data. This close relationship allows the vendor/consultant to offer tips and tools for how best to prepare for migration into the specific CRM tool, and where the best division of labor should be between the organization and vendor/consultant.

Elements to consider during data migration include:

- a. **Find the Data:** Organizations often have information scattered among different staff, inside of different systems. Find all the useful information required to populate the CRM and identify who maintains it, what it contains, and how accurate it is.
- b. **Improve the Data:** Many organizations move inaccurate data into their new CRM tool, creating just another problem for users. Work to identify what is inaccurate about the data and repair what is possible prior to importing to the new system.
- c. **Identify Available Migration Tools:** Some CRM systems and vendors/consultants have tools and services available to help transform data to fit the new CRM, and to move it into the system. Understand these tools and services early on and identify what work the organization must do to make use of these tools.
- d. **Test the Migration:** Make sure to run a test of the migration and use the CRM with this information. This ensures that the information arrives in the proper places in the CRM and allows organizations to make corrections before the final import takes place.

Training and Support

CRM software offers a wide range of tools for users to learn and master. Many users will require multiple exposures to documentation and training in order to gain the critical skills required to succeed with the new CRM. Often CRM systems will provide written documentation, videos and other self-paced trainings, while many will provide group trainings or periodic in-person training opportunities.

Elements to consider during training include:

- a. **Identify all Training Options Early:** Give future CRM users a head start by introducing them to overview trainings for the new CRM tool. Understand what is free and what is fee based. Review trainings for quality and to prepare users for future training.
- b. **Plan for Gaps:** In many cases, the available training materials will not cover every feature the organization plans to use in the CRM. Identify the written materials missing, and any lack of availability of video, live webinar and other forms of training required. Plan for how to learn these skills, either internally or through an external consultant.
- c. **Learn in Context:** Be sure to practice CRM skills using real data that the trainee recognizes and understands.
- d. **Train the Trainers:** Internalize the knowledge gained from trainings so that organization staff can train other staff.