



Howard **Leavitt** sales and training solution

# FIND YOUR VISION IN THE WORLD OF CRM

## Automotive Culture Versus CRMs

*"Vision is the art of seeing things invisible"*  
– Jonathan Swift (1667-1745)

How many times have you read articles about how CRM applications will improve your profit and sales volume? What is a CRM? Ask 10 dealers and I think you will get 10 different answers, depending on the way they run their businesses. It is a catch-all phrase to explain a variety of processes that facilitate the collection of data. Understanding data management is as important as understanding the definition of the term "CRM."

Here is Wikipedia definition of CRM: **"Customer relationship management (CRM)** is a broadly recognized, widely-implemented strategy for managing a company's interactions with customers, clients and sales prospects. It involves using technology to organize, automate and synchronize business processes — principally sales activities, but also those for marketing, customer service, and technical support.

"The overall goals are to find, attract and win new clients, nurture and retain those the company already has, entice former clients back into the fold and reduce the costs of marketing and client service.

"Customer relationship management denotes a company-wide business strategy embracing all client-facing departments and even beyond. When an implementation is effective, people, processes and technology work together to increase profitability and reduce operational costs."

I did not *always* have the vision of data management and CRM. I used to think there was always the next "up" to sell, so why collect names? Besides, I never had time to follow up daily. My second job as a sales manager was a disaster. I thought running fast and working the floor was all that was required to succeed; pushing for the sale by closing hard, not in collecting data. A few years later, I started to realize the importance

of managing customer data and how it leads to an increase in sales. Not just collecting, but *working* the data, truly retains customers, increases profits and increases your volume.

Do you need to be digital to accomplish the above? No, you can remain in the past and continue to have some success, but the dealers who have gone digital will eat your lunch. Learn how to manage data today. *Do not wait.*

In 1996, I had the fortune of being sent to a week-long training program that Ford Motor Company was sponsoring for its franchised dealers' management. Facilitators ran the program and exposed us to major retailers outside the automotive world. Executives from Nordstrom, Neiman Marcus and Burberry presented the way they interacted with their clientele. By the third day, I had enough and was not getting what they were preaching to us. What did selling clothes have to do with selling automobiles?

On the fourth day, we watched a film about a clothing store in Dallas that catered to a worldwide audience. Customers would call from all over and order a variety of items by phone or mail. The store's employees would collect detailed information from first-time buyers and then enter all the data into the store's database of clients. To complete future orders from these clients was simple; it only required that the original information was valid. Just look up the client's name and there, in one place, all the history and stats about that client was at your fingertips. The process was so simple compared to what we were doing to see the basic data of our clients.

*Digital was the answer, and my search to replace paperwork with a digital solution started that day.* No more pulling deal jackets and looking for clues. All the time wasted looking for deal jackets that were misfiled or in someone's desk drawers was over. I gained a vision: sharing data that can be accessed on the fly, anywhere in the world. What an original idea.

I got back to the dealership and asked my DMS provider what systems they had for sales. A long silence was the answer. It was very basic, so like a lot of sales managers, I developed a home-grown system and kept looking for a better solution. Today, there are many in the marketplace and the confusion of what meets your needs can be daunting. First, understand the vision. Ask what the culture in your dealership is? Will you have the strength to be a champion and make the next step to the digital world?

I hear the following objections all the time:

- My sales reps won't use it.
- My manager thinks it is a waste of time.
- Computers for all of my salespeople; are you crazy?
- We do not sell enough to warrant the cost.

There are more objections, but the biggest stumbling block is, *no vision!* How can CRM companies explain and show that going digital will increase and grow your business? Dealers can relate to Website costs, lead providers and DMS systems because they are tangible programs and applications.

CRM applications are about a process of manipulating data that can help you retain a customer and sell a car. As a dealer or manager, you need every tool that is available to succeed in the current and future economy of this country. Take charge and get educated on the digital world or data management, call it a CRM or whatever you like, but realize that it is the future of how you will conduct your business with the generations to come. Small shop or big shop, it does not matter; see the process and join the CRM club.

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