Case Study

Take Control of Your Data

The Tale of a Frustrated Chemical Distributor

This story has a happy ending. Well, at least we plan to have them continue to live happily ever after.

The Challenge

IT began with a call from our business development coach, asking us to discuss the challenges this mid-sized business was having difficulties with customer centricity even though it had 2 of the industry's leading CRM's, a PRM solution, a modern cloud marketing platform and an aging but adequate ERP.

The problem was, even with nearly average technology spend on business applications, they were not achieving business results. The company had moderate marketplace complexity, serving North American direct sales to businesses, supporting consumers, and selling through a partner channel across varied chemical categories.

Customer-facing team members were struggling with data. Prospect and customer data was wrong, stale, invalid. Their systems made it hard to find the right data at the right time.

This affected very basic information sets: accounts & customer hierarchies, contacts & relationships, comprehending business communications, and knowing how the customer was performing to plan.

- Sellers were not using or updating the data properly; some had private data stores.
- Marketers had to use untrusted 3rd party sources and isolated this data set.
- Customer support was using multiple systems to get their job done, including adding the data from scratch in another ticketing system.
- IT was getting some blame for slower than desired improvements.

No context or connectedness, insufficient re-use of data, no trust, no insights

Company was losing money because of a lack of personalization, inadequate data coherence, poor data custody when sales agents turned over, insufficient customer responsiveness; VOC indicated too much customer relationship strain. New employees from competing businesses were complaining that the data dysfunction was affecting internal relationships and culture.

Since the company had recently upgraded its key applications with modern Saas software, we felt the applications were not the issue. We reviewed the IT landscape and all tools and hiding places for data. We found several spreadsheets and some unofficial SaaS apps in place. Users felt the need to use alternative data stores to get their jobs done; this only made the data silo problems worse.

After a brief plan for the business to rationalize a few applications and change some habits, we decided to create a data amendment plan and provide an ongoing solution, knowing they would still be using numerous apps with databases to run the business.

We rejected a monopolistic system-of-record approach, where dependencies and complex integration would be needed. We advised the client that using ERP as a hub would get costly and create less business flexibility, moving them in the wrong direction. We instead focused on a Customer Data Platform (CDP).

Our proposal called for the following treatments:

1. Find all applications and stores that keep/manage customer & prospect data. Bring legacy data sets together into a single data repair platform using Ascendant Group's Customer Science™.

2. Validate, append, amend, standardize, and enrich the data sets, keeping the appropriate information in the right formats.

3. Solicit Requirements from all divisions and departments for unified, recirculated marketplace information.

4. Acquire a CDP. Create a data model and integration approach.

5. Articulate and unify historical transactions, customer assets, and all business communications.

6. Create new and update feeds into the CDP.

7. Build customer profiles, KPI's and scores.

8. Create API's to present this information back to the line of business users for on demand consumption in sales, marketing, customer service, operations.

9. Create data governance and CDP roadmap to align with CRM roadmap.

10. 2021+ plans include, dynamic segmentation, lead scoring and distribution, predictive analysis for partner churn, product suggestions, digital behaviors, improved correlation and prediction scoring to trigger some 1-1 corrective events, and a BI foundation for bottom-up forecasting!

Impact:

Our phase-1 project lifespan was about 6 months. Adoption took about a month.

1. The company's customer service felt an immediate impact. For the first time, the agents were able to pop a customer profile that spanned 2 CRM's, 2 ERP's, one Distribution system, LinkedIn, with data refreshed from 3rd party services. This could be popped for each call and case, which provided all key details of the customer, including:

   - Name, ownership, key contacts, all known communications channels, MTD, QTD, YTD orders, revenue; unique product saturation, backorders, credit status and old invoices, recent cases, and a CSAT score. Partners had additional information such as performance, leads and stock.

   It was obvious to the customers that agents had the right information and were quick to respond. Customers felt the "brand" understood their entire account history and status. Agents were having the right conversations and could add the right comments. Marketing added a few simple VOC and supportive communications to head off partner and customer CSAT problems.

2. Sales was the next winner, as they had data that allowed them to tailor better solutions and pricing. They could hold partners accountable and better predict their quota and bonus. Sales agents began to update their source systems because they had just completed our data quality remediation and they were already benefitting from improvements. Managers had more leverage now to expect concurrent updates.

3. Marketing received data quality benefits and began to change some communications practices around the new information, making messaging more appropriate and personalized. Their next step is to improve segmentation and real time message responsiveness. Eventually they plan to execute some limited ad buys around targeted customers and prospects.

4. IT was relieved that the business was not pressuring them for further consolidation of the line-of-business applications in the landscape. They remained a hybrid "best-of-breed" business.

   Don't you just love a happy ending?