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CRM

CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT

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IN CUSTOMER SERVICE



REQUIRED READING

The Geek, Nerd, Suit Approach to Customer-Centricity

Achieving customer-centricity requires a partnership between IT, analysts, and business strategists

Business leaders often lose sight of the customer by focusing on data, complex analytics, or high-level strategizing. This is the premise of *Geek, Nerd, Suit: Breaking Down Walls, Unifying Teams, and Creating Cutting-Edge Customer-Centricity*, a book co-authored by three executives at Elicit, a marketing and advertising solutions provider. The authors, Brooke Niemiec, chief marketing officer, Chuck Densinger, chief operations officer, and Mason Thelen, CEO, assert that organizations can achieve customer-centricity via a partnership between IT (geeks), analytics (nerds), and business strategists (suits). Associate Editor Sam Del Rowe spoke with Niemiec to learn more.

CRM magazine: How do you define customer-centricity? What are its key aspects?

Brooke Niemiec: A commonly (or perhaps, overly) used definition of customer-centricity is “putting the customer at the center of decision-making.” While this is obviously a good sentiment, true customer-centricity is more technical than that. It starts with knowledge about customers: what they are doing, why they are doing it, how they feel about your brand, and what motivates them. The second, and often more difficult to master, component of customer-centricity is actually using that insight to make customer experiences better in a way that aligns with priority business objectives

How do you define each of the three elements (geek, nerd, and suit)? And why these three elements?

Geek, nerd, and suit represent data, insight, and strategy. Geeks are the technologists who manage the technology and data flows that occur with every customer interaction. Nerds are the data scientists whose analytical prowess develops a deep and meaningful understanding of customer behaviors and attitudes. Suits are the strategists and experience designers who ultimately put that technology and data to good use. These three aspects were at the core of every major successful customer-related initiative. You need the infrastructure to house customer data, you need the development of insight to make sense of all of that data, and you need a team empowered to act on that data to deliver better experiences.

You write that companies need to establish partnerships between the three. Why, and how can they begin that process?

If you have any combination less than the three, you end up with some humorous and very common situations:

- geeks-only—amazing, but lonely technology;

- nerds-only—complex models without impact;
- suits-only—unfulfilled dreams;
- geeks and nerds—solid models on the shelf;
- nerds and suits—active decision-making without data; and
- geeks and suits—active decision-making with raw data.

The good news is that these three functions are almost always interacting with each other in some way already, but they have different approaches to problem-solving. The first step is to get them speaking the same language, the language of “customer.” The second step is ensuring that big customer initiatives include a leader from each functional area. For example, it might be common for an IT group to own the selection and implementation of a new campaign management solution. However, the success of that tool depends critically on having a source of customer analytics and segmentation that will be used for targeting. It also depends on business owners communicating how they expect to use the solution. The key is to make sure that all three stakeholders are involved up front.

What kind of research did you do for this book?

The initial source of our contributing research was our collective personal experiences with a variety of companies across multiple industries and levels of customer relationship sophistication. We saw what worked and felt the pain of what didn’t firsthand, both as members and consultants.

We also felt that it was important to validate those hypotheses outside of our networks. We spent a lot of time reading articles about companies that were being praised for their great customer experiences or their smart application of customer data. Wherever we saw an example of a company that seemed to have things figured out, we dug in to understand what they attributed as the source of that success. We also shared content, stories, and drafts of the book with mentors, business executives, writers, professors, industry influencers, friends, and family.

What relevant pain points did you identify?

We narrowed it down to 15, including poor access to customer data, outdated technology, a reliance on averages, a belief that we are representative of our own customers, and lack of testing what actually makes a difference. Even the 15 most-common barriers to customer-centricity can be summarized in one problem: disjointed, awkward, and frustrating customer experiences driven by siloed teams, bad technology, weak or nonexistent customer insight, and the lack of a true customer owner.

