

New technology can reap benefits for SMEs

M MUNEEER

W E ALL know that technology helps businesses. Not just large businesses. It is not that expensive for small and medium businesses to use technology to reap benefits. If you are a small business owner, remember that with technology and communication, any raw data you have can be translated into useful information and drive your strategy better. For example, if you have been facing trouble getting the detailed analysis from your sales force, a simple database programme will allow you to accurately measure their sales effectiveness, who are your best customers, and who is giving you a large chunk of your revenues.

As a small business owner you are more concerned about driving sales and topline. And that is precisely where technology can help you. The benefits it can deliver in sales management should not be ignored. And, don't worry; it is not as complicated as you think for implementing such technology in your business. And it is not too expensive as I mentioned in the beginning. You do not need the complex and sophisticated database management software that large companies typically use. You can use a simple and cheap database that can be set up by just about any-

one who is computer-literate and competent. To top it up, you can read *Database for Dummies* kind of books as well.

A lot of training will be needed if someone is lacking in formal knowledge of information technology. How long would depend on the type of business and the internal processes, steps and forms involved in the running of your business. The payback is tremendous. If you are perplexed at the required effort, you can always hire professionals like IT freelancers or even small business consultancy firms to create a simple sales or customer database according to your budget. In order to do so, useful information is required. You will probably need information on which accounts generate most of the revenues since you will need to put in more resources and efforts on servicing these accounts or clients. That is the only way to increase the share of wallet at these critical customers.

Most businesses must manage key accounts better since it is probably easier and cheaper to create more business from existing accounts rather than acquiring new ones. Small businesses should start out with simple Microsoft Access database, which is fairly easy to set up and does not require too much capital investment as it is already pre-installed in most personal computers. In essence, such tools will make



ORGANISE: Efficient CRM requires focused activities and job allocation

good managers better as these tools allow them to manage faster and more competently, guided with information. Using technology does not

change bad managers into good ones either.

With the right technology tools, as the owner or CEO of the firm you

will get a helicopter view. Nothing can be hidden since you will have a performance-driven sales team where in they will have to fill in the required fields or risk losing incentives. Naturally, this will lead to resistance in the beginning. You can overcome this by explaining to the team that this would help them increase coverage and get more with less effort. The reports will form the basis for the claims of problems, so you can find ways to resolve them.

The typical way a business is done is not drastically different in terms of sales. What really has changed is how you maintain the relationship and trust.

In the past, customer loyalty was a factor, but now with fierce competition from every type of business conceivable, you need information to maintain that loyalty with customised services. With price-cutting and discounts abound, today loyalty needs much more attention.

So what is this buzzword, CRM? It is nothing but a process to ensure that your good customers are handled and serviced better. It is all about maintaining the information about your customers and keeping track of their businesses. Having said that it does not mean you shall not take care of your bad customers. Based on data analysis you should classify your customers and see if some bad ones fall into strategic cus-

tom segments. This segmentation may be done in various ways such as based on sales (both actual and potential), depth of relationship, repeat business and business potential. If you treat customers well by adding value to their business and not by winning and dining, you will gain their loyalty and get repeat business. If their interests are taken care of why go to another vendor and teach the new vendor their requirements all over again? It would be much of a hassle for them to get someone else if you have been servicing them long and know their business well enough.

So, how will you implement your own CRM system? Start with compiling all your business contacts into MS Excel spreadsheet with relevant fields for analysis. You can store the data into a central database and use it for MS Outlook for synchronising with your other devices. That way you will have access to everything everywhere. You should also buy one of those high quality business card scanners or use your assistant to type the data of the cards you have into the database.

There you are, all set for CRM 101. It just does not cost anything but some focused activities and job allocation!

(The writer is CEO and MD of CustomerLab Solutions)