

Ways the media industry can win with CRM

By Roger Strain Posted: 25th August 2009

Keeping a print media business afloat is never easy at the best of times – and at the moment, with global shockwaves reverberating through the newspaper industry in particular, it's harder than ever. Fortunately for South Africa's titles, there is still life in local print advertising – but the sales job is a little harder.

In this environment, tight sales pipeline management is critical – and it's here that customer relationship management (CRM) software can really come into its own. Most ad sales teams still run on spreadsheets, which creates several problems. For one thing, it's hard to prevent different titles approaching the same client, each without knowing what the other is doing – and, in a very relationship-driven industry, that can damage relationships.

Another problem is that it's extremely hard to keep information accurate and up to date. Exchanging spreadsheets via e-mail sometimes just makes the problem worse – you end up with multiple copies of the same document, always out of synch and out of date. Trying to put something as simple as an invitation list together can be a logistical nightmare.

CRM takes all of that pain away. Keeping all customer details in a single database means they're always up to date – and no matter who is contacting the client, they'll always know who else has done so recently, and what the outcome of that contact was.

Many of the same advantages apply to online ad sales as well. In fact, since online ad sales and placements are a much more complex business with a much greater volume of deals, CRM systems are arguably even more important.

One recent client, 24.com – which places ads dynamically to ensure they're relevant - faced a huge challenge in trying to discover exactly which ads had been served, where and when. This information was not only important to its clients, but also internally so that advertising revenue could be allocated fairly between the different titles. Integrating CRM with other line of business software made up-to-date information much more visible to staff and customers alike. (Incidentally, because integrating with other software can be such a critical component of CRM success, it's important to choose a system with Web services architecture that will make that integration easy.)

Subscription sales campaigns also become easier when there's a CRM system in place. A CRM system can run a contact centre auto dialler and make it easy not only to record call results, but also to schedule follow up calls or send application forms.

Managing subscribers is equally easy. The ideal is to have a system that will route every incoming communication – whether it's an e-mail, phone call or message from a Web form – to the same place. That way, anybody the customer speaks to has access to a holistic view of the customer. Clients like MWEB and Kalahari.net have used CRM to deliver faster, more targeted customer service.

Ultimately, implementing CRM is about creating a customer-centric view of your entire organisation. Wherever your customer information is held – in sales databases, in debtor's books, in logistics planning systems – it should all be visible from the same place. Media organisations that can get that right are first in line for survival.

Liquid Thought

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