

A man with short dark hair, wearing a white and blue vertically striped button-down shirt, is sitting at a dark desk. He is looking at a laptop screen and smiling. On the desk, there is a smartphone. In the background, there are three framed documents on the wall and a small potted plant on a side table.

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Connect the person
in your database
with the one visiting
you at the show.

by Brian Todd

Software olutions

So you've built up a healthy database of great prospects—now what?

It isn't going to do you much good unless you have a way to transform all that information into sales on the boat show floor. For many exhibitors, customer relationship management (CRM) software can help bridge the gap.

"The way things work now, there is a bit of a black hole with the Internet," says Jon M. Lintvet, vice president of product at Milwaukee, Wisconsin-based ARI, a CRM software and service provider. "People—most of whom you've never met—fill out information online and are engaging with your business. But in most cases, you have no way to connect that information to a customer at the show."

Doing so is easy, though, he says. Many dealers use a dollar-based offer such as reimbursing admittance fees.

"Others are getting creative and inviting consumers to an 'exclusive' event, which could be as simple as opening the doors an hour before the event, just for these folks, or a special pin or name tag and bottled water when they arrive," Lintvet says.

But if you and your sales staff head into the show armed with the right data, you know precisely how to nurture the relationship.

Engage prospects and begin marketing to connect with both the online and offline customer before the show even starts. Send emails or direct mail postcards to your customer database, inviting them to the show, highlighting the inventory that will be there and including a barcode to bring with them.

With the information in that barcode, your salespeople now have a wealth of information about the person standing right in front of them:

- Who has been helping this customer?
- What product is he or she interested in?
- Is it the right time for an accessory upgrade?
- How long has the person been in the sales cycle?
- What product does this person already own?



Tim McAfee

CRACK the CODE

They might look like some kind of modern art, but quick response (QR) codes are more than just fancy designs. Read by smartphones and tablet computers, the codes deliver content right into the palm of a customer's hand.

A multitude of content can be delivered via a QR code: a complete inventory listing on your website, videos and additional discounts for acting now, says Jon M. Lintvet of ARI.

"The challenge is how to use this technology effectively," he adds. "Simply pointing to content that is readily available (i.e., the same description and pricing), is a waste of time. Give the customer something special. This technology is not commonplace yet. For someone to change their behavior and engage this way is a great thing. Make it worth it."

But before you begin adding QR codes to every product you sell, Lintvet suggests considering how you plan to manage that content. Most companies

simply link a QR code to a web page for a particular product, so one scan by a show attendee means one view of the item.

But QR codes can be a two-way street. Once the code is scanned, an exhibitor can use that code to send periodic updates, notices of special offers or upcoming boat show dates to a customer's electronic device.

"This requires your QR code plan to include an engagement strategy," Lintvet says. "For example, the scan takes customers to exclusive videos of the product and asks them to fill out a form for more information or an exclusive offer."

"For someone to change their behavior and engage this way is a great thing. *Make it worth it.*"



"If done right, you can use technology to stitch together a picture of that customer before he or she visits your exhibit," Mr. Lintvet says. "When we're talking about an item like pleasurecraft, those sales have historically been driven through an intimate sales rep/consumer relationship. Your software needs to help build that credible, trusting relationship through the channel the customer prefers."

More and more, the preferred channel is shifting to the Internet and email, he adds. "The trick, and ultimately the competitive advantage, comes down to how the software and process can help you drive sales by building comparable relationships absent in face-to-face interaction."

The Sales Cycle

For Centurion Boats of High Point, North Carolina, tracking customers begins on the company's website. Potential customers who visit before a boat show can click on a "Locate a Dealer" link prompting them for:

- name
- address
- phone number
- email address
- type of boat they're interested in

The CRM software sends an email to the corporate office and the regional sales manager, as well as the nearest dealer. From there, it's the dealer's responsibility to notify the target customer of area boat shows, promotions, and information about their dealership and products that fit the customer's needs.

The process isn't much different at a show. "Right away, we find out where they do their boating so we can match them up with a dealer," says national sales manager Bryan Holland. "Then the customers' information is entered into a laptop and sent to the dealer."

Again, it's the dealer's responsibility to manage sales leads, including follow-up sales calls after the show.

For any company, CRM software can be a powerful tool for helping sales staff maintain relationships with customers. Special offers and updates on new products or upcoming boat show dates can be automatically emailed to targeted sales leads based on their preferences.

Software can also generate periodic reminders for sales staffers to reach out to customers. This kind of follow-up is part and parcel of CRM software, Holland says. But linking it to a live-management tool that can help generate interaction on the spot is what separates a good sales tool from one that just manages data.

Getting customers to add their information into a software system at the show makes them feel committed to you, the dealership and the brand, Holland says. As an incentive, consider offering visitors who input their info into your computer a chance to win a prize.

Before you make the investment in CRM software, though, ask yourself the following questions:

- Does it help me manage my customers before, during and after the show?
- Is it accessible remotely?
- Does it let me create targeted marketing campaigns based on specific profile points, such as geography, product interest or other data sets?
- Can it be programmed to automatically send personalized responses to customers?

Nothing beats a good, old-fashioned, face-to-face meeting on the boat show floor. But technology can help make sure you get that opportunity, and that you make the most of it. 📱

Padding Your Results

Like any newfangled tech tool, the iPad and its tablet kin can be a boon to your marketing efforts—as long as you use them correctly.

“The beauty of the iPad is that it brings almost all the benefits of a full-sized computer to your sales team, which is on the move,” says Jon M. Lintvet of ARI.

With a tablet, sales staffers can greet customers, update their profiles and send a personalized target message—right from the show floor.

“The iPad can help build those sales relationships because you can use it to access and update your data on a particular customer in real time,” he says. “Tablets are an excellent low-profile, non-obtrusive way to access CRM software. Not to mention they still are just plain cool. Customers like seeing them, touching them, and many Americans have yet to see one in person. It helps your people appear relevant and current.”

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