Pipeline

Your Free
CRM Handbook

Discover what CRM is, why it's indispensable for sales teams, and how to choose the right CRM solution for your needs.

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The Customer is Still King

This may be old sales jargon, but today, the premise is even more accurate. Markets are crowded, and growth is a challenge. In fact, if you start a business today (2023), you will have 15.8 times more competitors than a decade ago. And with more competitors in the game, buyers become more skeptical and are easily swayed if you can't build trust with them.

A Customer-Centric Approach to Sales

Building customer relationships is labor-intensive and time-consuming.

We aren't just talking about the actual time your salespeople spend with a customer in meetings, but the process beyond that. This includes the broad spectrum of lead generation, sales management and forecasting, data organization, team management, and other tasks.

A lot of work demands a lot of effort, contributing to 90% of sales professionals feeling burned out. Sales teams feel overwhelmed by the high burden of administrative tasks, such as maintaining sales records and seeking multiple deal approvals for their pipelines.

In a world where time equals money, you need to empower your sales representatives with a sales tech stack—more importantly, a CRM—so they can work more efficiently on their primary task: closing deals. This white paper will help you understand what a CRM tool is, how it can help you become more productive, and guide you in choosing the perfect solution for your needs.

What Is a Customer Relationship Management Tool?

When interpreting from its name only, Customer Relationship Management (CRM) is often defined as software that manages "relationships" between a company and existing or potential clients. However, this is only a broad description of a CRM and is often compared to an ERP.

What Is the Difference Between CRM and ERP?

Many believe that if you already have Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP), you don't need a CRM. Although CRM and ERP tasks overlap at times, they support different business functions.

At its core, ERP focuses on connecting a business's financial and operational activities through a centralized database. This enables each department to share error-free information to streamline business processes and optimize sectors to lower the overall upkeep costs.

When building a centralized data hub, companies typically start by acquiring some of the ERP modules that help the back-office teams with accounting, finance, human resources (HR), logistics, supply chain, and procurement. As the business grows, additional modules are added.

On the other hand, a CRM is also used as a data repository, but the functionality differs.

Customer Relationship Management software's main users are the client-facing teams (sales, marketing, and customer service). It is a single source of truth that helps improve sales performance by ensuring every customer's need is fulfilled promptly and efficiently.

Both CRM and ERP have their own purposes that complement each other. Depending on the nature of your business, you might need both to support all areas of your business.

	CRM	ERP
Main goal	Build strong relationships with customers and boost profits	Improve internal communication workflow and cut company's expenses
Main functions	✔ Store customer and sales data ✔ Track customer interactions ✔ Provide real-time, sales-related data to make informed decisions	✔ Store enterprise-wide data ✔ Control every business process ✔ Improve internal productivity ✔ Reduce production costs
Main users	Front-office teams	Back-office teams
Orientation	Customer satisfaction - measuring external factors (customer feedback, objections, pricing, etc.)	Company growth - measuring the people, products, and processes inside an organization
System type	✔ Non-modular, but some CRMs come with add-on features ✔ It can be a subset of ERP	✔ Modular ✔ Some ERP solutions have the basic CRM components
Key features	✔ Contact and lead management ✔ Sales and pipeline management ✔ Marketing automation at scale ✔ Customer service management	(Based on the commonly offered modules) ✔ Accounting and finance, e.g., billing and revenue analysis ✔ Manufacturing, e.g., product development and scheduling ✔ Inventory management, e.g., stock and delivery schedule ✔ And other modules

What Does a CRM System Do?

As briefly mentioned, one of the key features of CRM is its ability to store and organize all sales-related information in a centralized database. This allows your team/s to have better visibility on approaching prospects, mapping clients, and reading sales trends (among others).

The three types of data maintained by CRMs are:

- **Customer information:** demographic data and publicly shared data on social media (e.g., likes and interests). This helps to create personalized offers according to sentiment.

- **Transactional information:** customers' sales history, e.g., past purchases, cart abandonment rates, and website visits. This helps to identify customers' buying behaviors.

- **Marketing campaign information:** to keep track of sales and marketing KPIs, e.g., conversion rates, Cost Per Action (CPA), and engagement levels. This helps to improve future marketing campaigns to gain maximum Return on Investment (ROI).

Furthermore, since most CRMs today are built in the cloud, every change made will also be automatically updated in real time. Data can be accessed from any device in any location. Everyone who is involved in a deal can work together to ensure no leads slip through the cracks.

