Customer Relationship Management For Professionals

Customer Relationship Management (CRM) is the concept meant for the business community, which can help them promote their business. Professionals like Chartered Accountants, Company Secretaries, Lawyers may use the same concept to take their professional practice to new heights.

Customer Relationship Management (CRM) is basically providing and getting feedback from the customers for improving the service provided to them. CRM is a tool, which when used effectively, can ensure long-time survival and growth for any professional. CRM helps to develop life long relationship with the clients, motivate the clients for loyalty and retain them.

CRM is concerned with the dynamics of an existing client-professional relationship. The process of CRM is dynamic and in this the working assumptions and the appropriate actions may change, based on fluctuations in the environment or in the client-professional relationship. This implies that CRM involves continual attention to the client-professional relationship, in terms of time, money, or other resources.

Dissecting the definition further, notice that the client is ultimately in control of the relationship. The client can elect to continue the relationship or walk away. In this regard, the definition also implies that the professional is doing most of the work of maintaining a mutually beneficial relationship. In this situation, the client may contribute only a modicum of effort in maintaining the relationship, such as taking the time to avail of professional service from a particular professional, instead of seeking it from others.

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Types Of CRM

CRM application software can be broadly divided into five areas

i) Client interaction management

ii) Client decision support

iii) Systems integration

iv) Client information management

v) Workflow

(i) Client interaction management: Client interaction management tool is often called operational CRM. These tools facilitate more effective interaction with the client. They can be broadly divided into three main categories.

(a) Contact management tools: These help professionals to retain information about clients across multiple channels. It helps clients to understand better.

(b) Channel management tools: These enable clients understand how the professional interacts with the client. They enable delivery of services across the multiple channels in effective, efficient and consistent manner.

(c) Content management tools: These enable clients manage what the professional sees.

(ii) Client decision support: Client decision support tools assist companies in decision-making. Sophisticated analytical tools are available that can process large amount of data. They have capability to transform raw data into knowledge, which clients can utilise to achieve better understanding and decision-making.

These tools can draw upon data lying in

clients' data warehouses. Various data mining and online analytical tools (OLAP) can be used to drill data for analysis. These tools can provide many insights, highlighting relationships that can help managers in decision-making.

Further, results of analysis can be embedded into client interaction. This ability can provide personally customised service to customers.

(iii) Systems Integration: Systems integration tools enable clients to integrate their different business applications with CRM.

(iv) Client Information Management: Client information management tools enable a single view of a client across multiple channels. These tools make it possible for clients, staff and intermediaries like contact centre to share the same data about a client across multiple channels.

(v) Workflow Management: Workflow management tools enhance the client service by enabling automatic distribution and prioritisation of tasks.

Developing CRM

Database of the clients has to be created either manually or through computer software programs available in the market. An updated knowledge about the client, his partners and his acquaintances is a must for providing excellent service to the clients. This can be collected systematically from the day the professional starts dealing with his client. A typical database should contain the following particulars. The particulars may be modified according to the requirement of the professional.

For Individual Clients the following Database may be created:

- Name
- Date of Birth
- Permanent Address
- Present Address
- Business organisation under this control
- Associates/partners
- Family member details
- Details of business/profession pursued by the family members
- Amount invested in various business organisations.
- Particulars about membership in trade/ manufacturing association
- Vision
- Status of legal cases pending in Direct tax/ Indirect tax laws
- Status of other statutory approval pending (e.g., RBI approval, import and export approvals, etc)

For a company the following database may be created:

- Name of the company
- CIN No
- Registered Office
- Business locations
- Particulars of Directors
- Particulars of Key Executives
- Performance of the company for the past 10 years
- Vision of the company
- Status of legal cases pending in Direct tax/ Indirect tax laws
- Status of other statutory approval pending (e.g., RBI approval, import and export approvals etc)

Maintaining Database

Creating a database about the client is only the first step; it has to be updated periodically to know about the current status of the clients. If the database is created in the computer, the updating will be easier and also the retrieval of the information as and when required.

An updated database will help the professional at any point of time to know about the clients' current state of affairs. It will help not only the senior people in professional firms, but also assistants who are dealing with the company will be benefited by this database.

