US ONSHORING OFFERS SUPERIOR EFFECTIVENESS OVER OFFSHORE FOR CRM IMPLEMENTATIONS

Whitepaper

Eagle Creek Software Services

Introduction

Today's business environment is more competitive than ever. In order to thrive, organizations need to excel in meaningful customer and prospect engagement across the buyer's journey. CRM continues to grow in importance and IT support for this changing business environment needs to expand accordingly. With enterprise level CRM Systems companies can process and understand their customers and prospects and respond quickly in sales and service, and at times, instantly, to shifting customer desires. Companies need to stay current with their CRM applications but with a sense of economic trepidation, IT budgets are still tight.

What are the options for technical support of your CRM initiative?

Companies looking to enhance their CRM initiatives have several options today as far as execution. The first option, do it yourself, is often not an option. Few companies have sufficient resources to execute on large-scale CRM implementations and upgrades. And hiring a team of CRM professionals to oversee the project would be difficult as competent CRM IT resources remain in short supply. To train employees to successfully execute the implementation is too costly and time consuming.

The second option companies have when undertaking CRM implementations or enhancements is to hire onsite consultants. However, the current economic environment makes this option too costly for most companies. The third option, hiring offshore consultants, comes with its own set of obstacles and risks. While it often appears to be cost-effective, there have been very few successful large scale CRM deployments managed by offshore resources.

Experience has proven that partnering with an onshore, U.S. based Technology center provides the most success for companies implementing or upgrading their CRM applications. An onshore partnership that effectively leverages onsite and onshore resources offers the best alternative that maximizes software investment, improves efficiencies and quality, while managing price and risk.

Let's examine why.

Why CRM is different from a business standpoint

The early days of CRM proved to be an unwieldy process that was better in theory than in practice. Organizations are now thinking of CRM as a business strategy that focuses on customer experience, knowledge, satisfaction and retention – a customer-centric business philosophy. Effective CRM practices significantly increase an organization's potential for profit. It increases internal communication, provides ways for employees to work together toward a common goal, makes the selling process easier and more effective, and most importantly, increases prospect acquisition and customer satisfaction and loyalty.

In this buyer driven world, it is important to listen to how the customer wants to interact – be it via telephone, email, mobile device or social media. In order for CRM solutions to be effective in today's technological world, all prospect and customer touch points must be personalized, integrated, consistent and of high quality. All channels should interconnect to create a complete and seamless customer experience.

Ownership of the customer and prospect experience remains one of the few things that has not been outsourced. Companies can still achieve competitive advantage by delivering a singular customer and prospect experience. By understanding the buyer's journey and effectively meeting the prospect's expectations of that journey.

"CRM services are shifting from a focus on point solution deployment centered on application suites, to a 'customer experience' that brings together customer information, analytics, workflows, mobility and social CRM disciplines into a richer, multichannel access to capture the entire customer journey."

Ed Thompson,
Gartner Group

Hence the CRM system has become the critical foundation for managing and enhancing customer relationships. In order for these solutions to succeed, they need to promote effectiveness as well as efficiencies. Today's CRM application must support more effective sales calls, by providing online content coaching tips for review prior to a call and a more comprehensive view of the customer, not just automate how reps in a call center increase their call volumes.

The integration of social media with customer relationship management strategies is pivotal so that organizations can optimize the power of social engagement to get closer to customers. In this environment defined by customer control and two-way dialog, organizations must engage with their customers on their terms.

Today's organizations that invest in CRM initiatives have most likely some level of integrated information, applications and services to drive and enable customer-focused behaviors across the enterprise. To enable CRM solutions to truly deliver on the promised potential, organizations require a partner skilled in CRM, analytics and business intelligence (BI) to complete a comprehensive CRM strategy.

Why CRM is different from an IT perspective

Today's CRM solutions and strategies are far different from the applications of the past, in terms of technological capabilities. Today's CRM strategies involve interactions across a variety of departments within an organization, often on a global basis. CRM applications form the backbone of such exchanges. These solutions enable customer-facing business processes such as marketing, lead generation and cross-selling, opportunity management, forecasting and quoting, sales support, customer and field service, collaborative channel management, e-commerce, social media participation and customer data analytics.

Today's CRM applications require integration with a host of other legacy applications. This tight integration is demanded to provide a simple customer interaction with the organization. Possible system integrations include order entry, product and pricing files, manufacturing, distribution, marketing, customer contact centers, field service and business analytics. Real-time integration capabilities that go beyond simple data sharing are necessary for end-to-end business processes across applications.