CRM harmonizes disparate, hard-to-manage sales and customer data and transforms them into valuable knowledge. By understanding the lay of the land, your team is empowered to always bring their A-game whenever they interact with potential and current customers.

Which Businesses Use a CRM?

Many claim that CRM is only effective for large companies. This, of course, is a misconception.

Any business that engages with customers can benefit from CRM adoption, regardless of the size and industry type. For example, whether you're a small business or an enterprise, every company aims to shrink the sales cycle. To achieve this, you need to understand your customers' interests and pain points to offer the right solutions right from the start. And where can you get this information? It's all available in your CRM, ready to be retrieved and used.

With more satisfied customers, small businesses will naturally get bigger, and enterprises can keep their customers loyal to their brands. For this reason, CRM is for anyone, really.

35% of companies that use CRM have 1 to 10M annual revenue, 25% earn less than 1M, and 15% generate 10 to 50M (Source).

32% of companies that use CRM come from the service industry. Followed by IT and manufacturing businesses in second and third place, both with 13% shares (Source).

What Is the Role of CRM?

CRM tools were created to drive growth through healthy customer relationships. While the concept of each solution stays the same, they do have different goals. Most CRMs are categorized into four main groups: **operational, analytical, collaborative, and strategic.**

Rather than focusing only on one category, choose an all-in-one CRM that offers a combination.

The Main Types of CRMs

- **Operational CRMs**

  Operational CRMs play a direct role in managing customer relationships by handling customer-facing functions. For example, a CRM is used to manage sales pipelines, nurture leads, and onboard new clients. This way, your sales representatives can easily store customer contacts and track their progress from newly acquired leads to loyal clients.

- **Analytical CRMs**

  Analytical CRMs focus on storing and repurposing sales-related data so you can make more informed business decisions. The types of data include customer data (demographic information), marketing data (e.g., campaign performance), and sales data (e.g., leads, purchasing, and communication history).

- **Collaborative CRMs**

  Collaborative CRMs concentrate on the information-sharing aspect. The CRM will log and share every customer interaction: who they are, whom they spoke to, the context of a message, and channel interaction. By tracking all communication points, you can discover the trends affecting your customer base, anticipate their needs, and even prevent potential risks before they occur.

- **Strategic CRMs**

  Strategic CRMs put customers at the center of every decision. Using the customer and market trend data stored in the hub, the CRM helps organizations develop the best customer value propositions that retain customer satisfaction. For instance, strategic CRMs help you analyze the best communication channels for your business and the best time to start a campaign.

7 key features that most all-in-one CRMs offer:

1. Customer contact management
2. Communication management
3. Lead management
4. Workflow automation
5. Data analysis and reporting
6. Intuitive mobile CRM
7. Third-party app integrations

8 Advantages of Using a CRM

It is estimated that for every dollar spent on CRM adoption, you'll get more than $30.48 back.

From a financial perspective, CRM implementation has a high ROI value—but what about from the business perspective? What exactly will your business get out of it?

Here are some major benefits you'll receive from using a CRM solution:

Sales Activity

✓ Lead nurturing

✓ Customer retention

✓ Sales forecasting

Team Productivity

✓ A single source of truth for data

✓ Automated workflows

✓ Cross-departmental collaboration and reduced silos

Company Benefit

✓ Increased sales

✓ Decreased expenses

1. CRM simplifies and amplifies lead nurturing
Provide different sales treatments based on the leads' value to the company. Sort the most promising leads from those requiring additional pre-sale touchpoints so your sales representatives can prioritize their efforts accordingly.

2. CRM facilitates personalized offers to increase customer retention
Harvest customer interaction data and the sentiment that goes with it. Craft thoughtful responses using the right tone and voice—the kind of one-on-one engagement service that fosters loyalty.

3. CRM initiates better sales forecasting
Rely on data, not guesswork. Accurately track your sales patterns to navigate tomorrow's sales landscapes without misallocating resources.

4. CRM provides data transparency and centralization
No more dealing with multiple spreadsheets managed in departmental boxes. CRM provides everyone with a single, centralized repository database that contains one harmonized set of metrics.

5. CRM offers automated data entry and report generation
Customize the information you want to enter with custom inputs and set automated action-/time-based templates to cut down administrative tasks. You can also select which dataset you want to see on your dashboard for clearer visibility of your sales activities.

