Five CRM trends you & your customers need to know about

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This year is going to be BIG for Customer Relationship Management (CRM) solutions.

And winning the loyalty of today's customers means staying connected with them, always knowing what their needs are and meeting them quickly—sometimes before they even realize the need exists.

Gartner forecasts that the global CRM software market will grow at a 14.8 percent compounded annual growth rate (CAGR) through 2017, which is about $36.5 Billion in size, up from $20.4 Billion in 2013. And, through our own ModernBiz campaign, a result of extensive research with industry experts, top Microsoft partners, and customer research, we've learned that customers often need complete solutions to help themconnect with their own customers.

The fact is, there is money to be made from taking advantage of the best CRM solutions available—and we want to help our partners get to market with these solutions quickly and easily.

Here are the top CRM trends that will help you effectively Connect with Customers in 2016:

1. Social CRM is going viral.

Social CRM involves using social media strategies to engage with customers—its presence in the market is growing quickly.

According to research from ReportsNReports, the overall global social CRM market is forecasted to be $17.92 billion by 2019 with a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 51.9 percent for 2014 to 2019.

Plus, in a recent CRM whitepaper, the MSL Group, a communication strategy agency, notes that social CRM solutions aim to "build a connection between social media and a company's internal and external communication systems" and by doing so are making big changes in the industry.

> "The recent explosion in social media usage has permanently changed the relationship between a company and its customers. Their views have a major impact on the purchasing decisions of others within their social circle and companies are unable to control them."
>
> Stanislas Magniant, Head of Digital, EMEA, MSL Group

Take advantage of the trend and find more leads for yourself by using social media to identify and act on buying signals. You can better understand your customers by getting a snapshot of their social activities through embedded social buzz volume, trends, and sentiment analysis, using the Microsoft Social Engagement tool.

2. CRM is moving to the cloud.

Though the numbers that CRM experts suggest might vary, they all announce that SaaS will be dominating the CRM industry this year, including Gartner.

Plus, according to the Cloud Report, a research study by Bessemer Venture Partners, 50 percent of all CRM software will be cloud based in 2016, and that is expected to increase to 62 percent by 2018—up from just 35 percent in 2013.

If you're not already, you'll definitely want to get a piece of this tremendous growth opportunity by building your CRM Cloud business.

3. Mobile CRM will take you places.

Adding mobile access to your CRM can help increase sales exponentially, as salespeople with Mobile CRM have immediate access to account history, product information, price lists and promotions—empowering them to offer the customer expanded options and close sales on-the-spot.

Your CRM users will expect mobile apps that provide contextual news, social data, and task flows for quickly completing frequent activities. They'll want apps that use intuitive natural language voice commands to create new records, schedule meetings, set reminders, and find information. Make sure the solutions you build can speak to these needs.

To further understand the strategic advantages of Mobile CRM, and how it helps to increase sales values, shorten sales cycles, collect information at source and much more, check out this infographic by Microsoft partner Able Bridge.

4. CRM users are interested in integration.

In the past, CRM applications used to be a system with limited or no ability to integrate and gather data from other sources. Today, as users demand more value from their CRM providers, modern CRM applications are starting to integrate with related software applications more often and more fully.

The winning CRM solutions will provide seamless integration with marketing automation software, ecommerce platforms, analytics software, productivity software, accounting systems and more.

Interactive visualizations and dashboards make it easy to quickly identify and act on opportunities with tools like Power BI, which is fully integrated with Microsoft Dynamics CRM Online.

As a Microsoft partner, be sure to utilize the ModernBiz Connect with Customers resource materials to have a relevant and well-informed conversation with your customers and provide them with true business value.

5. Big Data joins CRM Predictive Analytics.

Data analytics are no longer optional in business. As data expands at an exponential rate (Big Data), the ability for a business to take action and make decisions based on hard evidence is a core differentiator between good and great.

And CRM systems generate a lot of data, but when big data is too large and unspecified, it cannot be very practical and businesses need to find a way to overcome this challenge.

Use tools like Microsoft Dynamics CRM to gain insight into advanced analytics, and access to the machine learning capabilities of the Cortana Analytics Suite. Plus, use the tool to provide customers with intelligent, adaptive processes for sales, customer service and social CRM.

These five trends mean one thing: it's more important than ever before for businesses to have an integrated and affordable CRM solution that helps them gain a complete view of their customers, close more sales, and build ongoing relationships. And as a Microsoft partner, you can offer just that.

So, now that you know the trends, market them! Make sure you use digital outlets like your website and social media pages to tell new and existing customers about your expertise in these areas. And don't forget, Microsoft's ModernBiz resources, designed to help you market these solutions and drive your business forward, are always available.