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WHITE PAPER

Social CRM From Talk to Action: Learn how to put Social CRM to work for you

Ready to embrace social CRM but unsure where to start? Here's a best practices guide to get you started.

Executive Summary

Unless you've been living under a rock the last few years, you've heard plenty of buzz about the power of social media to transform not just personal interactions, but business ones. In fact, if you're like most forward-thinking businesspeople, you no longer need convincing: you know that the "social revolution" is here to stay and that it requires changes in your business approach and use of supporting technologies—especially your CRM system, the hub of your prospect and customer interactions. Indeed, you're eager to stop just talking about social CRM and put it into action.

But the question remains: how? If you're stuck at this crucial juncture, you're not alone. Odds are that your company has already made some forays into the social space. Yet for many companies, these projects have been rolled out in fits and starts, generating initial excitement but failing to maintain momentum or form a coherent social strategy, let alone deliver measurable business results. What started out as an intriguing initiative to get closer to the customer and generate business value may have lost its sheen and become just more work, with no real sense of tangible returns.

If this describes your company, don't despair. As with any new technology or trend, the early adopters sail in uncharted waters and must sometimes learn by trial and error. The good news is that best practices and proven strategies for effective social CRM have begun to emerge, and heady technological evangelism about as-yet-unreleased products has been superseded by actual products you can implement today. This makes it the perfect time to step back and assess how you can put a true, successful social CRM strategy into action.

Five Best Practices for Social CRM

1. Treat Social CRM as Part of Your Overall CRM Strategy

To put social CRM into action, you need internal consensus and understanding as to what it is you are trying to achieve with your "social" initiative and how you are going to achieve it. The resulting plan will look different in every company, based on the organization's specific goals, customer base, and business processes, but an underlying current in all plans should be recognition of the new reality of the customer-controlled conversation and a strategy for harnessing its mutual value for both the customer and the company.

In devising your social CRM strategy, look first at your existing CRM strategy. Is it working? Are you able to define its value? Do you struggle with user adoption? Is your CRM system flexible enough to accommodate shifting demands and changing business processes—of which social CRM is just one—or have you outgrown it? If you have any qualms about your CRM system's ability to meet your long-term needs, address these issues before investing in social CRM.

Looking to a social CRM tool to fix an underperforming CRM implementation is a surefire path to disappointment, as the best social CRM projects are those that are approached as natural extensions of your existing CRM tools and strategy. Social media channels differ significantly from traditional means of customer interaction, but they remain just that: new channels. They must supplement and complement existing channels and feed into the same 360-degree customer picture you strive to achieve within your CRM system. Implementing a standalone social tool that is not fully integrated with your CRM system simply creates new information silos and risks creating a highly disjointed customer experience.

It is therefore essential to take a holistic approach to customer relationship management, one that does not arbitrarily distinguish between "social" and "traditional" CRM, but recognizes that these are all linked elements of an effective customer engagement strategy, best served through a seamlessly integrated solution.

To formulate an effective social strategy, start with a solid CRM strategy and effective tools, then look at how and where social channels fit into this web of customer interaction.

2. Prioritize and Iterate

One of the biggest challenges of any social CRM program is determining which of the many available channels and tools to focus on. While it's easy to get caught up in the dizzying array of available options, a pragmatic approach can easily mitigate risk. Companies taking their first serious steps toward social CRM should look for technology maturity and adoption in selecting which social tools to incorporate first.

The simple way to approach this is to go where your customers and prospects are. Do they blog? Do they ask peers for advice on Twitter, share views on Facebook, build their professional profile on LinkedIn? Different consumer and business groups often show different adoption and usage patterns.

Once you determine which social tools your customers use, develop a prioritized list of which ones to include as part of your social CRM strategy, taking into account the aforementioned technology maturity (how long has the social tool been around, and has it matured into a relatively stable system?) and usage by your customers and prospects, as well as the ease and cost of integration with your CRM system. Consider also your company's CRM user groups and business processes, and the extent to which each social tool offers a logical fit and identifiable opportunities for value-generation.

Embracing an iterative, phased approach to social CRM is sensible. Given the dynamic, rapidly evolving nature of the social web, your social CRM initiative will most likely entail a process of continual expansion, refinement, and enhancement. It may make sense to focus on a single social tool as a test case, or you may wish to focus on a few social tools at once in order to devise a more integrated cross-channel strategy.

3. Integrate Social CRM into User Workflows

A fundamental goal of CRM is to create a fluid, integrated, consistent experience across all customer-facing departments and functions. Whether a customer is interacting with your sales, marketing, or service teams, and whether they're dealing with the same service rep they talked to yesterday or a new one, they should encounter the same informed, personalized interaction and overall customer experience.