There are no standard rules or government regulations for how CRM applications should operate. This enables each industry and organization to utilize CRM applications to fit their unique requirements that are based on their own business model.

While CRM applications have come a long way in terms of technological capabilities, organizations are far from utilizing a CRM application's full capability. Many organizations are only 40 percent of where they need to be in terms of implementing CRM solutions for today's business environment or embracing the disciplines of managing data and business intelligence to improve decision-making. Many have implemented some form of CRM across their divisions, but have not developed an integrated view of the customer or a consistent cross-channel customer experience.

Benefits of partnering with U.S.-based Technology Centers vs. offshore resources

In general, CRM application implementation and management requires a mix of business process, system architects and IT engineers to support it. In order to ensure the correct group is present at the right time for each phase of CRM implementation it is important to be able to quickly scale and rotate resources between onsite and offsite locations.

In addition, for successful projects, CRM resources must be experienced in specific industry and business processes as initiatives are complex, involving multiple organization disciplines and are often times unique to a company or industry. Today's CRM applications require multiple integration points with other legacy applications such as manufacturing, order entry, customer and field service, which demands knowledgeable resources in application functionality as well as specific industry business processes.

Systems design requires close collaboration with business and operations personnel to gather requirements. Systems development is highly collaborative and high touch. This makes proximity of IT resources, language and operating in close time zones critical for effectiveness and quality of the solution.

Offshore outsourcing often brings continued frustration to clients due to the lack of true innovation skills these organizations are able to offer. For U.S.-based organizations, the offshore consultants are not the problem solvers and strategic partners they had hoped for. This is a result of the consultants not truly understanding the real business drivers and lacking context, which leads to the inability to translate specifications or orders into a solution that works. Context can be especially difficult to gain when a development center is offshore.

Organizations looking to efficiently and effectively implement and upgrade CRM applications benefit from utilizing U.S.-Technology Centers that offer stability and a depth of resources. To achieve a successful implementation, organizations need consultants that can look at projects from an entrepreneurial perspective, combined with expertise in business technologies, information security, information management and architecture.

Onshore resources reduce the total cost of the project while improving the quality of deliverables by providing teams of experienced resources working in close proximity and increasing the speed of delivery.

Best opportunities for use of onshore resources to improve productivity and reduce costs and risks of CRM initiatives

A CRM application implementation or upgrade has various lifecycle stages. These stages include requirements definition, design and prototyping, configuration, coding modifications, integration to internal and third party systems, data mapping and import, testing, managing implementation (change control and deployment), continuous enhancements and support and system upgrades. In order for CRM implementations to be successful, utilizing onshore resources to improve productivity and reduce costs is essential.

Clearly defining the requirements and objectives are essential to the success of the implementation and are best performed by on-site resources working hand-in-hand with the key client business and IT teams. This step is intended to define in detail each requirement such as system functionality, data imports and interfaces, reports and training requirements. It also defines the scope of the project, its boundaries and the project team's roles and responsibilities.

Design and prototyping

The design and prototyping stage is most efficiently done with a team of experts working on-site. CRM is much more iterative from a design standpoint and requires close collaboration. Agile development, which can be very difficult to achieve, cannot be done offshore due to its very nature – evolving requirements and solutions through collaboration between cross-functional teams.

In order to achieve adaptive planning, evolutionary development and rapid and flexible response to change, combining onshore development with on-site resources is crucial in order for resources to be able to interact throughout the development cycle. Prototyping a CRM application facilitates the phasing in of new technology, allows experimentation on a smaller and less costly scale, tests the system's functionality, highlights required changes in organizational procedures, and most importantly, demonstrates that project objectives can be met.

Configuration

Configuration is extremely important in today's CRM application environment and having technical resources with innovative problem solving skills in order to make systems efficiently and effectively work for an organization is mandatory. Since there are different ways to implement requirements, resources must have a detailed understanding of the industry, business requirements and the application, as well as the ability to innovate and design a solution to meet the needs of customers and users.

Integration to internal and third party systems

Part of the configuration process involves integration to internal and third party systems. For this cycle to be successful, resources must be in close proximity to understand clients' existing systems and the nuances of data integration. Onshore configuration eliminates communication and context issues during this process.

