

TIME FOR ACTION

The IS department must grasp the bull by the horns and take charge of their organisation's CRM policy, says Rob Brickle.



Rob Brickle: start talking the language of the business

It is time to look at things from the IS department's point of view...

The IS budget was put to bed, at the latest, in Q3 last year. It didn't include anything for CRM. The first quarter this year is already past and new budget is unavailable. Anarchy pervades in the various user departments as they learn about and individually sponsor, or procure, 'CRM' solutions for their needs.

This isn't necessarily that uncommon a scenario. It is one where a CRM strategy is probably lacking – but we have banged on enough about that already.

It is highly likely that there is a requirement for an holistic CRM solution. If things continue in an uncontrolled and unco-ordinated way, the variety of solutions will not deliver the best ROI to the business as a whole, and the blame will inevitably lie with the IS organisation. Time for IS to take some positive steps for the future and for the business, which require little or no capital expenditure:

- Start the CRM strategy ball rolling. There are a variety of departmental 'CRM' solutions; they work reasonably well in those departments but are not optimised for the organisation as a whole. Examine the CRM business strategy for the organisation. Take some ownership and control of it if you haven't been able to have some input already.

If no such strategy exists, then start lobbying for a cross-functional working group to be set up to explore and develop a strategy. This can't be generated without the user departments but needs the control and influence of IS to guide the solution.

- Teach your people 'business speak'. I was at a quality gathering last year where the chair of the event was a very senior executive from a global manufacturing company. His view of quality was not one of compliance but of business improvement driving positive change in the organisation overall. He made the point that all the quality professionals gathered there may well share his view and may be striving to achieve this – but unless they start talking the language of the business they will be ignored and continue to be seen as dealing with compliance.

In a way the same message applies to IS. Unless we can put things into the language of the business and clearly articulate the benefits to the business in a way in which they understand, we will be ignored.

Increase the credibility of your IS staff by ensuring that they understand the basic business principles of each department. Why not work with the various departments to implement a mutual education programme, where they shadow a business person for a period and *vice versa*? If you don't, then don't be surprised when your users continue to engage expensive external consultants who bring this skill to the table!

- Get the support of the marketing and sales departments (probably finance too). Marketing and sales people are the ones most likely to see the advantages of a CRM system. They will understand some of the 'soft' benefits that can be generated and the impact this can have on performance. They will understand how an appropriate strategy and system can drive change in the business, as well as drive out new opportunities and retain and enhance the value of existing relationships.

Get them on-side and they will help you articulate this to the finance people. Who knows, it may give you sufficient argument to create the budget you need this year or at least set you on the path for next.

- CRM, Call Centre & Marketing Systems 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.