



Hmmm, Here Customer! Where are you? Who are you?

Communicating with customers had always been such a simple matter. People telephoned or wrote, maybe even dropped by your representative office to have a chat.

Workflows in corporations were predictable, tested and known. Processes were stable and life was good.

Then came electronic communications.

Within a few years, companies suddenly had to manage telex, faxes, then voice mail systems, then e-mail - and the Web. This is on top of the above traditional communicating mechanisms. New technologies to assist companies were developing faster, creating an environment where product life cycles were measured in a handful of months and not years.

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Interestingly, the very technologies that were opening new possibilities for companies to communicate with customers have made it easy for those same companies to lose control of customer contact and in the process assist in fracturing the all-important relationship between buyer and seller.

Companies are now learning that when they focus on narrow issues, department-by-department or employee-by-employee, the view of the customer as a whole gets lost. Decisions that make sense for one part of an organization could have undesired effects on another.

It is well known that one bad customer experience in any channel can adversely affect the entire customer relationship and risk destroying loyalty.

As customers, we are all becoming more demanding of excellent customer service. Whether we are dealing with a utility company, bank, insurance company, airline, or telecommunications service provider, our tolerance of poor service is falling, and our expectations of service excellence continue to rise.

As many products are taking on something of a commodity status, and differentiation is at best short lived, excellence in customer service has become one of the few remaining differentiators in many markets.

Within this environment, businesses of all shapes and sizes now recognize the value of customer relationships on their business and are racing to implement some form of Customer Relationship Management (CRM) solution.

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Poor service delivery can be the result of many things, but a common cause is the inability of the IT infrastructure to support a consistent integrated customer experience across multiple channels and across the business functions of marketing, sales, service and delivery.

Organizations need to improve service levels now. They need to breathe life quickly into the legacy infrastructure so that improved customer experiences can be delivered on the front line as soon as possible, while at the same time meeting changing business needs.

Many companies have embraced these Customer Relationship Management (CRM) solutions as a valuable asset in winning and retaining customers.

However, do these companies see a maximum benefit on the bottom line? Perhaps more specifically, does the company know everything it needs to know about the customer's interaction lifecycle?

If you ask a single business unit, it might say yes, but this simplified local view might not match the enterprise-wide reality.

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Seeing the bigger picture

To remain competitive in today's customer-centric marketplace, companies need to create a complete view of their customers and share that view across the enterprise. Customers expect personal service and that your company already knows every detail of the relationship they have with your company, regardless of the channel they use to communicate with your company.

The customer does not see your company as a departmentalized conglomerate. Customers do not call the customer support department or the billing department - they call Your Company.

It is therefore more important than ever for an operator to understand the marketplace, know how products and services are being used, have access to a full integrated view of each individual customer and have the ability to respond quickly and appropriately to changes in market conditions and regulations.

One of the important functions of a CRM system is to help identify candidates for cross selling and up selling. It does this by tracking how much customers spend, and what they spend it on, in order to identify future offers that may appeal to each customer.

What is needed for effective CRM is an alternative view of customers — one that takes into account both their value as individuals and the value of their relationships with others.

If marketing viewed customers by households, companies might arrive at completely different conclusions about whom their most valuable customers are, and what motivates them to buy. Indeed, simply by recognizing which customers are members of households, it could make a reasonable set of assumptions before doing any further customer segmentation.

It can radically change a company's idea of which customers it considers to be the most valuable. It can be used to maximize the profitability of customers by providing a more accurate view of the collective value of the household, as well as the relative value of each household member.

In terms of holistically understanding the customer, the key strategy required is known as having a "single view of the customer." This means that across all products and interactions, the individual customer is the highest-level piece of information.

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A New View Of Our Customers

Companies providing different services usually use different information systems to maintain customers. For this reason, separate departments of the same company may store customer data differently. Primarily this is due to the transactional nature of the supporting business systems that they are using – for example a General Ledger application from a financial suite.

What may be an alphanumeric number identification for a given individual or organization in one system may not necessarily be represented in a way that makes recognition and reconciliation an easy task for comparing the details stored in another system.

Over 90% of companies believe that a single integrated view of the customer is critical

Only 2% of these companies say they have achieved this view

Due to the potential lack of relationships and synchronization between operational systems, that same individual or organization, that is – your customers, will be represented in all systems separately and differently.

To successfully deploy customer-orientated solutions, organizations need a process of identifying a single individual from multiple systems and/or records within an enterprise. By applying a set of business rules and templates, a unique identifier may be established for each customer. This consolidation of customer data from all given sources may even diagnose, within the same system, other data anomalies that may exist.

Using sophisticated data correlation tools, it is possible to compare customer information using data such as house numbers, phone numbers, last names, products and accounts, and then link records together into a single customer view ready for processing in your chosen segments.

An example in the telecommunication industry is where customer data is usually stored within the billing system. In many cases, when a new post paid SIM card is sold (that is, a new contract is signed) a new customer record appears, even if this customer already exists in the system. Little effort is made to utilize existing customer data records to locate a match. As a result you have duplicate efforts in unnecessary and over complicated processing.

The intent of creating a Single View Customer Scheme is to enable a foundation for consolidation of customer information into a unique identifier for deployment of analytics within a CRM/Data Warehouse environment. It is not limited to this, however, and businesses may use this resultant unique identifier as a basis for other applications or processes that may benefit from a unique identification approach to informational requirements.

Staying competitive and gaining market share require flawless execution and a strict focus on the customer.

Such benefits of implementing a single view customer solution include identifying and understanding new business opportunities, taking holistically based actions with specific customers as well as analyzing the impact on profitability of a new business strategy or competitor 's activity.

Choosing the right technology toolset for a comprehensive CRM solution is critical. However, the ability to improve customer service rapidly - particularly in the delivery of quality customer information to all points of contact - is key.

Of all the challenges facing Communications Service Providers, Financial Institutions, Utility Companies, Retailers and Transportation organizations including fierce competition, changing regulations, blurring business boundaries and rapidly advancing technologies – no issue looms larger than your customer relationships.

How do you acquire new customers? Reduce the rate of churn? And grow?

Simply put, organizations need to know the holistic behaviour of their customers before they can effectively address customer needs. If organisations fail in this regard and are therefore slow to improve their management of customer relationships, they may well find their prized assets have gone elsewhere.

SINGLE VIEW EXCHANGE from Languix Pty Ltd

The SVX solution from Languix Pty Ltd is the result of several years of trial and error in creating this foundation. Using precise matching processes and algorithms, SVX successfully provides the basis for customer-orientated business systems enabling better business decisions and driving customer-centric processes.

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