Implementing CRM applications with existing third party systems could create issues of data management – making it difficult to create a single view of the customer – a main objective of CRM implementations. Oftentimes the systems do not work efficiently together because the data is inconsistent and fragmented. To resolve data issues, organizations are looking to improve Master Data Management (MDM), which comprises a set of processes and tools that consistently defines and manages the master data of an organization. Proper MDM is loaded with potential benefits and offers help to organizations that are drowning in data. If implemented correctly, MDM can provide near term business value that plays into an organization's new focus on cost efficiencies, risk management and regulatory compliance, while supporting growth and future transformative strategies.

However, just as with CRM, organizations need to approach MDM as more than mere technology. In order to succeed with MDM, businesses need to understand that MDM is a discipline and not just a technology and consider the people and processes before they start investing in the IT. Radcliff states, "In the same way we say CRM is a business strategy enabled by technology, MDM is a discipline for ensuring the quality of your core data, customer data included, and it could also be product data and supplier data or asset data."

For this concept to be successful, it is vital that the development and implementation to occur in close proximity to third party data providers, making it difficult to do offshore. The more integration that is required, the more security becomes important. Security of customer data is a complex issue that is best addressed onshore.

Testing

Ensuring a quality product, one with zero defects, is delivered on time has tremendous impact on the overall cost and level of customer satisfaction with a project. The only way to ensure a quality solution is delivered is through comprehensive testing. Many factors affect testing results, including geographical closeness of the testing team to the development team. Closer proximity between the development and testing teams improves overall quality.

CRM has become more important
As customers and prospects become viewed as a corporate asset, CRM is increasingly becoming a business philosophy, not just a set of processes and technologies.

CRM has become more visible
It is readily recognized by corporate executives and must now fully embrace the customer and prospect experience.

CRM has become more complex
In order to fulfill on both the facets of visibility and importance, CRM technology has to become more "outside in" (customer and prospect oriented) and delivered in a device-agnostic, socially enabled, experiential fashion.

A significant cost factor in CRM implementation and upgrade testing is management. Onshore testing management combined with offshore testing execution optimizes resources and requires less attention, lowering the costs of the entire project. Onshore testing management also eliminates the majority of communication problems, increasing efficiency and again lowering costs. Having control of the work product helps ensure the project will be delivered on time, eliminating the negative impact a late delivery can have on the overall budget. To achieve this level of control, onshore testing management is required. Along those same lines of budget control, onshore testing management can usually execute or improve the level of testing with fewer people.

Continuous enhancements and support

Working onshore resolves security issues, communication problems, infrastructure constraints, physical distance limitations and time zone boundaries – the problems every offshore project encounters. Once the system is implemented on-site, continuous enhancements and support, as well as upgrades, can be managed and developed onshore, including 24x7 support. Having a dedicated onshore team of resources experienced with the CRM application saves organizations money, reduces risk and increases the quality of the project.

Conclusion

In summary, CRM initiatives are more important for businesses than ever before. Successful, forward-thinking companies must learn to embrace new CRM capabilities to remain competitive. Gartner's CEO Survey "found that CEOs cited CRM as their most important area of investment to improve their business over the next five years." Advanced methods for managing customer data have vastly improved CRM capabilities and the real promise of CRM is becoming a reality. To fully benefit from a successful CRM implementation companies need to partner with qualified onshore service partners who can offer consistent and sustainable CRM resources and leverage onsite and onshore when necessary. This will further maximize their software investment, improve efficiencies and quality, while managing price and risk. An article in BusinessBalls.com pointed out, "The ultimate purpose of CRM, like any organizational initiative, is to increase profit. In the case of CRM this is achieved mainly by providing a better service to your customers than your competitors."

About Eagle Creek Software Services

Eagle Creek Software Services provides consulting and technical expertise to the Enterprise. The firm focuses on CRM, Information Management (BI) and Applications Development, helping clients increase quality and efficiencies while managing price and risk in software development, deployment, & support.

With over 350 consultants, Eagle Creek Software Services is the largest U.S. based onshore software services company. Eagle Creek is uniquely positioned by combining on site expertise with U.S.-based Technology Centers. The onshore delivery model allows Eagle Creek to achieve consistency, scalability and sustainability in the provisioning of technical and consulting capabilities.

Eagle Creek has expertise in a multitude of industries, and has the experience and know-how to implement, upgrade and maintain enterprise-grade front office technologies, applications and platforms.

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