The same goals apply to social CRM. Using more channels increases the risk of fragmentation in both data collection and the customer experience. Social data is just another piece of a 360-degree view of your customers, and thus it should not be siphoned off into a separate system. Likewise, social-media interactions and associated activities typically fall into the same kinds of categories as other CRM activities and workflows, such as marketing communications, lead generation, pursuit of sales opportunities, and customer service. As such, to implement social CRM in a manner that enriches and expands existing processes, rather than splintering them, companies must integrate social tools with their existing CRM records and workflows.

What this means is that an employee must be able to access and act upon social information in the same locations and in the same ways that they can with other customer and prospect data. Customer or prospect intelligence gleaned from social sources must be integrated into the existing customer or prospect CRM record, not a standalone system. Users should be able to check into their customers' or prospects' social activities centrally from within this CRM record, without having to visit each social site separately. Furthermore, users must be able to respond to and act upon this intelligence within the same rubric as other CRM interactions; for example, transforming a Twitter enquiry into a lead and assigning it for follow-up, or logging a service incident in response to a disgruntled Facebook wall post. This depth of social CRM integration not only ensures consistency of customer experience across traditional and social channels; it also saves time and creates efficiencies for users, increasing user adoption.

4. Focus on Value

In defining goals and prioritizing phases of your social CRM initiative, keep your focus squarely on value: what value will each social component bring, and how will it be measured? Bear in mind that social activity is by nature a two-way street, so ideally, the value generated should be reciprocal. After all, how deeply are you likely to engage your customers if there's nothing in it for them? The best goals therefore combine value for the company with value for the customer: faster, more efficient service responses, for example, benefit both the customer and the company. Similarly, more corporate transparency in exchange for more customer feedback results in a win-win scenario.

Determine up-front how you are going to measure success in the social sphere, and establish pre-project benchmarks against which to measure progress. Metrics might include customer satisfaction and retention, leads generated from social sources, service-ticket times for incidents generated from social versus other sources, and the like. Your measurement criteria will likely be a mix of "hard" and "soft" metrics, but be sure that you have a way to tie your social initiative back to genuine value.

5. Keep One Eye on the Future

Because of the rapidly changing social landscape, social CRM initiatives should be conducted with a view to future business agility. Focusing on value and taking a prioritized, iterative approach minimizes risk and delay, but it does not diminish the probability that you will in future have to accommodate within your CRM paradigm something that is impossible to foresee today. New social tools and channels will continue to appear and to transform the business landscape. While you may not be able to anticipate precisely what these will be, you should ensure that your CRM system and social CRM implementation are as open and flexible as possible to accommodate ongoing additions and refinements over time.

Pivotal Social CRM: True Integration

Social CRM signifies a major change in the way companies and customers interact, and as with any game-changing development, there is no shortage of evangelism and hype. Until now, however, few products have even come close to delivering on the vision of true social CRM. The release of Pivotal Social CRM is impressing industry leaders, analysts and customers alike.

CRM expert Paul Greenberg, author of CRM at the Speed of Light, has called Pivotal Social CRM "the most comprehensive technology solution" for social CRM , and Forrester analyst Nigel Fenwick has noted its "very impressive integration between CRM and Social."

Pivotal Social CRM brings business users the power of the social Web where it is most relevant and valuable: right within their CRM system. With seamless integrations to Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, InsideView, and Google BlogSearch, Pivotal Social CRM makes deep insight and intelligence from the most popular social media sites available as part of the natural daily workflows of sales, marketing, and service teams.

Social Monitoring & Communication

Users can search LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook, and more without leaving the CRM system. Contacts and company records can be linked to multiple social accounts, and their social activities can be easily monitored from an intuitive CRM dashboard and recorded within the CRM database along with tagging for negative, neutral, and positive sentiments. Organizations can use these features to uncover social media intelligence by identifying prospects, tracking deal chatter, monitoring public opinion, spotting customer complaints and issues, and more, and best of all, they can take immediate action on what they learn. When a social activity merits follow-up, users can instantly generate a lead, service ticket, task, or other activity within the CRM system, ensuring that social interactions are logged and responded to in a manner consistent with other corporate processes and workflows.

Pivotal Social CRM also enables companies to streamline communications by broadcasting marketing messages and corporate announcements to CRM contacts and multiple social network audiences in a single step. Users can manage Facebook events, invitations, and attendance lists from right within the CRM system. These features enable companies to grow their social media presence and derive more marketing value from social sources with less time and effort.

While many vendors claim to offer social CRM, none match the true social solution available with Pivotal Social CRM—one that not only incorporates inbound and outbound social activity, but also integrates this activity into existing CRM workflows and business processes.

Conclusion

By using a thoughtful and strategic approach to social CRM that follows the best practices set out above, powered by a comprehensive social CRM solution such as Pivotal Social CRM, your business can quickly harness the vast potential of the social web for measurable business value.

To learn more about Pivotal Social CRM, call 1-877-PIVOTAL or visit www.PivotalCRM.com.

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