

Six Points To Consider

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1. All CRM solutions are not alike.

Some CRM solutions are designed for large enterprises and have only recently been scaled down to fit the budget and simpler needs of smaller businesses. A system designed from the ground up for small to midsized companies is more likely to suit your requirements for rapid implementation, ease of use, and low cost of ownership.

2. Does the solution fit your company's needs?

Many companies make the mistake of buying functionality they do not need. CRM systems often fail because end users are forced to struggle with overly complex applications. Establish your key business requirements first; then list the features and functions most important to your business. Finally, match these to the strengths of the solutions you are evaluating.

3. How quickly and easily can the system be implemented and modified?

It should not take months to implement your CRM system. A solution that is easy to set up and modify is essential for a fast-paced, competitive business environment. Business requirements can change overnight, and your CRM solution must be able to adapt just as quickly. Adding users, changing access privileges, and adding fields or report "views" to your database should take minutes, not hours.

4. Will the system grow with your business in a simple and seamless way?

The right CRM solution should integrate seamlessly with your existing e-mail and word processing software. It should also enable you to capture and manage customer information right from the point of contact - phone, fax, e-mail, or the Web. All information should be automatically integrated into a single shared database where it is instantly accessible to all authorized employees.

5. Does the sales and service channel for the solution meet your needs?

A good working relationship with a skilled CRM system integrator or VAR is essential to the success of your implementation. The ideal CRM integrator has a good track record with companies like yours and is able to serve as a single point of contact for your entire system hardware, software, and support services.

6. How much will the solution really cost?

The initial cost for a CRM system can vary from under \$500 to more than \$3,000 per seat. Implementation, training, options, and customization can add thousands of dollars more. To determine the total investment required, get a comprehensive quote for an up-and-running solution; then project the cost of support personnel and fees for upgrades and support. You can save time

and money if your system includes integrated applications for sales force automation, marketing, help desk, and customer service that will work "right out of the box."