Even at present, professional firms have some system to know about the current status of a client. CRM database provide the information in an organised manner.

Rapport With Clients

Regular interaction with the clients through e-mail, letters, physical meeting and other forms of communication is *sine qua non* for succeeding and expanding in a professional carrier.

Send legal compliance requirements to the clients periodically, say 20 to 30 days before the due dates of such compliances. Reminder can also be sent, in case of non-response from the clients concerned.

Collect data about the clients' industry and pass it on to the clients. The information may be available in the website, newspapers, annual reports of companies in the similar industry and other sources. This will help the client to know about the current status of the industry to which it belongs. This kind of dissemination of information will enhance value addition in client services.

Make the new client feel awesome with a personal letter. Send a suitable message to the client about the first anniversary with the professional. Sending 'Thank You' notes to the clients who give you good referrals always create goodwill and it leads to more referrals by the same clients. Asking clients for their ideas and opinions about the services rendered by the professional will always strengthen the relationship.

e-Newsletter

Publish e-newsletters periodically and forward the same to your clients and prospective clients. Sending newsletter through e-mail is most cost effective and it reaches the client immediately.

e-Newsletters may contain the following :-

- Latest amendments in Direct Taxes
- Latest amendments in Indirect Taxes
- Latest amendments in Labour Laws
- Latest amendments in Industrial Laws
- Latest amendments in Corporate Laws
- The Gist of important decisions by various courts/tribunals
- The Gist of business news published in Newspapers and Magazines

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- Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) and the answers of any topic of current interest to the clients.
- Definition of important Legal terms and phrases
- Business seminars, conferences relevant to the clients arranged by various bodies throughout India
- Useful website addresses of interest to the clients

Even though compiling an e-Newsletter will take time and effort, it is worth doing. By publishing e-newsletters the professional concerned is also compelled to update his professional knowledge.

Periodical publishing of e-Newsletters will enhance the image of the professional among his clients and brand building happens naturally. Publishing e-Newsletters on a monthly basis is more ideal. A hard copy of the e-Newsletter can be sent to the clients who are not using/familiar with e-mail usage.

Categorise the clients by how they are using the e-mail obsessively, regularly, occasionally, or never. The mode of sending information has to be altered according to the client preferences.

Value Addition To Client Business

Clients are interested or dedicated in their own business. They know how to make a product, market the product and make a profit out of that. The legal requirement of proprietorship business is different from partnership, and Joint Stock Company is different from other forms of business entities.

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Finding out what your clients are about gives you an excellent reason to communicate with them.

Professionals are repositories of a client's data, mainly financial data. Clients need simple information about their financial affairs, which they can use for better decision-making, and generally they don't understand financial data prepared as per the Companies Act, Accounting Standard and other legal requirements. The CRM software transforms numerical numbers into language, which is easily understandable by the client. Such type of reports provide tangible value addition to the clients.

Return On Investment In CRM

CRM is a strategy/tool, which has to be developed over a period of time. We cannot measure the return precisely just like an investment in a business venture. In the long run, the goodwill generated through CRM will definitely bring new clients by referral from your existing satisfied clients. Ultimately return on investment rests in regular interaction with the clients often, thoroughly and usefully. Keeping the existing clients and enlisting of new clients is the ultimate aim of CRM concept.

Useful Software/Websites On CRM

There are various CRM software available in the market. After ascertaining the requirements of the professional, he can look for a system that can (i) schedule tasks and give automatic reminders. (ii) Sort and report with customised fields within database. (iii) Monitor e-mails sent/received, phone calls and other contacts, and (iv) can generate report with different clients requirements.

Readers can browse the following websites for more information on software:

- www.microsoft.com
- www.intuit.com
- www.clpsuite.com
- www.2020software.com
- www.siebel.com
- www.clientdynamics.net
- www.constantcontact.com
- www.romni.com

Conclusion

The time and energy devoted for CRM by a professional will increase his earnings and also enhance the image of the professional among his clients. Apart from providing regular services as a professional, the value added information provided to the clients, will bring prosperity to both the professional and the client. ❐