6. CRM promotes cross-departmental collaboration and reduces silos
While CRM systems mostly influence sales and marketing practices, they cause ripple effects in other departments. For instance, the customer support team can respond quickly to tickets by looking at the sales data, accounting teams hold one-stop access to revenue reports, and Human Resources (HR) teams can generate objective reports.

7. CRM boosts sales and revenues
Gain a 360-degree view of the preferences of your clients. You see what emails they opened, what ads they clicked on, and what pages they visited (for how long and from where). Leverage these insights to close more deals as well as increase cross-selling and up-sell opportunities. This way, you'll remain top-of-mind for all your prospects.

8. CRM decreases expenses
With more on-target sales and marketing tactics, you'll spend less time and effort acquiring new customers. And with more tasks and workflows set on autopilot mode, you'll need fewer employees to hire. All in all, you'll save time and money.

How to Choose the Right CRM for Your Organization?

To build a well-oiled sales machine, you need to start by choosing the right CRM tool.

The wrong solution can lead to a loss in money, time, and also your team's trust. As it is, ditching traditional ways of working with spreadsheets, post-it notes, and cumbersome email software combinations for a CRM is already difficult for some salespeople. And adding bad experiences in CRM adoption will only decrease their acceptance of the tool.

Here are some simple steps that can guide you in choosing the right CRM tool.

Step 1

Identify the users of the CRM

Although this varies from business to business, those who usually spend most of their working time using a CRM are in sales, marketing, and customer service. Make sure that you involve them in picking a solution that will fulfill their needs.

Step 2

What are your goals for implementing a CRM solution?

Think about your current sales pipeline management and compare it to the ideal sales process (the steps, workflow, and actors). Which inefficient processes do you wish to improve? For example, my sales team has difficulties in converting leads, spends too much time doing administrative tasks, and needs customizable data fields.

Step 3

What features do you need from your ideal CRM solution?

Based on the results from step 2, create a list of features that can help improve your sales performance's flaws, and then group them into the nice-to-have and must-have categories. For instance, mobile access can be a deal breaker for construction companies but not for retailers, and for businesses that have lots of recurring orders, having automated action-based features will save time and ensure a consistent workflow.

Step 4

Which CRM solutions check my requirements?

There are plenty of CRM solutions available on the market, but only some will match all, if not most, of your requirements. Take your time to identify and consider the pros and cons of each. Additionally, many CRMs nowadays are SaaS-based and offer free trials or demos. Take this opportunity to test your favorite CRM solutions, get the complete picture of their capabilities, and see whether they accommodate your needs.

Step 5

How to ensure the chosen CRM is a worthwhile investment?

Before you make the final decision, encourage your team to weigh in on their opinions (positive or negative). It's important not to skip this step as it's more likely to achieve a high adoption rate if everyone shares their thoughts, even if, in the end, the winning CRM solution isn't what they chose in the first place. People who don't weigh in can't buy in—and with a low buy-in level, you won't recoup your CRM investment.

5 Signs of the Right CRM

When searching for a CRM solution, don't only focus on the offered features. Wanting to get the best features from a big-name CRM provider isn't wrong, but ask yourself if you need them all.

Flashy features don't always guarantee success. In fact, they come with complexities and exorbitantly high prices. So, instead of deciding based on capabilities, consider the following.

1. **Are there any hidden costs?**

Be careful when calculating the total costs. Many CRMs offer the central sales and marketing features as add-ons. The basic price may look cost-friendly, but the more you add, the more inflated the price becomes.

2. Does the CRM support smooth integration with third-party software?

Excellent CRM solutions support seamless connections with your favorite marketing, email software, and more. It's rather pointless if you still have to switch between many tools after acquiring a CRM solution to get the job done.

3. How long and how steep is the learning curve?

The sales process is already complex. There is no need to add more complexity to managing a CRM. After all, a CRM is implemented to simplify and increase your productivity. If it's proven otherwise, you should consider switching to another CRM tool.

4. Does the CRM offer reliable customer support?

This will become your go-to tool for securing sales. Because of this, your CRM has to work perfectly all the time. Having reliable customer service will guarantee that whenever you have problems, someone will help you fix them.

5. Can the CRM grow along with your business?

As your business grows, your data and team will too. Pick a tool that can be scaled up easily without blowing up your pocket is a smart move to make right from the start.

The ideal CRM checklist

- ☐ Have no hidden costs
- ☐ Offer many integration options
- ☐ Easy to use and adopt
- ☐ Offer reliable customer support
- ☐ Scalable

A Comparison of 5 Popular CRMs

With plenty of options in the market, we understand that choosing a CRM solution can be daunting. To help you with the decision-making process, look at the comparison table and see what CRM users say about five well-known CRM solutions, including Pipeline CRM.

