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Six Steps for Successfully Buying Customer and Service Management Software

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Service companies gain tremendous value utilizing a service management software solution. Many service companies use paper-based approach, older (dos) software, or a combination of tools such as excel, outlook, and custom in-house database programs. Service companies using these approaches would gain tremendous improvements in their operations by moving to a modern service management software solution. It would take most service companies only a few months to achieve a return on investment if they buy the right software at the right price range for their needs.

Customer and Service Management Software (CSMS) provides a unified solution to manage all business aspects of a service business. Solutions typically include modules such as CRM/Sales, customer, service and install orders, field technician dispatch, receivables, inventory, and a help desk or knowledge base. The CSMS will connect to popular accounting programs or include full accounting functionality as part of the CSMS solution. The CSMS creates a unified memory of customer information including all service performed, all equipment installed, customer contacts, and notes of customer "touches". Everyone in a service company utilizing a modern CSMS will know everything about the customer both past, present and potentially future service. The service company with a modern CSMS is viewed as having extensive knowledge of the customer. The only way to provide excellent service is to have full knowledge of the customer. The best way to provide all employees at the service company with full knowledge of the customers is to have a CSMS in place.

CSMS will improve day-to-day operations. It will also increase the value of the service company because all knowledge of all customers will be recorded in a central repository. If the principals of the service company ever decide to sell or transfer their company, the accumulated customer data in a CSMS will be worth many times more than the initial cost of the software.

The selection of a CSMS is an important decision for the service company because they will incur time and cost in selecting the CSMS, installing, training their employees, and then utilizing the tool for a long time. Although it's an

important decision, the service company should realize that making the decision in a timely fashion is just as important so that they begin to realize the benefits of the CSMS.

Experts say forming a strong partnership with the right software vendor is essential to success with CSMS. But navigating the seas of CSMS options can be daunting. Here are six steps service companies can take to help guide their CSMS software purchasing decisions:

Step 1: Understand the Tremendous ROI Potential of CSMS

First and foremost, service companies should understand and realize the tremendous value of implementing a CSMS solution. Service companies achieve return on investment improvements from CSMS in a number of areas, as discussed below:

1. **Improved Customer Knowledge:** Having complete customer knowledge of all service activities and equipment installed allows the service company to provide better and proactive service to their customers. Often, this knowledge allows the service company to provide their services *before* the customer experiences problems or allows the service company to offer new services, products or upgrades. This knowledge also allows multiple employees to provide great service to customers. As a service company business owner, you could also have more freedom since all your customer knowledge can be shared to the level you want with employees.
2. **Detailed Service Information:** The ability to identify and track chronic customer issues allows the service company to provide additional service for the customer or in some cases determine that some customers are not providing adequate returns for the amount of service provided. This allows the service company to boost or optimize the profit per customer.
3. **Field technician dispatch optimization:** Optimizing field technician scheduling provides both better utilization of your staff and more accurate scheduling for the customer. Customers are more likely to work with a service company that can dispatch a technician within a window of a couple hours versus numerous hour scheduling. The service company is perceived as much more professional if it can say the technician will be at the customer site from 9am to 10am versus being there anytime during the day. In addition, technician routes can be mapped out to minimize drive time.
4. **Inventory management:** Increasing inventory turns or providing just in time inventory can be achieved with some CSMS solutions, which will increase cash flow versus tying up money in inventory that can become obsolete in this rapidly changing market.
5. **Timely Invoicing and Payment Tracking:** Timely invoicing after work is completed will lead to faster payment and better cash flow for the service company.

Step 2: Assess Your Current Service Process

Once you see the tremendous ROI benefit of CSMS, you can now put in the time or resources to find a solution that will work for your business. The next step is to determine your current process for servicing companies. As you deploy your CSMS, you want to continue to provide the current level of customer service and likely better service. Analyzing your current process involves a few areas:

