Ask SCORE

Tips For Choosing The Right CRM Platform For Your Small Business

Customer relationship management (CRM) systems offer technology to streamline a company's ability to interact with current and future customers. A CRM system essentially provides a central place where businesses can store customer and prospect data, track customer interactions, and share this information with colleagues. It allows businesses to manage relationships with customers, helping the business to grow.

A good introduction to the benefits of having a CRM system can be seen at …

https://blog.perfectmind.com/benefits-of-using-crm-for-your-business

You can find a variety of CRM platforms on the market to help you automate, organize, and synchronize your marketing sales, customer service, and technical support activities and data.

All CRMs come with their advantages and disadvantages, so how can you know which one is the best fit for your small business?

"The cost of acquiring a new customer is always much greater than retaining an existing customer," explains SCORE mentor and business development expert Wilson Chu. "Therefore, it is so important to collect and analyze data on your existing customer base so that you can use this data to retain and grow sales to these customers. CRM systems should allow you to collect the most useful data about your customers."

"For example, I met a company called Back Office Thinking that uses CRM to track and manage donors for nonprofit organizations. Their objective is to encourage/cultivate a first time donor to ultimately become a donor that puts the nonprofit into their will. In order to do this, you need data on the donor such as age, finances, family, etc."

When deciding on a CRM for your small business, ask yourself these questions to help you narrow down the options that will best serve your company:

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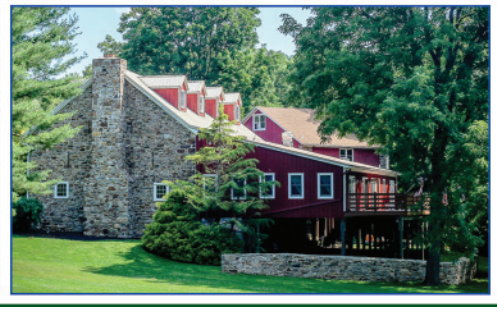

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- **What is the most important thing I need it to accomplish?**
  For example: increase qualified leads, improve customer service interaction, organize contacts, track interactions and transactions, etc.?
- **What systems do I need it to interface with?**
  For example: your email platform, accounting system, contacts platform, calendar, etc.?
- **How many users must it accommodate?**
  Is it capable of growing with your company? What will it cost to add users?
- **How much maintenance will it require?**
  If you have a system that involves premise-based hardware, find out what it will take to keep its features and functionality updated and to scale it as your company grows.
- **Can it be accessed conveniently?**
  Will your sales team be able to enter and update information about leads and customers remotely from their desktop and wireless devices? Accessibility to your system no matter where your team members are will help prevent important information from slipping through the cracks.
- **Will data synchronize automatically between all devices and systems that interface with your CRM?**
  If data is not synced automatically, depending on when your team members are looking at data and what system they are using, they may not be seeing up-to-date information.
- **What changes in my business might I need it to accommodate in the future?**
  Think about your expectations related to adding staff, growing your base of prospects and customers, diversifying the products and services you offer, providing more billing options, etc.
- **Is a free demo available so I can get a feel for its capabilities and ease of use?**
  Getting some hands-on time with a CRM can give you a better idea of how easy it is to navigate and the efficiency it might provide.

According to Chu, "The CRM system/software a small business chooses must be able to collect the proper information, be able to analyze that data, and report it in a format that can be used in the company's customer service, sales, and marketing efforts to cultivate its customer base."

While the vast majority of CRMs for small businesses are cloud-based offerings, they still require a notable investment of money and time. You will want to carefully decide on the solution that is right for your business, so you make the best use of your human and financial resources.

For insight about the different administrative and operational aspects of your business that you might streamline with a CRM, consider talking with a mentor at your local SCORE chapter.

Since 1964, SCORE "Mentors to America's Small Business" has helped more than 10 million aspiring entrepreneurs and small business owners through mentoring and business workshops. More than 11,000 volunteer business mentors in over 320 chapters serve their communities through entrepreneur education dedicated to the formation, growth and success of small businesses. For more information about starting or operating a small business, contact SCORE TriCounty. You can call 610.327.2673, email tricounty@scorevolunteer.org or visit the website at www.tricounty.score.org.