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CRM Success with Offshore Outsourcing

Description	This white paper provides proven methods to successfully use an offshore development team to realize a successful CRM project.
Date Published	January 27, 2008 by Salesforce.com, Siebel Authorized/Certified, SAP CRM Consultancy Practice
Keywords	Global Outsourcing, CRM Trends, Key Issues of CRM Projects, Successful CRM Projects, CRM Vision, Offshore Development, IDC
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Phase	Design Phases through Post-Production
Resources	Executive Leadership, CIO, IT Director, VP of Business Divisions, COO
Product Areas	Siebel 7.0 (all versions) and Siebel 8.0 and Professional, Unlimited, and Enterprise Editions of salesforce.com, SAP CRM, Sugar CRM

Contact

To obtain more information regarding an assessment of these CRM methods for success using an offshore development team, please contact crm@tsgonestop.com and reference this paper authored by Temeko Richardson.

Background

The CRM Vision has been communicated and transformed into a multi-year corporate plan. Executive leadership and business stakeholders have provided the stamp of approval and agreed to a range of funds that can be allocated towards the vision. A CRM vendor selection committee has objectively chosen the CRM solution that best fits the business model, timeframe, and budget. Business and IT leaders have agreed on the third party implementation vendor. The vision is becoming reality but there is one potential hindrance to the success – the people responsible for developing functionality for the core business logic are all offshore.

The latest model of the Big 5 spin-offs is to incorporate a team consisting of an on-shore project manager, architect, and business analyst and offshore developers that are responsible for incorporating business context and data integrity. Oftentimes business processes are lost in translation even after multiple explanations by the onshore team. Regardless of the reasons that have been cited by many consulting firms (i.e. language barriers, comprehension problems), the CRM vision still has to be a success without costing the company extra money to correct functionality that onshore resources might have been able to interpret correctly.

How to Guarantee Success with This Model

In a study of multiple engagements that involved the contracting of a third party implementation consulting firm with offshore resources, five key methods proved to be successful in interacting with the offshore development team, often referred to as the India Development Center (IDC).

1. Engage onsite “watchdogs” to ensure the business requirements are followed.

Successful CRM projects have a business analyst (employee that has performed the business processes and has worked in a capacity where key business requirements were core to the job function) and an independent consultant that has experience implementing several CRM solutions in the role of architect, developer, and data integration expert. These two people makeup the CRM Vision “police” to guard against misinterpreted requirements before development phases commence. The hybrid team consists of the company business analyst working with the onshore business analyst to make certain the business requirements fit into the solution being developed. The independent consultant guarantees the business requirements are representative in the functionality and are developed properly, thereby serving as the checkpoint at each phase of unit testing. The independent consultant safeguards against difficult development approaches that are too hard to maintain and support after go-live.

2. Status checks on their time zone are mandatory.

Long hours during the CRM project are normal but weekly status checks during the IDC’s time zone are mandatory. These status meetings can be short but they serve as an ounce of prevention to mitigate the risks of the development team building a solution that is off-basis where requirements are missed or misinterpreted. When the meetings are during the development team’s time zone, a sense of team is incorporated – creating an approachable environment to ask questions. Live conversations can provide answers that could otherwise be misinterpreted through email and documentation due to language barriers and comprehension challenges that may occur based on American business standards and perspectives.

3. Complex functionality should be developed onshore.

Successful CRM projects have the design and build phases for complex business logic and processes created by onsite business analysts and developers. There will be complicated business context that may require the face-to-face and immediate interactions necessary for a quick resolution or requirement change, subsequently saving time and money. Oftentimes complex business logic and business processes do not require complicated development if there is an opportunity for business process reengineering which can be led by the onshore team. It is less time-consuming and more advantageous to be in close proximity of super users and stakeholders for complex functions that are vital to the core of the business.

4. Data integrity should be owned by onshore resources.

All the functionality can not overcome the failure of a CRM implementation with bad data, which results in inaccurate reporting. The implementation vendor should provide an onshore resource that can outline data quality, conversion, and integration strategies with the data owners – management and business stakeholders. After this team signs off on the strategies to ensure data integrity is met with multiple testing iterations, the solution architect identifies the technical approach to handle these crucial parts of the implementation. The algorithms can be run by the offshore team with detailed design specifications and instructions but the design, validation, and testing plan are mostly handled onshore for successful CRM projects.

5. Plan and execute a smooth, swift transition.

The IDC is not intended to be a long-term solution. There must be resources in place onsite to take over the development, system testing, and change management before the CRM solution is implemented and provided to users. Send the most trusted resources to the IDC for a week or two to work with the development team during the development stage to prepare a knowledge transfer transition to an in-house development/production support team. This approach ensures the IDC can be released after the first complete testing cycle and the in-house staff can support any customizations or changes required. This, of course, requires training employees to develop and support the CRM solution through courses offered by the CRM vendor and temporary contracting of independent consultants that can guide them through the process.

Overall, the challenges of implementing CRM solutions have proven to be great with the offshore development model, regardless to the savings promised but almost never realized. In the end, it is less expensive to put the right resources in place to validate core business processes are covered in the CRM implementation than it is to provide functionality that the business can not use to be productive. Nonetheless, the value-add of proper planning and prevention to protect the CRM vision is priceless – rendering a great chance at success for all parties involved.