



Customer Relationship Management Software 101

Throw Away Your Rolodex™ - - or Send it to the Office Supply Museum

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I have to admit, I kind of miss my Rolodex™. You know, that round thing with the neat little knob on the side that contained all of the contacts I knew, all of the contacts I wanted to know and all of the contacts that I knew but wished I didn't know. It was very satisfying to flip it around and listen to that neat clicking noise as I watched the world go by at my fingertips. I'm pretty sure no one really uses a Rolodex™ any longer (if you do, please don't take offense); they've probably ended up in some office supply museum somewhere. However, I am sure that many people are wasting time and resources using antiquated and disjointed methods of retrieving, organizing and maximizing important client information. Contacts are often-times locked away in some information silo somewhere, creating an island of information that no one can reach or utilize. There are some basic steps an organization can take; one of which is implementing integrated CRM software to better organize and utilize important information.

FIRST THINGS FIRST – What is CRM software?:

Customer Relationship Management (CRM) in the purest sense is, "A software solution that helps a business to manage their customer relationships in an organized manner." Basically, this software is the all-in-one *very* graduated Rolodex™ law firms and other organizations use to manage their clients, prospects and business information. Some may argue that Microsoft® Outlook has, in essence, replaced the Rolodex™. It has in some ways but the lack of two-way integration with the centralized repository of names really still limits the user. Truly, from a sales and marketing perspective, CRM software, when used to its full potential, is the key to organizing and uncovering qualified leads in the most efficient manner. From a management perspective, it is the memory of an organization; a place where all contacts are kept and all communication is recorded.

ORGANIZATION & RETRIEVAL – Life Before and After Implementing an Integrated Customer Relationship Management (CRM) Application

Before: Until recently, many organizations opted for the "best of breed" approach to their software packages, much as they would dinner at a bad four-star restaurant. They order expensive à la carte side dishes (systems) just for the sake of having them, without considering how the decision will impact the main course (enterprise). Instead of a centralized and organized database, much of the information is randomly and repeatedly entered. Marketing-wise and administratively, a lot of time is wasted looking up contact information and then re-keying it into separate, disparate databases. One change is made in one database, resulting in having to manually make the same change in other databases. Although this is a basic approach, a lot of people are still doing it. The only benefit to this is it's a great way to learn client's names!

Implementing a stand-alone CRM application that doesn't integrate with a firm's financial and practice management package results in important information never making it from point A to point B. A connection is never made between the client's needs and how the firm can meet those needs. This results in lost opportunity and ultimately lost revenue.

After: A CRM software application, especially one that is integrated with the firm's core system, is designed with efficiency in mind. First, I would advise that you purchase CRM software that is built into your core management, preferably financial and practice management, software package. This will enable you to automatically do away with multiple, disparate databases as everything ties together and you will not get that unblended and expensive "à la carte" effect. A CRM application that integrates with practice management enables users to enter the same data in just one place, thus eliminating potential errors and omissions and not to mention wasted time. If a user updates contact information on the list, the changes are updated throughout the entire database (globally). This includes addresses, phone/fax numbers and email addresses.

It is also imperative to find an application that integrates with Microsoft® Outlook; the attorney's centralized contact list. Contact files are updated through two-way integration and vice versa. Any changes made to the contact file information are populated on the marketing mail list. In addition, this tool allows users to schedule events, track responses and send email alerts as reminders of tasks to be completed. Also, when working on marketing projects, contact information can be easily exported into mail-merge format to be used in Microsoft® Word or a comparable word processing program.

Most importantly, CRM software is used to track ROI with regard to seminars, events and new initiatives through cost comparison with business received as a result of a seminar and/or event. Custom fields are set up to track ratings, responses and even surveys. In addition, with an integrated system firms can automatically see the historical information that ties into the client's needs. With investments, inception to date billing, etc. listed, marketing can discover opportunities to cross-sell and strategically market to them.

Utilizing CRM software will not only save time and resources - it just makes good business sense. Whether you are a well-established law firm with a complete marketing department or if you are a small start-up firm licking your own envelopes, you will certainly reap the rewards of implementing a built-in, graduated firm "Rolodex™" that integrates with your core financial and practice management system.

About the Author

RainMaker provides mid-to-large sized law firms with proven, practical and progressive Financial Management, Practice Management, Business Intelligence, CRM/Marketing and Case/Matter Management software. Leah Bilotta, Marketing Manager, RainMaker Software, Inc. can be reached via lbilotta@rainmakerlegal.com. For more information about RainMaker Software, Inc. please visit www.rainmakerlegal.com.

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