

Take Control of Processes With a CRM System

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There's free or low-cost tool that will not only reduce the amount of time you and your staff spend on day-to-day tasks but also help you spend more time with your current clients and network for new ones. It's called a Client Relationship Management (CRM) System, a multi-functional type of software, one of the most under-used tools in a small-business owner's arsenal.

Regular, sustained use of a CRM System is a key method by which you can grow your business because it allows you to implement processes that will engender a culture of consistency, predictability and reliability in your practice. The odds that you will meet your obligations to your clients and referral sources increase significantly when you have processes built into your business that you and your staff can easily access, follow, and learn.

CRM System software – including Redtail, Salesforce and others -- allows you to embed repetitive tasks, checklists and all types of processes to quickly assign work to others or yourself and move on to more rewarding work during each day. Typical processes you can input once and use repeatedly include how to create a financial plan, how to set up a new client relationship, how to follow up on an introduction to a prospect and more. Once you embed these processes, even if they're not perfect, you and your staff members can follow the same steps each time and not waste time reinventing the wheel. Besides the time saved, you'll gain the assurance that the work processes will be done in the same, high quality way every time. To top it all off, it will also provide you with regular reports so you can start figuring out what other types of repetitive work are done in your office. You can then build these repetitive workflows as new processes and continue to automate, saving time, effort and money.

The top advisory firms use tools like CRM Systems to take their businesses to the next level, according to Stephanie Bogan, president and lead consultant, Quantavis, a consulting firm in Redlands, Calif. "The most successful advisory firms are actively using a CRM system to manage the operations as well as marketing efforts," she says. A recent study sponsored by Quantavis found that top-grossing advisory firms have significantly more operational leverage than their peers, investing substantially more in staff and operational overhead, but in turn generating higher revenue and profits. An investment of money and time into a CRM System can pay big dividends.

Unfortunately, too many advisors are not embracing CRM systems nor embedding processes because of mistaken ideas that such systems and processes are too time consuming and expensive. This couldn't be farther from the truth. In a May 2009 report entitled "Getting the Most out of your CRM Investment," Charles Schwab found "...while most independent investment advisors use some type of client tracking system, many could do more to realize the full business benefits of these systems to increase their productivity

and profitability.”

If you're still not convinced, here are four common reasons why advisors resist adopting CRM Systems and Processes and why they are flat-out wrong:

Objection One: Costs too much money. An easy-to-use, readily available CRM system costs as little as \$65/month. Some are even free. Enough said.

Objection Two: Takes too much time to implement. You can easily upload the data that's already in Outlook or another address book or email program to a CRM System. If you still think it's too complicated, most CRM companies will handle the upload for you. Once you have the contacts in the system, brain dumped all outstanding work and typed in a few frequently completed tasks, you'll be 10 steps ahead of your stone-age dwelling competition.

Objection Three: Choosing among CRM Systems is too confusing. Many technology and/or advisor-oriented publications, including this one, provide reviews and tips that will help you narrow down your options. You can also network with your peers and ask what systems they like or hire a technology consulting firm to help you select, install and transition your office to a CRM System. Anyway, it's far more important that you pick and install a CRM System than you find the absolute best one because switching between systems isn't that hard if you find a better alternative later.

Objection Four: Ironclad proof that it will save money and time. If Fortune 500 companies and governmental organizations such as the Army can save money and increase efficiencies by using CRM Systems and similar products, so can you. “A good CRM system can serve as the productivity hub of an advisory firm – improving workflow, creating efficiencies, and maximizing the client experience,” according to the Schwab report. Finally, if you're not convinced, odds are your competition is, and they will eat your lunch. Sales of CRM Systems grew 11.2 percent in 2008.

If your goal is to hit the Moss Adams average (2009 report) of 75 clients per advisor, you're not going to make it without help from tools like a CRM System. Without that assistance, you'll likely be too bogged down and distracted by operations work, training staff, reinventing the wheel and more. To coin a term from the great Bob Veres (*Financial Planning* magazine Dec 2009), get over your Tech Lethargy and realize your focus needs to be to create raving fans of your business, not operations work and keeping track of everything in an antiquated system.

PC Reliability

Each year, *PC World Magazine* surveys its readers about product reliability and service. In the March 2010 issue, they published the feedback they've collected from approximately 45,000 readers.

When it comes to laptops, Apple reigns supreme once again. For Windows laptops, Toshiba scored the best. They approached Apple's score on reliability, but they trailed a bit in service. Acer also scored well. Unfortunately, HP and Dell, two popular brands among advisors scored last and next to last respectively.

Apple also dominated on the desktop computer rankings. Acer scored second best. HP was dead last here, with Gateway and CyberPower also scoring poorly. In the consumer printer space, Canon led the list. Brother, Epson and Samsung all notched very respectable scores. HP once again landed at the bottom of the heap, with Lexmark scoring only slightly better.

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