1. Determine the number of employees you have now and will need in the future in various disciplines: For example If you have only a few employees (or sole employee) your main benefit for an CSMS will be in tracking customer history. If you have many field technicians that need to be optimized, you will benefit from strong dispatch software. If you have a large sales force, you will benefit from a CSMS with a good sales or CRM module.
2. Determine existing and new employee computer skills: If you have an older dos system, existing employees may be comfortable, but new employees struggle because they are used to more modern windows systems. Unless you have no plans to change employees and never want to sell your company or pass on to the next generation, you would be well advised to migrate to a more modern system for the benefit of the company value or to make it easier for newer employees to become productive. You also want to consider your level of technical support required to install and manage your CSMS. Since the CSMS will be running your business, you want rapid response to issues and questions. Despite the technological advances with email and Internet, complex issues or questions are often most rapidly solved with both email and telephone support, preferably with support personnel that are understandable and speak your language.
3. Determine customer expectations: Your customers may have requirements from their service provider to know everything about their situation and equipment. Customers of interconnect and IT service companies just want the equipment to work so they can focus on their own business rather than telephone or computer problems. Excellent interconnect and IT service companies will know everything about the customer equipment and service history so they can provide fast repairs or provide timely upgrades.
4. Determine your need for tracking sales leads and history: Some service businesses have a long sales process before the lead becomes a customer or a proposal becomes an order. Other companies need to talk with massive numbers of leads to get a few customers. Except if your business instantly converts sales leads to customer, you should consider CSMS with a strong sales module that allows transfer of sales information to a customer.
5. Determine your inventory needs: If you have complex inventory needs, you will need a CSMS with a strong and comprehensive inventory module. The inventory and accounting needs often dictate the type of CSMS. For example High 5 Software has two totally different CSMS solutions, one with a strong interface to popular accounting programs, which handle

basic inventory, the other High 5 Software solution has a very strong inventory module with a lighter interface to popular accounting programs. Other CSMS vendors provide a proprietary built-in accounting program, but these are less popular or not known by accountants or independent bookkeepers.

6. Determine your accounting needs: If your organization has a working accounting package that meets the business needs, then you should search for a CSMS that works together with that accounting package. If your organization needs to change it's existing accounting approach, then you are open to investigate the best CSMS for your business, then get the accounting solution that works with the CSMS. The CSMS vendor can recommend accounting approaches that will complement their solution.

Step 3: Assess Your Needs and Expectations

Step 2 lays the groundwork for you current "as-is" process. The next step is to determine your "should-be" process. Go through each of the items in step 2 again and determine which areas need to improve or change. From this list determine your CSMS solution needs. Fill out a list with each of the above items like this:

1. Number of Employees and Disciplines Now and Future:
 - a. Number of Sale People. Now _____ Future _____
 - b. Number of Customer Support: Now _____ Future _____
 - c. Number of Dispatchers: Now _____ Future _____
 - d. Number of Field Technicians: Now _____ Future _____
 - e. Number of Accounting Personnel: Now _____ Future _____
 - f. Other: Discipline _____ Now _____ Future _____
 - g. Other: Discipline _____ Now _____ Future _____
2. Employee Computer Skills:
 - a. Need for ease of Use _____
 - b. Training requirements _____
 - c. Technical Support requirements _____
3. Customer Expectations:
 - a. Customers expect us to know everything about their system we service: Yes _____ No _____
 - b. Customers expect us to track service history: Yes _____ No _____
 - c. We need to track details about customers systems such as serial number, IP address or other: Yes _____ No _____
4. Sales Needs:
 - a. Sales are simple and instant: Yes _____ No _____
 - b. Sales cycles are long and complex: Yes _____ No _____
 - c. Sales leads require multiple "touches" before they buy: Yes _____ No _____
 - d. Sales team changes often, need to keep detailed records so that sales lead continues to be managed even with changing of sales personnel: Yes _____ No _____
5. Inventory Needs:

- a. Our business has complex inventory needs beyond popular accounting packages: Yes _____ No _____
 - b. Our accounting package handles all inventory needs, we need a CSMS that interfaces closing with our accounting package: Yes _____ No _____
6. Accounting Needs:
- a. We are not changing accounting packages, our accounting package is _____.
 - b. We are open to changing accounting packages to get the best CSMS: Yes _____ No _____
 - c. Our Service Management comes first, and would like the CSMS to provide accounting information to our accounting package, which is _____

Step 4: Match Your Needs With Software

Once you have identified your “should-be” process, you are ready to find the CSMS solution to meet your current and future needs. Using the 6 areas from steps 2 and 3, you can formulate the important criteria necessary for your CSMS. You can use this information to pre-screen CSMS software, since it would be a waste of your time to evaluate software that does not meet a critical need for your business. Complete the following chart with your business needs, then review the CSMS vendor information or call their sales staff to access how the CSMS meets each of the needs. From this matrix you can determine the software that best matches your critical business needs. Running the real evaluation software in your network or through an online evaluation will allow you to confirm the CSMS vendor assessment versus your business needs.

