

GETTING TRENDY

Rob Brickle tests some key CRM predictions against the reality.



Rob Brickle: emotional states are increasingly germane to what it takes to retain customer loyalty

In recent years, a number of predictions have been made about the direction of the CRM marketplace. I thought them worth airing for you to judge and see how well they had got on...

- The first key prediction was about CRM 1.0 moving to 'social CRM'.

Historically, the focus for CRM had always been operational, the aim being to automate processes that make the employee more effective in managing the relationship with customers.

This had been proven to work and was technology-driven. It tended, however, to be a one-way mirror, based around transactions with the customer driving any kind of insight – rather than taking a customer view of the supplier data and using this to determine the insight, ideally achieving a 360-degree view.

This concept was then driven towards dramatic transformation, as it moved toward a more social model of CRM – on the basis that customers increasingly expect access, transparency, honesty and collaboration with the companies they choose to do business with, and a personal experience.

As a result, CRM vendors began to incorporate social tools such as wikis, blogs and social networks – the so-called Web 2.0 applications – into the CRM suites they offer. Now CRM is recognised as a key tool at a time when holding onto customers has become a prime objective.

- The second trend was about customer analytics which would embrace and draw data from social sources.

Businesses require an increasingly personalised (and humanised) relationship with their customers; and customers are demanding highly individualised experiences with the companies they deal with. To be successful at this, businesses must have an intimate and detailed knowledge of their customers, not just random demographic data.

Behaviours, emotional states, connections and social matrices are increasingly more germane to what it takes to retain customer loyalty and, certainly, to make a customer an advocate. But customer analytics even now have barely begun to identify behavioural data effectively.

Some companies will complain that granular customer data is impossible to gather, but the behavioural data sources are out there. Think about social networks like Facebook or LinkedIn and the depth of the information provided by profiles. Consider sites like Slideshare.net or Flickr and the breadth of social tags that are available and specifically identifiable when it comes to the individual who created them.

Or what about the customer feedback on review sites ranging from the 'traditional' like Amazon to the more contemporary like Yelp? What about customer feedback in public and privately facilitated communities that are aimed at garnering consumer knowledge? Consider, for example, medical communities devoted to a specific condition or a specific treatment that are monitored by pharmaceutical companies.

What has been lacking is the actual analytics on this data. However, companies have started to develop the appropriate technologies to manage this.

- The final prediction was 'CRM goes mobile'.

Many vendors have attempted to bring CRM to mobile devices. But apart from a few that are BlackBerry-enabled, the failures have been more notable than the true successes. Part of the problem is the need to provide fairly complex functionality on

devices with small screens and thumb-operated keyboards. Another major problem is to provide a rich internet experience on slow networks.

That's why the CRM iPhone applications are better left unused. Not because they can't reproduce their functionality or exhibit a complete internet experience, but because they are so slow.

However, with the upgrade to 3G carrier networks as standard for mobile devices, the latency issues are starting to disappear.

The CRM vendors have been working on the unique features necessary to provide a good mobile experience on a small screen – as well as platform interoperability – so that CRM applications on the iPhone, BlackBerry and Windows Mobile devices work in tandem, regardless of which platform you have.

We are seeing the first signs of fast, interoperable CRM applications that are designed for mobile devices and work with their on-premises or on-demand parents.

● CRM Software, Call Centre & Marketing Software Expert Rob Brickle is managing director of customer-driven change consultancy **Bsquared Consulting**. Tel: +44 (0)20 8939 3840. Email: rob.brickle@bsquared-consulting.com.