Recognizing the Quiet Power of Your CRM Data

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Marketing departments today often spend a great deal of their time focusing on things that involve strategies and planning. To support these critical activities, they have built up and aligned key staff and resources. This is completely understandable given the pressure they are under to deliver results and value. While the pressure has always been significant, in recent years, with competition at unimaginable levels, it has intensified significantly.

However, it may actually surprise many marketers to discover that one of the most important tools to help their firms deliver value and develop business isn't a strategic or planning initiative. In fact, it's actually something more akin to the town pariah for many firms. Mention it in some organizations, especially professional services firms, and you'll get plenty of feedback, and not all of it positive. Yes… it's your CRM system.

Even marketers who understand its potential don't always give Client Relationship Management the attention or respect it deserves. Yet CRM is the critical cornerstone of most successful businesses. It is the system by which an organization gains an understanding of who its key Clients and contacts are and what services or products they buy. But beyond the basic data it holds, a well-organized and utilized CRM also houses a wealth of other information that can offer insight into areas for potential new business and opportunities to gain new Clients.

CRM and Data Management – Not Sexy, but Essential…

It's understandable why CRM systems aren't a favorite focus for many Marketing departments today. CRM systems have been around for decades, so they sometimes lack the trendiness of hot new technologies like Artificial Intelligence. Plus, they can seem like costly and high maintenance systems and, when not properly implemented, they sometimes fail to provide value or ROI. Additionally, these systems contain cold, hard contact data, such as salutations, addresses and phone numbers. But, while independently these pieces of data may not seem very exciting, in context, and in concert, with other types of information, they can be powerful.

The Not-So-Cold Side of CRM Data

The potential power of the information that can be found in CRM systems transcends the cold, hard facts about contacts and organizations. Attorneys seeking to develop strong long-term relationships within their networks will want to enrich their contact information. They can use the CRM to add information to contact records such as notes on conversations and details of meetings. They can add personal details and reminders not to forget important dates. In our recent post, "Getting to the Heart of eMarketing," we explored Clients' expectations for more personalized interactions and communications with their law firms. The CRM system is the most efficient way of tracking Client information to support this effective communication, which can ultimately lead to business development.

Clients also expect law firms to function as firms, not collections of individual attorneys sharing office space. They expect that no matter who they speak with, the firm representative will have some knowledge of them and the history with the firm. What organization do they work for? Who is the relationship attorney? What types of work is the firm doing for them? Additionally, an attorney speaking to a Client should be able to see that they recently read one of the firm's articles or attended a firm event and that they are also currently working with several other attorneys in other practice groups. Some firms even take this a step further, noting details like drink preferences for Clients who visit the office. What a nice personal touch that can really set the firm apart.

The CRM system can provide quick and easy access to all these types of information as well as information about the Client's subscriptions, interests and activities. More importantly, the CRM provides an excellent platform for attorneys to access information about the Client's current business information and legal challenges, so an attorney can be well prepared to start a business development conversation about potential legal needs.

The Firm's Most Valuable Assets… Its Relationships

Another area where the CRM can provide significant value is relationship identification and expansion. Perhaps the firm wants to do business with a company that is not currently a Client, but they are having trouble finding any active contacts to reach out to at the company. An ERM or Enterprise Relationship Management tool that is linked to the CRM may be able to identify an active contact within the firm who has a personal relationship with a key contact at the target company via e-mail connections. Additionally, there may be alumni information in the CRM that could identify a former firm attorney who now works for the company that the attorneys could contact. These are just a few examples of how CRM tools and data can provide value for relationship expansion and business development.

Strategy and Planning

For firms that are focused on strategies and planning, here is the good news: CRM only works if it is executed strategically, and it requires a great deal of planning. Each firm will have different goals and each firm's needs and requirements will be unique.

For example, some firms may want to target geographically, while others may have an industry focus. CRM can help a firm to execute either strategy. For instance, doing geographic address searches can help the firm to target market for regional events, while adding data for key industries to Client records can help the firm to segment for industry seminars or events.

Firms that get real value and ROI from their CRM system are spending the time up front to put together a strategy and execute their plan.

Not Exciting…But Essential

While CRM may not be the most exciting aspect of the marketing or business development process, it is vital to both. As law firm leaders plan for future growth and increased revenue, CRM and the invaluable data within it must be a key area of focus and should be appropriately resourced. Without this level of attention, revenue and growth goals are likely just a wish.

- *For more than 10 years, the team at **CLIENTS**First Consulting has been helping Professional Services firms and other organizations successfully select and implement CRM and eMarketing systems to maximize value, adoption and return on investment. If you need help with CRM, eMarketing, Data Quality, Data Privacy Compliance or Client Intelligence, contact us at 404-249-9914 or Info@CLIENTSFirstConsulting.com.*