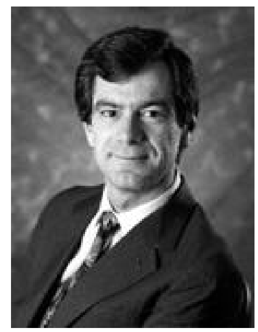
Getting the Most from Salesforce.com: A Conversation with David Taber

Salesforce.com is a dominant player in the CRM category and an integral part of many companies' lead management, database marketing, and demand generation programs. Yet in my experience marketers often have a love-hate relationship with Salesforce, a tool originally designed for salespeople that now, like it or not, has become a critical part of the marketing machine.

To learn how we marketing types can get more from Salesforce.com, I spoke recently to David Taber, CEO of CRM consultancy Saleslogistix and author of the Prentice-Hall book, Salesforce.com Secrets of Success.

HS: What would you say is the biggest misconception about Salesforce and the way it's used in most companies? In other words, how do people use Salesforce in ways for which it was never intended or designed?



DT: Well, the biggest misconception about Salesforce is that it's something Sales reps like and Marketing folks don't. Actually, it's much easier for Marketing and lead cultivation people to get instant value out of Salesforce.com (SFDC) than it is for reps. So the issue isn't misuse…it's under-use. In too many cases, SFDC is just a glorified contact manager.

Marketing people naturally tend to think in terms of campaigns and "mass" activities, and that's exactly what SFDC (or any good CRM system) can help automate in a hurry. Unfortunately, the data in most CRM systems isn't tight enough to help marketing. All too often, the data is disorganized, has poor quality, and suffers from dupes. And improving data quality requires some behavior changes and cleanup fees that get scary. So before loading 10,000 leads (or 100,000) into the system, marketing needs to get its act together.

HS: I must hear at least one person a week say "I need to clean up our Salesforce database." Is that a reflection on the software, or on how people use it?

DT: Salesforce, like any CRM system, is only as good as the data in it. And most of the issues around data quality are people and process problems, so these must be worked on along with the software add-ons that improve for data quality. The good news is that most basic data quality (DQ) issues can be fixed in a week with the right tools. But if you don't fix the ongoing pollution problems at the source, data will be gunked up again in just a few months. That's why the process issues have to be dealt with from the beginning.

Here's the hard news: fixing data quality can easily exceed $1 per record, and with tricky things can be $5 per. This sounds extraordinary, but how much did the leads cost you in the first place? How much does it cost you to qualify and nurture a lead into a real sales cycle? Data grooming is something that needs to be in every marketing VP's budget!

HS: How do marketing automation systems make Salesforce more useful? What basic principles do you recommend to Salesforce users that are implementing marketing automation?

DT: As I wrote in an article for CIO.com last year, marketing automation and CRM are close cousins. But they are different systems, focused on different processes. SFDC by itself can help marketing, but serious marketing campaigns need a separate marketing automation system to increase lead flow, improve lead quality, and lower the cost of lead nurturing.

The most important principle in using marketing automation is to keep it logically separate from the CRM system, yet synchronized with it. They are separate databases (“names” and your “remarketing database” are not the same as “qualified leads” or “contacts) that are focused on different business processes. But it is essential to have the two integrated so that a lead that emerges from cultivation is seen as a “good call-in target” rather than “a lead I disqualified four months ago.” This integration needs to happen with the technology and with the expectations (business rules and semantics) of sales and marketing people.

HS: It seems to me that most Salesforce implementations happen organically. Is it fair to conclude that most companies don’t do enough planning when it comes to implementing Salesforce?

DT: Part of SFDC’s sales technique is to come in on the ground floor and gradually grow upwards in the organization. So they want to make the system easy to use and easy to buy. Here’s an irony — one you’ll never hear from me about any other product: Salesforce is too easy to use. Everyone thinks that they already know how to use it, and there isn’t much planning, training, or discipline required. Soon enough, they discover that they can’t get as much out of the system as they thought. They may blame it on the system, but it’s really an issue of people, policies, and processes.

[Note: you can say the same of most marketing automation systems – HS.]

HS: What’s the one thing that Salesforce does well that you think fewest companies take advantage of?

DT: Let me give two answers here. For smaller companies, SFDC can do a lot of light automation without your having to write code. The workflow system, in conjunction with tasks and email reminders, can solve a lot of problems like stale-lead alerts, quote approvals, service level agreement (SLA) escalations, and automatic renewals. Too many people aren’t aware of how much value is untapped here.

For larger companies, there’s an old saying in the CRM world, “the best CRM systems are built, not bought.” So integration with marketing automation, ecommerce, order entry, your phone switch, and other support systems is the key to a “360° view” of the customer relationship. No one system ever does that off the shelf. Most people don’t realize how easy it is to integrate SFDC with other systems — it’s a real strength — so SFDC can be a really effective “command center” for everything that Sales, Marketing, and Customer Support needs to interact with.

HS: Thanks David!

This entry was written by Howard Sewell, posted on July 15, 2010 at 1:58 pm, filed under B2B Marketing, CRM, Database Marketing, Demand Generation, Installed Base Marketing, Lead Management, Lead Nurturing, Marketing Automation and tagged CRM, Lead Management, Marketing Automation, salesforce.com. Bookmark the permalink. Follow any comments here with the RSS feed for this post. Post a comment or leave a trackback: Trackback URL.

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2 Comments

Chris Keller
Posted July 21, 2010 at 8:48 am | Permalink

Great interview. Expertise like David’s is much needed for marketers today. I for one am battle scarred from a previous marketing automation integration with

Salesforce. My still unresolved big issue with Salesforce was reporting "total leads" that ever enter the top of the funnel. Even after engaging their sales engineers, we could not find an automated solution to create a end-to-end lead water flow report per stage. The problem was once a lead was converted, it fell out of the "total leads" generated bucket. That was a big problem that created confusion and doubt in the numbers when "total leads" reported decreased month over month as leads were converted. That appears to still be a big Salesforce problem.

David Taber
Posted July 26, 2010 at 6:29 am | Permalink
Your comment is awaiting moderation.

Chris,

The problem you are having with the "total leads" report is that you're trying to do it as one report. SFDC just can't do reports that span Leads and Contacts (and Opportunities) at the same time. You have to use an external reporting tool like Crystal or Birst to provide the unified view. Or, if you have internal coding resources, Access or Excel plus Visual Basic.

You're not the only one who's tripped across this issue!

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Name *

David Taber

Email *

dtaber@saleslogistix.com

Website

http://www.saleslogistix.com

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