

# 4 CRM Hacks Every Entrepreneur Should Be Using



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*These hacks will help any entrepreneur improve customer service.*

Brands depend on personal relationships to turn leads into customers and to deliver a great customer experience. And for budding businesses, that personalization process has often relied on gathering customer data from third-party sources -- but that era may be coming to a close.

Thanks to the backlash from its dealings with Cambridge Analytica, in which the personal data of millions of Facebook users was improperly accessed, Facebook is ending advertisers' ability to supplement targeting data from third-party sources with its own data. (Brands can still infuse third-party data with Facebook targeting, but they'll have to buy the data themselves because Facebook wants no part of it.)

Most businesses that used this service did so because they aren't leveraging data from their internal customer relationship management (CRM) system properly. That's why Facebook's policy changes might actually be a blessing in disguise: Startups can be far more successful using their CRM to access customer insights than buying data from any third-party source.

Ideally, startup founders will love and understand the tools that bring them more business, but that's not always the case. CRM systems can be difficult to use and maintain, which can be frustrating for

entrepreneurs. However, when that frustration translates into abandonment, consumer data becomes segmented within the company. Sales reps can't access the information generated by the company's marketing efforts, which hurts their numbers.

On the other hand, by offering accessible, real-time data on customers and leads, a CRM helps startups improve customer service and refine marketing and sales strategies. That translates to improved sales numbers -- per Nucleus Research, having immediate access to consumer data shortens sales cycles by up to 14 percent.

Luckily, a CRM system, in and of itself, isn't cause for frustration. Rather, frustration stems from using the system inefficiently.

In a survey conducted by market research group Opinion Matters, the average sales rep reported spending 15 full working days every year entering phone numbers into a system. Startup leaders don't want their salespeople entering phone numbers; they want them making calls. Many CRM systems offer automated features to help, but if reps don't know how to use these tools, they continue to waste time plugging away at data manually.

Proper CRM usage doesn't just help drive sales, though. These systems can also help executive teams transform large pools of data into easy-to-read reports, informing better strategies and leading to shorter meetings. Everyone benefits from smarter CRM use. But what does "smart" CRM usage look like, and how can startups adopt it without a headache?

CRM systems can be critical sources of insight that empower companies to see their data from all angles and deliver more personalized customer service. Use these four tips to get more from CRM systems and turn a potentially confusing resource into a powerful weapon.

### **1. Tell the software what to streamline.**

Manual processes are not only time-consuming, but they're also prone to human error. CRM automation can remove this barrier by importing information, making smarter schedules and compiling related data.

According to a report covered on IBM developerWorks, "ease of use" is the most wanted feature in a CRM. One way to make a CRM easy to use is by telling the system to group information together by prospect rather than by activity. This will help salespeople easily find everything, from emails to notes on specific conversations with prospects. This tracking provides a more comprehensive picture of the sales process, allowing users to identify strengths and weaknesses in their sales strategies.

CRM systems can also create lists that feature job titles and industry roles. This helps salespeople personalize first calls, which makes the cold-call process more productive.

### **2. Learn to spot at-risk accounts.**

Research from Bain & Company found that increasing customer retention rates by just 5 percent can increase profits by as much as 95 percent. CRM software is the perfect tool to track customer engagement as it allows employees to step in to help clients when things look bad.

Say a company regularly receives calls related to technical issues. Without a CRM, those individual complaints might go unnoticed, especially if they were handled by different people. But with better

tracking, budding businesses can identify those patterns and make proactive calls to solve problems before their customers abandon ship.

Fortunately, CRMs make this easy: Simply set up the flags for different triggers, such as repeat complaints. The software can alert sales reps when customers set off one of the triggers.

### **3. Make sales and marketing play nice.**

All businesses -- both new and established -- run better when sales and marketing work together: Altify found that organizations with aligned sales and marketing teams had 26 percent higher win rates and 18 percent shorter sales cycles.

Larger businesses are waking up to the benefits such alignment offers, which should signal an important shift to startups, too. In an article for CMO, Maria Wirth, marketing manager at MNF Group, one of Australia's largest telecommunications companies, said, "With the tidal wave of content marketing and lead nurturing initiatives, the seamless handover of leads back and forth between sales and marketing becomes a crucial key to success."

Don't let the CRM system become the exclusive property of just one group. Instead, encourage both sides to contribute to customer data. This helps sales teams communicate what helps them close and what doesn't, which, in turn, helps marketers develop effective campaigns that give sales teams what they need.

### **4. Use robots to make CRM adoption easy.**

Virtual assistants, such as chatbots or voice-recognition devices powered by artificial intelligence, can interact with CRM systems to set appointments, add client information to files, and locate information without forcing users to sift through data manually. Asking AI to find customer information might sound futuristic, but it's already possible and will likely become a widespread practice soon. Research compiled by Statista estimates that, from 2017 through 2021, the adoption of AI could add \$394 billion in value to the CRM sector.

Most entrepreneurs know they need a CRM, but they just as often don't know how to use the system effectively. Without that knowledge, startups are missing out on higher revenue, improved customer satisfaction and more capable workforces. Used correctly, a CRM system can transform from an operational necessity into a competitive advantage.