



FEATURES

● PRINT ● EMAIL ● DIGG ● DELICIOUS

The 10 Most Useless CRM-System Features

Some features are critical in a CRM solution. Then there are these 10.

By **Pam Baker** on **April 24, 2008**

CRM is undeniably one of the most **useful** technologies available today. But have some **vendors** included too many features with their products in order to compete? The answer ultimately depends on whom you ask. "The truth is that you could probably find for almost every feature a company that couldn't live without it. There is no such list of the 10 most useless features — except for each individual's own specific case," said Flynn Penoyer, telesales guru at **Penoyer Communications**.

"Flynn put it very well. These systems have a lot of features, but most companies take advantage of a very small percentage. Individual users even less. Does that make the features useless? Nope!" said Edward Siegel, director of marketing at **SuperOffice ASA**.

Not so fast, said business analyst and former CRM project manager Alli Breton. There are indeed several useless features, said Breton, who prefers his company name not be disclosed. He provides the following list of useless features based on his years of personal experience using various CRM products rather than by virtue of his current position.

1. Offline Mode: Internet connectivity is everywhere, so the need for offline mode in the days of **Web-based CRM** is virtually useless, particularly as the **mobile option** for CRM improves. After all, **Apple Inc.** just released its **SDK** program for the **iPhone**. Seriously though, how often are CRM users not online? Offline modules also tend to be buggy when it comes to syncing and are a huge maintenance overhead for IT.

2. Out-of-the-Box Reports: Breton was willing to put money on the fact that if you were to survey successful **CRM implementations**, less than 5 percent have used the out-of-the-box reports or anything even remotely close to them. The fact is all companies have different ways of profiling opportunities, profiling companies and defining products. This means a customized database renders out-of-the-box reports useless. If a vendor tells you they have 1,000 out-of-the-box reports, you should ask for a reference that actually uses them. They will probably be scrambling to find one.

3. Service-Rep Scripting: Some CRM applications have integrated **call-script** functionality for service representatives. You've likely fallen victim to this at one point, probably when calling your cable or Internet provider. Did you reset your modem? Do you see a flashing green light? Such automatic questions are annoying and go against the very concept that CRM is all about: relationships.

4. Sales-Process Scripting: This is similar to the above, but it involves giving a sales representative very specific **steps** and procedures when closing a deal. The sales process should be incorporated into CRM, but in such a way that it gives **sales agents** flexibility in nurturing their relationship with customers. Customers are king, and reps will have to approach every deal differently, which cannot be done with a sales script.

5. Pricing Modules: Most CRM applications come with out-of-the-box **pricing** modules. These modules are typically based on the quantity-, widget- or unit-price model. Many companies' pricing policies are usually more

complicated than this, with tiered discounting levels and other complexities. Service providers don't use the unit-pricing model at all.

6. PBX Integration: VoIP will eventually eliminate PBX, so why some CRM vendors still offer this near-antiquity feature is a mystery.

7. Reporting Engine: This is not a "useless" feature per se, but the built-in reporting functionality of CRM applications is rather simplistic. In order to do hard-core data analysis, you will probably need a more powerful analytics tool. This is why many CRM vendors will offer analytics as a completely separate module, or partner with a company that offers the functionality.

8. Out-of-the-Box Database: Again, this feature is not necessarily worthless, because any CRM implementation should use as much of the out-of-the-box database as possible. But some CRM packages go overboard and come with thousands of such database fields that you will likely never use. At the end of the day, it's a headache for the database administrator who has to maintain it.

9. Out-of-the-Box Address Profiling: Address profiling in out-of-the-box CRM packages are typically North American-centric. If you have global customers, you probably have to tweak the way addresses are maintained.

10. Out-of-the-Box Usability: Granted, the UIs of a lot of applications are sexy, but you will likely have to customize an application so that your user base will readily accept it. Very few CRM vendors are adhering to standard usability guidelines when designing their out-of-the-box offerings.

Whether you agree or disagree with this list depends entirely how you use CRM in your organization since CRM is, and always will be to some extent, a subjective issue. Vendors are aware of this and thus try hard to cover all the bases.

"CRMs are feature-rich because the needs of the vastly different environments they are deployed in vary so greatly," said Penoyer.

"For example, in my personal use of a CRM product, I simply don't need the 'opportunity management' feature for my sales process – it is totally useless, overkill to the nth degree," he said. "However, walk into an organization with a complex sale and they may live in the opportunity manager. Conversely, they may not use the task list for whatever reason, without which I would lose 70 percent of my productivity."