Service Management Software Needs Matrix

	Customer Support Needs				
	Simple	←-----→			Complex
Your Needs	1	2	3	4	5
High 5 ABC's	④	④	④	④	④
High 5 SMP	④	④	④	④	④
Other SMS					
	Dispatch				
	Simple	←-----→			Complex
Your Needs	1	2	3	4	5
High 5 ABC's	④	④	④	④	④
High 5 SMP	④	④	④	④	④
Other SMS					
	Technical Support Needs				
	Limited	←-----→			Full
Your Needs	1	2	3	4	5
High 5 ABC's					④
High 5 SMP					④
Other SMS					
	Customer History Needs				
	Limited	←-----→			Complete Knowledge
Your Needs	1	2	3	4	5
High 5 ABC's					④
High 5 SMP					④
Other SMS					
	Sales/CRM Module				
	Limited	←-----→			Full
Your Needs	1	2	3	4	5
High 5 ABC's					add-on
High 5 SMP					④
Other SMS					
	Inventory				
	Limited	←-----→			Full
Your Needs	1	2	3	4	5
High 5 ABC's			④		
High 5 SMP					④
Other SMS					
	Accounting Needs				
	QuickBooks	Peachtree	MSFT SBA	Other	None
Your Needs	1	2	3	4	5
High 5 ABC's	④	coming soon	coming soon		
High 5 SMP	④	export	export	export	④
Other SMS					

Step 5: CSMS selection and evaluation

Once you have matched your needs to available CSMS software one of the following cases will emerge:

Case 1: One CSMS is an obvious match: In your matching exercise it may be clear that a specific CSMS package will meet your service company needs and independent reviews from companies in your industry verify it. If that's the case, buy it and move on to step 6.

Case 2: Multiple choices: Another case is when multiple vendors will meet your needs and you need to select based on cost, ROI, and user preferences. In this case, evaluate the software and get firm price quotes.

Case 3: No exact match: Another case is that no vendors will meet all your needs so you either need to find a vendor willing to provide custom work or will facilitate you to build your own custom extension. Note that some vendors have VAR partnerships to allow you to contract out a custom solution. The cost of a custom solution may be cost or time prohibitive, so an alternative is to select the vendor package that gives the best match of the most important features. In this case you need to understand how you will work around the CSMS deficiency and make sure that the overall ROI benefit is still valid. This case requires the most evaluation effort because you need to evaluate both the CSMS and create a strategy for working around the limitations.

Step 6: Implement the CSMS System and Reap the Benefits

Once you decide on the CSMS, you are ready to deploy the solution and start realizing the benefits of the solution. It's important to follow through at this point since the people in your service company who have evaluated the software are still familiar and likely eager to move forward. CSMS vendors that have provided an evaluation copy installed in your system can usually provide a registration code after purchase so you can continue to utilize the software without another install. The amount of planning for the deployment depends on the complexity of the situation and beyond the scope of this paper, however your CSMS vendor can guide you on the deployment plan.

Once the CSMS is installed and running, make sure employees utilize the software to the fullest potential. You may need to monitor that employees are adequately keeping notes and histories for the sales leads, customers, and orders. Also, make sure that your CSMS is backed up on a regular basis with off-site storage.

Conclusion: The six steps of selecting and implementing Service Management Software is a straightforward task that does not have to take excessive time. Your service company will benefit tremendously by following through with the selection and installation of a CSMS solution.

About High 5 Software: High 5 Software has been a leading Service Management Software (CSMS) provider for 18 years. High 5 Software has two products targeting different market segments. Service Management Professional (SMP) is the flagship product with a complete bundled solution with very strong modules for sales, customers, service orders, install orders, receivables, knowledge/help desk, dispatch, and a best-in-class inventory module. SMP has a “light” connection to accounting programs such as QuickBooks®. High 5 Software’s other product, ABC’s of Service Management has best in class integration with QuickBooks® along with extensive customer module and dispatch. The sales and assets modules are sold as separate add-ons for ABC’s. ABC’s extends and synchronizes QuickBooks® information for customers, inventory, and billing. Both SMP and ABC’s have been providing tremendous benefits to service companies such as interconnect/telecom, IT, pool maintenance, landscaping, HVAC, plumbing, security, and many others. Contact High 5 Software at www.high5software.com or call 800-585-1696 or 360-293-3000.

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