As you can see, not all CRMs are created equally.

Pipeline CRM, for example, is a smart and affordable alternative to well-renowned CRMs in terms of the offered features, customer service, and pricing. Unlike others, it even includes elements such as custom fields, email tracking, automation, and more, from the Starter plan.

	Pipeline CRM	HubSpot	Salesforce	Pipedrive	Zoho CRM
Overall rating (out of 5)	4.4	4.4	4.3	4.2	4.0
Pricing* (starter plan)	$25.00 per user/month	$50.00 2 users/month	$25.00 per user/month	$14.90 per user/month	$14.00 1 user/month
Ease of use	8.8	8.7	7.9	8.9	8.1
Ease of setup	8.8	8.4	7.2	8.7	7.7
Ease of admin	8.9	8.6	7.7	8.6	7.9
Integrations (data import and export)	8.4	8.4	8.4	8.2	8.2
Customer support	8.9	8.6	7.9	8.4	7.4
Features					
Contact and account management	8.7	8.7	8.7	8.5	8.4
Opportunity and pipeline management	8.7	8.5	8.6	8.8	8.1
Task management	8.4	8.5	8.2	8.5	8.0
Lead management	8.5	8.7	8.4	8.4	8.2
Case management	8.4	8.4	8.3	8.1	7.9
Customer suppor portal	8.5	8.4	8.1	7.8	7.7
Customization	8.1	8.0	8.4	8.1	7.9
Performance and reliability	8.9	8.6	8.7	8.7	8.2
Ease of doing business with	**9.1**	**8.5**	**8.0**	**8.5**	**7.9**

*Featured included in the plans are varied from brand to brand

Source: G2.com, Inc. (2023)

Pipeline CRM: A Simple and Powerful CRM

Not all businesses, especially small- to medium-sized industrial businesses, embrace technology adoption. This means that they...

- ☑ Tend to be laggards in adopting complex sales automation tools,

- ☑ Cannot afford comprehensive solutions with inflated price tags, and

- ☑ Value ("local," i.e., US-based) customer support that can solve their problems irrespective of what CRM plan they subscribe to.

At Pipeline CRM, we are committed to building a CRM without the overpriced and over-engineered features—the opposite of well-capitalized CRM platforms.

We've quickly become the top choice for many reasons: "Highest User Adoption," "High Performer," and excellent "Quality of Support" are three aspects that are loved by our loyal users—granting us several G2 badges over the past years, including the "Leader" badge for Winter 2023.

Leader Small Business WINTER 2023 · **Highest User Adoption** Enterprise WINTER 2023 · **High Performer** Mid-Market WINTER 2023 · **High Performer** Enterprise WINTER 2023 · **Leader** WINTER 2023

★★★★★ May 21, 2019
"My Information is at the tip of my fingers and at my desk, anytime I need it."

★★★★★ Mar 04, 2022 (Original Nov 28, 2018) ❓
"Very solid, flexible, easy to use CRM"

★★★★★ Oct 26, 2021
"EXCELLENT CRM with SALESFORCE CAPABILITIES at a REASONABLE PRICE"

Top Features of Pipeline CRM

Let your sales team focus on your bottom line while we automate the rest. Pipeline CRM is intuitive enough for small businesses and robust enough to feel tailored for an enterprise team.

Email Campaigns and Tracking
Track open and click rates to gain insights on which emails yield the best results.

Custom Fields
Create up to 25 custom fields based on what customer data are most important to you

Easy Integrations
From Gmail to QuickBooks to Mailchimp. Continue utilizing the tools you already use.

Sales Forecasting
Analyze past trends to forecast future sales opportunities accurately.

Track Commissions
Automate sales commissions to reduce costs and increase transparency.

User Permissions
Assign permissions to set what your team can see and do.

Unlimited File Storage
Store all your data (documents, images, etc.) without additional charges.

Mobile App
Stay on top of your sales while you're out doing your job through your mobile.

Real Human Support
Our U.S.-based support team provides the same expert-level care regardless of your subscribed plan.

Empower Your Teams with CRM

Retain existing customers, attract new ones, and boost revenue with CRM. Get a bird's eye view into your sales cycle, track the progress of each lead, and share real-time updates with your team. Try Pipeline CRM, a simple system crafted with the right features—no more, no less.