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❖ Exploring Microsoft CRM in Law Firms

Customer relationship management (CRM) software is one of the core applications used by businesses to manage their existing client relationships, generate new opportunities from within their client base and manage the development of new business from a sales perspective. Almost every business, small to large, has some technology in place for CRM, and this application is critical to the success (or lack of success) of that business. However, within the legal marketplace, CRM software has not been adopted by the majority of law offices.

Law and CRM: A Delicate Scenario

In an environment where more and more law firms are hiring marketing professionals, public relations managers and new business development executives, very few firms are acquiring the technology to support the efforts of these professionals. For a significant percentage of the firms that do make an investment in CRM technology, the success rate and adoption of the most widely implemented systems is less than stellar.

In its 2005 Technology Survey, ILTA reported that more than half of all CRM implementations failed to go live or had serious adoption problems, and most users were unhappy with their systems' ease of use and return on investment. In fact, according to the survey, the adoption of CRM now appears to have come to a standstill, with few or no new CRM projects taking place during the past 12 months. Coincidentally, in 2005 Microsoft Outlook garnered a seven percent gain as a firm contact management tool. Furthermore, through discussions, technology roundtables, industry conferences and general market intelligence, it is evident that CRM applications have not enjoyed much success in the law office market.

There are several reasons for the lack of adoption and CRM misfires, most notably the difficulty to integrate with standardized applications, complicated by the lack of a native user interface that law practice

staff are comfortable using. Furthermore, marketing and business intelligence data must be captured via day-to-day workflow. Asking attorneys or support staff to go back and re-enter data into another system will not work. If the data cannot be captured at the time the work is performed, the likelihood that it will be re-entered later is virtually zero. Without capturing the data throughout the day, and without users re-entering the data later, law firms don't have the ability to aggregate this information that is so critical to the business development of the practice.

Microsoft's Answer to CRM

For an organization that wants to grow and succeed, few things matter more than connecting with clients and generating new business from existing clients. Although CRM software can be complex and difficult to learn, most of the time getting data into the marketing database means extra work for lawyers, paralegals, legal assistants and administrative staff. Employees require time and training to gain proficiency on CRM applications. More often than not, employees resist adopting CRM software because it forces them to change their work routines.

Microsoft Corp. understands the reasons why CRM has not been successful, and it has established partnerships with some of the legal industry's most respected technology companies to create CRM tools to address the specific business intelligence and contact management requirements of the legal marketplace.

Enter Microsoft Dynamics CRM 3.0, the newest release of Microsoft's customer relationship management software. For law practices that have standardized on Microsoft Office, this new CRM version and its legal-focused development will allow business intelligence data to be captured as it is entered into e-mail, contact management, word processing and calendar applications. Furthermore, application modules, screens and forms can be assembled around these core modules to allow specific

practice groups to aggregate information that will allow them to analyze the results of new business development activities.

Following is a quick look at how Microsoft CRM works with familiar Microsoft products to give any law practice or business a new way to stay connected with customers or prospective clients:

Microsoft CRM Integrates with Microsoft Office

With Microsoft CRM, your firm can create a centralized repository of customer data that sits neatly alongside Microsoft Office — the applications that employees probably use every day.

Extend a Firm's Outlook. The foremost design objective in creating Microsoft CRM was tighter integration with Microsoft Office Outlook, the most used application in the Office suite. Microsoft CRM is literally “built-into” Outlook, meaning less application-switching, faster adoption by users and higher productivity for every “client-facing” employee in your organization. Users can look up customer information, send and manage e-mail, set up appointments and capture customer discussions — all without ever leaving Outlook. From Outlook, employees access Microsoft CRM relationships, engagement histories, prospective opportunities, marketing campaigns and client service modules to make important decisions, market services, solve problems and get strategic views of the business.

Microsoft Outlook messaging and collaboration already provides law firms with a reliable tool for communicating with clients, storing contact information, managing tasks and scheduling appointments. With the Microsoft CRM's New Business Development module, all client information can be managed from Microsoft Outlook.

In addition to traditional contact information, Microsoft CRM allows users to categorize contacts based on their “type” of contact (such as client, expert, opposing counsel, judge, physician or referral source). It allows these contacts (card file entries) to be associated with clients, engagements, associations, committees, seminar events, etc. This card

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file association provides a much needed extension to the Outlook card file data, creating an extremely valuable related-party database to enable firms to analyze relationships and determine the best approach for pursuing new business opportunities. This functionality capitalizes on Outlook data to establish new opportunity tracking, business lead or referral information, seminar participation, practice group marketing presentations — everything you need to stay connected with customers or potential clients. And because this information can be available firmwide, all employees have the power to see client histories and respond effectively to questions and requests.

