Effective Customer Data Management Helps Achieve Your Goals by Janet Taylor

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There is something about the start of a new year that makes private individuals and businesses alike turn to thoughts of goal setting. Clearly, in both our business and our personal lives, having clearly defined goals is essential â€“ if we don't know where we want to go, then how will we know when we have arrived? More importantly perhaps, how will we know we are not just wandering round in circles, aimlessly, achieving little?

Ideally our goals should be S.M.A.R.T. goals: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Timely. For example, let us assume we want to increase sales by 5% in a six-month period. This would appear to satisfy most of the S.M.A.R.T. criteria. It is specific, we have stated a precise increase in sales; it is measurable, clearly we will know â€“ in six months' time â€“ whether or not we have succeeded; it is likely to be attainable, 5% does not sound unrealistic; and it is timely, our objective has a specific time-frame during which we intend to achieve it. Four out of five then, so far so good; but what about relevance? Business goals must be relevant not just to the business owner but also to his/her employees. A Harvard Business School study, conducted in 2001 by Robert Kaplan and David Norton, found that only 7% of employees fully understood their company's goals or their role in helping to achieve them. That leaves us with 93% of employees falling into the 'wandering aimlessly' category!

The problem of how to ensure that our employees' efforts are fully aligned with the company's goals also begs the question of what strategies we should employ to achieve these goals. While a 5% increase in sales may be realistic, we still need a clearly defined, effective strategy to achieve this. Will we be trying to sell more to our existing customers, trying to find new customers or a combination of these two? Marketing to existing customers requires a different approach to marketing that is directed toward a wider field of potential customers that we have only limited knowledge of.

Clearly all that customer data we have been collecting avidly for years can now be put to good use. First we must establish who our high-value customers are and how we could increase our sales to this group. Next, we need to discover which specific groups of people we should be targeting if we intend to increase our customer base. Effective customer data management will provide us with a clear picture of our high-value customers. Knowledge of these customers and their past buying habits and demographic is essential, whether we wish to increase sales to these customers or to identify potential customers who fit the same demographic. Assuming we collected relevant data and asked the appropriate questions on our surveys, then we do have the information we need; we just need to be able to analyze it and we are well on the way to achieving our goal. Eureka!

At this point, we should have a game plan in place, a plan that we can communicate to our employees and to which end our marketing and customer service efforts should now be directed. Employees should be able to see how their efforts directly relate to the company's goals. As a result, they are likely to be more engaged and to experience greater job satisfaction, leading to a lower staff turnover. Performance reviews and compensation can even be directly linked to the achievement of goals.

InSite Systems' customer data management (CDM) solutions can help any business clearly identify its high-value customers and give it the information it needs to direct marketing efforts towards these customers, potential or existing. With cloud computing, InSite's CDM solutions also allow clients to quickly access real-time data analysis anytime, anywhere.

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