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Social CRM Offers Big Rewards If You're Persistent

– David Taber, CIO

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Marketers have been having so much fun with the term *social CRM* that it's hard to know exactly what it means. Social CRM already offers obvious advantages for both [revenue generation](#) and [customer support](#) functions, but the definition sure seems to be changing as vendors build out feature sets and integrate acquired companies.

Sure, you can get a plugin that looks into Facebook or LinkedIn, but these will help you see only your personal social network in an easier way. Likewise, you can hook up a lexical analysis tool to your customer community engine, but that really only gives you trailing indicators of sentiment or reputation. These things alone won't help you understand the dynamics of your commercial and personal relationships, let alone provide timely responses. That's the Holy Grail.

7 Social CRM Innovations to Watch

Despite all the hype, there's a lot of innovation going on here, so let's take a look some social CRM basics.

Lead enrichment has been a real beneficiary of social networking, allowing Salesforce.com's [Jigsaw](#) and others to use crowd-sourcing and other techniques to keep volatile contact information up to date.

Other approaches to lead enrichment focus on Web scraping and lexical inference. [ZoomInfo](#) and other systems, for example, may synthesize several avatars from an individual's publicly available information. However, this can lead to some ambiguous information value—I was recently represented in ZoomInfo as five separate profile. (To be fair, there is another living, breathing Dave Taber within 50 miles of me with a similar background. Guess there are just too many Dave Tabers around.)

Tips: [Social CRM for the Enterprise: How Analytics Can Move You to Greater Success](#)

Consequently, **social network graphers** and **scorers** are an area of important innovation, as they help disambiguate "Which Dave Taber is this, anyway?" and help you understand who follows whom.

As you'll remember from [The Tipping Point](#), all social networks are not created equal. Certain individuals have enormous social network reach and act like Internet exchange hubs. It is therefore critical to identify and leverage these "connectors" to get the maximum social network effect. If you follow the idea that [commerce is a conversation](#), then finding the mavens in your community and working them to best effect for PR, marketing and customer service is going to be one of the highest ROI areas for social CRM.

Unfortunately, there is an area where we haven't seen much yet: Identifying who in your organization has the best connection to someone you need to get to. It would be nice to know who has the best

social path, for both speed and credibility of connection. Due to privacy policies, security issues and API limitations, however, it looks like we're going to be waiting a while for this one.

With the Facebook IPO and the [Salesforce acquisition of Buddy Media](#), **social advertising** is all over the trade press. There are some cool success stories here, but go in with your eyes open. Results vary, and missteps can cost you in customer reputation—or, thanks to violations of privacy, in court.

Far more mature are **product review** engines such as [Bazaarvoice](#) and [Extole](#), as well as sites from [Yelp](#) and others. Because these systems develop and groom the reactions of your customers, they can achieve dramatic results. Decades of data show that the unsolicited opinions of customers are many times more credible and influential than advertising can ever be. Indeed, an entire methodology has sprung out of the research surrounding [The Ultimate Question](#).

For both marketing and customer service, it's important to understand the attitudes of prospects and happiness of customers. That's why sentiment analytics and **social media monitoring** have become such vibrant areas of social CRM. [Reputation Defender](#), [Radian6](#) and [BuzzMetrics](#) are just three of the more recognizable names in this field of more than 200 products, though it's worth noting that most of these products are highly specialized and not particularly well-integrated with popular CRM infrastructure.

To help reinforce the right kind of customer reverberations, **community management engines** help shepherd customers (typically, active community participants) and corral prospects (often, lurkers). When properly linked with your CRM nurturing campaigns, social communities can be equally important to marketing and customer support functions.

Feature: [10 Social CRM Tools to Help You Keep Tabs on Your Customers](#)

Finally, the latest **gamification and engagement systems** from [Bunchball](#), [BuddyMedia](#), [Badgeville](#) and some other "B" companies offer a tantalizing look into the potential of social media when combined with social engineering. Expect these to have the biggest payoff with early prospects and confirmed customers, helping extend your influence outside of your "walled garden" community.

6 Realistic Social CRM Expectations

With all this, it's easy to have unrealistic expectations about what social CRM will give you. Look beyond the slick veneer of vendor presentations and demos. In truth, only six things are for sure at this point:

- You'll need to collect new types of data about your prospects, and more of it, than ever before. Expand your "terms of use" and opt-in verbiage.
- Identity management—that is, understanding exactly who's who across your infrastructure—is a significant issue. Be prepared to expend significant effort on this.
- Getting the payoff from social CRM is going to require a lot of integration and/or custom code. Watch out for data model issues.
- Putting all this data in doesn't mean you'll be able to predict anything for a while. People are complicated. Models are fallible.
- Useful analytics are usually more complicated than you might think. Think [Big Data](#).
- It's still the early days for products, skills, processes and best practices. Now is the time to upgrade your internal toolbox.

Reaping the benefits of social CRM will require some work on your part, and it won't happen overnight. Remember, though, that innovation rarely comes to those who wait.

David Taber is the author of the new Prentice Hall book, "[Salesforce.com Secrets of Success](#)" and is the CEO of [SalesLogistix](#), a certified Salesforce.com consultancy focused on business process improvement through use of CRM systems. SalesLogistix clients are in North America, Europe, Israel and India. Taber has more than 25 years of experience in high tech, including 10 years at the VP level or above.

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