Enable Excel to Analyze Customer Information. Microsoft Office Excel spreadsheet software is a powerful tool that is widely used in most law practices. Compiling important data often means searching through multiple sources of information. Now, Microsoft Excel works with Microsoft CRM to give practices a new way to understand the impact of changes in new engagement presentations, marketing programs, Web leads and referral generation programs. Marketing data can be easily imported to Excel from Microsoft CRM, making it easy to run scenarios, reports and graphs for all aspects of a law practice.

Enable Employees to Customize Customer Communications Using Microsoft Word and Publisher. Employees can use data from Microsoft CRM to target customers for marketing and business development campaigns using Microsoft Office. It's easy to select clients for a letter or marketing initiative — and personalized messages take only minutes with Publisher.

Microsoft CRM for Legal and Business Benefits

Microsoft CRM is set to deliver distinct business benefits to the law office community:

Marketing Automation. Microsoft CRM contains sophisticated marketing capabilities for planning, implementing and monitoring multi-tier business development and marketing campaigns. Marketing professionals and attorneys can quickly create a list of business opportunities (leads), craft a letter or direct-mail piece using integrated products such as Microsoft Office Word, launch the campaign and then track the progress and results. They can even track costs and revenue results of campaigns. Using the Create Quick Campaign Wizard, marketers can generate a quick customer e-mail and send it to a targeted list in minutes. Microsoft CRM will automatically track the results.

Works the Way Law Firms Work. Microsoft Office has become the law office desktop standard chosen by more law practices, so having a CRM solution that is tightly integrated with the tools that law firms are already relying on represents a high-tech advantage. This approach allows lawyers and staff to accumulate valuable business development information by capturing information through day-to-day workflow.

Uses Microsoft Architecture. The native integration capabilities built into the system's architecture ensure faster and easier deployments than are customary with stand-alone CRM systems. The IT staff will be able to simplify technology installations and utilize common configuration and customization tools to further reduce resource constraints.

Automates Business Processes. With Microsoft CRM, a law firm can quickly capture and organize data that formerly was lost or disorganized upon arrival. The Microsoft Office InfoPath information-gathering program can be used to create forms for entering data about a particular client engagement, marketing initiative or advertising campaign. This information is ported automatically into Microsoft CRM, where it is instantly available as part of the client's or potential customer's record of business or interests.

Gives Attorneys and Managers a Quick Look from a Dashboard. Using Microsoft Office SharePoint Portal Server and Microsoft CRM, a firm can

create custom “dashboards” that provide quick summaries of all important performance metrics. Firms can utilize powerful tools such as Microsoft SQL Server to enable them to research client data, evaluate marketing programs, weight the success of advertising campaigns and drill down into data to gain more detail about what really is driving new engagements or potential business opportunities.

Work Comes First, Not Technology

As powerful as Microsoft CRM is, it does not get in the way of daily business tasks; more importantly, Microsoft CRM allows lawyers, paralegals, legal secretaries and administrative staff to capture critical marketing information via day-to-day workflow. Because Microsoft CRM is designed with the familiar user interface of Microsoft Office products, even new tasks are mastered quickly. Microsoft CRM has streamlined installation processes and improved troubleshooting tools to help ensure that a law firm is up and operating fast — and stays that way.

Microsoft CRM offers the latest in security features. Client and business information is guarded with a fail-safe system that offers the best safety and confidentiality possible. Overall, Microsoft CRM offers law firms a complete client management tool, helping to find a new level of success through high-quality customer care. And Microsoft technology assures an affordable, effective CRM solution.

CRM of the Future

With Microsoft’s entry into the legal CRM marketplace, law practices can use this technology to establish a competitive advantage in several ways. Initially, this approach allows a practice to implement CRM functionality with an easy-to-use solution that will not have a significant impact on day-to-day workflow and allows the staff to capture important business intelligence data, rather than rekeying data in a separate system. Next, through the implementation of Microsoft CRM, everyone will participate in the creation of a firmwide CRM database, and everyone will have access to important client related data, allowing firms to make sound business decisions on up-to-date information. Finally, this functionality will work hand-in-hand with existing Microsoft applications to increase the adoption level of the system, thus creating a valuable client information portal or knowledge base for marketing professionals and business development specialists to use to accelerate the growth and success of the law practice.

Bringing CRM functionality to all firm employees as part of an integrated solution makes good business sense.



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