By Lorraine Keating, Prism Visual Software

Beyond the Hype of CRM

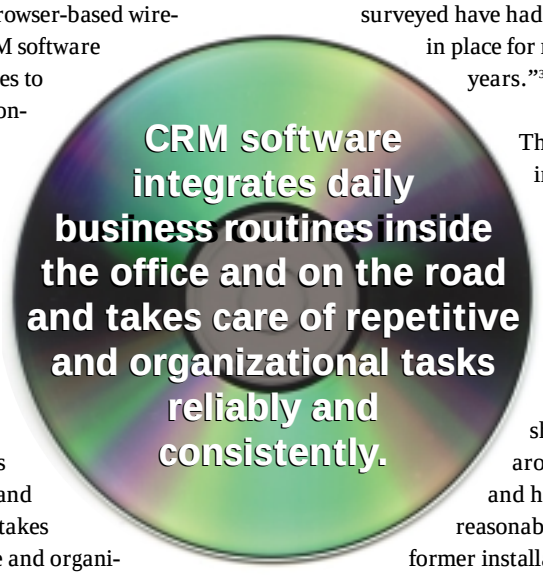
Customer Management Software for Water Treatment Companies

Have you ever thought of implementing an automated Customer Relationship Management (CRM) program into your water treatment business? Maybe some of your business associates mentioned the advantages of a CRM software product that they recently bought. Maybe you read about CRM software in a magazine. And maybe the hype about CRM made you think, "Who needs it? I am a small company and always have managed my customers."

The hype of CRM undeniably is going on but it is not only hype. The high-tech market research firm, Cahners In-Stat Group, recently stated that the worldwide revenue for CRM software is expected to reach $9.4 billion by the end of 2001. By 2005, worldwide revenues will more than triple to $30.6 billion.[1] In other words, companies everywhere are eager to build CRM software into their business. The benefits are numerous. CRM software allows companies to boost their sales while reducing their operating expenses and providing better customer service. CRM software directly increases the return on investment (ROI). Customer orders are fulfilled quickly and reliably. In addition, CRM software enables companies to respond rapidly to all customer inquiries that previously created chaos and frustration not only for customers but also for employees and inevitably the owner of the company.

It is safe to say that CRM is the ABC of customer service. Of course, every company wants to provide excellent customer service but it usually is easier said than done. Key to the successful implementation is the right CRM software so that your services will improve as quickly as your business revenues. Water treatment companies first and foremost need software designed for their business. Some of these software packages are enhanced for CRM because the software manufacturer understands the direction and advantages of customer-focused software. In fact, you may be able to stay with your core software product if CRM features can be added. Yet, if your software supplier does not provide such features to your software, you likely will gain more benefits from switching software than from doing without a CRM product.

Enhancing your company's profitability, improving the quality of your work and extending your customers' lifecycle, CRM software offers immediate benefits because of one major difference to non-CRM software. CRM software consists of a single integrated system that spans outside sales and services and connects the office with the field force both in real time and over the Internet using Nextel phones, palm pilots or other browser-based wireless devices. CRM software enables companies to effectively and consistently provide services to customers, regardless of where the interaction takes place.



CRM software integrates daily business routines inside the office and on the road and takes care of repetitive and organizational tasks reliably and consistently. Such software connects office workers, dispatchers, drivers and field technicians. Customers place their service or product orders on your website or continue to call by phone. The software displays work orders on the dispatch screen awaiting assignment to a technician by date and time. The software automatically updates and completes work orders and eradicates the task of manually changing invoices, schedules or accounting systems.

This sounds all well and good. Some CRM projects do fail. The Customer Relationship Management Research Center states that one of the Fortune 500 companies encountered serious difficulties in a CRM implementation because the company's field force did not share customer data. The lack of information weakened the design of the CRM project, which ultimately caused failure.[2] Office employees, the field force and everybody who is part of a company's work environment have to be on board when the company owners decide to implement CRM software.

So, when do you know that you have found the right CRM product? The decision should not be made lightly. According to Author Jon Surmacz, "Sixty-six percent of CRM programs are less than 12 months old. Only 11 percent of companies surveyed have had CRM initiatives in place for more than two years."[3]

The key for choosing the right CRM software depends on two factors. One has to do with the CRM software product itself that should have been around for a while and have enjoyed reasonable success in former installations. You want to know that the software company has long-term experience in designing software products for your specific industry. Two important questions a company owner must understand to make an informed decision are, "Are you the first company using this particular CRM software product?" and "What are the features of the integrated 'back office' package?"

The other factor is perhaps even more important for finding the right CRM software product. You need to identify a software company that is reliable, experienced and responsive to your needs. How do you recognize such a company for the water treatment industry? The answer is easy: The company must have a successful and widely recognized product. Moreover, the company itself must be customer focused, guaranteeing you both excellent services and a company practicing what it integrates. In other words, choose a company that recognizes the future of CRM and cares about you and your customers' satisfaction.

For water treatment companies, CRM software is a necessity for becoming a successful, well-organized and customer satisfying business. The bottom line is that a CRM focus guarantees a smoother running business while increasing your ROI. So look for the right CRM software product to get beyond the CRM hype into the down-to-earth improvement of your daily operational challenges.

1 Robert Conlin, *Study: CRM Software To Reap $30 B Revenue by 2005*, www.crmdaily.com (July 27, 2001).

2 Customer Relationship Management Research Center, *What is CRM?* www.cio.com (July 27, 2001).

3 Jon Surmacz, *Baby Steps: With CRM Efforts Still in Their Infancy, Companies Await ROI Metrics*, www.cio.com (July 27, 2001).

About the Author
Lorraine Keating is chief executive officer of Prism Visual Software, which has been developing software products for the product delivery and field service industries for more than 12 years. The equipment servicing software product "Visual ServiceMate" has serviced the water treatment industry as a desktop product for many years. Recently, Prism enhanced the product with palm pilots and wireless WAP functionality. Web-based CRM products "ServQuest" and "RoadQuest" have been awarded finalist status in Computer World's award "Emerging Companies to Watch in 2002."

For more information on this subject, write in 1014 on the reader service card.