



The Evolution of Sales Automation and CRM in the Fitness Industry

Industry Best Practices

Panelists

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Introduction

The fitness industry faces unique challenges to successfully align with the customer journey, in the wake of substantial and swift technological changes. How customer behavior has changed, how technology can address customers throughout the cycle, and how to bring the sales team on board are the major obstacles to tackle. Without solid systems in place, the sales process becomes clunky and disjointed, as new tools are layered on top of old ones.

Overall, a more holistic approach ensures a consistent message, without duplicating efforts or allowing leads to fall through the cracks. Rather than imagining customers as just leads to be sold, sales automation (SA) & customer relationship management (CRM) have expanded to include marketing and customer service as well. This creates a more natural process that can easily adapt to a variety of scenarios, including securing online leads, following up on dropouts, and boosting referrals.

This all-encompassing style of member relationship management, or MRM, allows fitness facilities to provide a superior customer experience throughout the lifetime of their interactions. Facilities no longer have to waste sales and marketing dollars on cold, uninterested leads, or overwhelm customers with calls from multiple trainers and teachers. Instead, the process is streamlined, and employees can access all relevant information, as needed, to provide a strong, strategic overview of the customer's place in the lead cycle.

5 Key Takeaways

- Provide customers with unique touch points at each step of the sales process, customizing their experience with granular data that provides new insights.
- Encourage everyone on the team to get on board with the new CRM platform, to create a single database of record with all relevant information about a customer
- Organize your leads with lead scoring for each sales stage, to identify customers who are ready to move to the next level.
- Social referrals are more valuable than ever, with social media leading the charge, so create more opportunities for members to recommend your facility
- Experiment with cutting edge techniques, such as smartphone apps and geotagging people passing by, to make the most of current technological developments

1. Using SA & CRM to Meet Customer Needs

Covering the entire lifecycle of a customer is the ultimate goal, but also the primary challenge. Fred Elias has broken it down into four main communication pathways:

1. Membership – the initial process of taking someone from cold lead to customer, often considered the traditional sales funnel.
2. Retention – encouraging members to return on a regular basis, so they do not lose interest and cancel their membership.
3. Internal prospecting – upselling members on premium services, such as personal training or special classes.
4. Cancellations – learning as much as possible about the customer's reasons for canceling, and encouraging their eventual return.

By categorizing members into separate workflows, it is easier to track and tag their interests based on their behaviors and placement in the cycle.

Rather than having a disjointed sales approach from multiple members of the facility, Samir Desai is forming a single view of the member. This has improved the overall customer experience, while ensuring that their efforts are well targeted and organized. He chose a larger platform, Salesforce, as the right solution for his business, because he was able to use it both for lead conversion and ongoing customer management for the critical onboarding in the first 90 days.

2. Bringing Team Members on Board

Encouraging the sales team to get on board is the first step in bringing a new sales automation and CRM platform to the facility. If it goes unused, the effort was wasted. While exceptions always exist, Robert Brewster, CEO, The Alaska Club believes that as a general rule, having a consistent, manageable process is more important than catering to the old ways of doing things.

Once the sales team is on board, you can further incorporate the customer service and administrative teams. Converting manual processes into automated systems streamlines the flow and gathers crucial information. A classic example is the paper trail left by a member cancellation. By integrating technology, cancellations can be processed in real time and reasons behind the cancellation can be determined, improving retargeting efforts, according to Samir Desai.

However, there is no need to spend a lot of time convincing the team to adopt the new CRM, as the technology itself encourages its use. For example, Samir continues, digital leads from the facility website are gathered and automatically incorporated into the system. Without using the system, they won't have access to that lead or any of the highly detailed information associated with it, such as where on the website they came from, along with other insights.

“We took a step back, we got the heads of the different departments together and we really mapped out what does that journey look like for the first X number of days, who's communicating what, and what's the form of communication?”

Samir Desai

3. Decide on the Right Platform

Choosing the right solution depends on the scale of your business and the level of personalization required. Fred Elias points out that Salesforce is not an out-of-the-box solution for most fitness facilities, and requires considerable customization. For smaller chains or individual clubs, a smaller platform that is already customized to align with their sales philosophy and how they want to manage member retention makes more financial sense.

The true measure of a particular platform is how well it permeates across all of the different verticals of a business. If you're only after simple lead conversion and sales force automation, it may not be worth the investment, Samir Desai notes. Rather, when all of the employees across multiple facilities are using the platform as a system of record, the difference is clear. Customers receive a consistent experience; from the marketing and sales messages they receive to their interactions with the front desk and trainers at the facilities.

4. Categorization with Sales Stages and Lead Scoring

Samir also recommends adopting the concepts of sales stages and lead scoring. By categorizing leads into sales stages, you can determine what message they need to hear when, to move closer to the next stage of the pipeline, ultimately ending in becoming a paying customer. Lead scoring allows you to give the data points collected a particular value, to prioritize and filter leads so sales teams know who is the closest to signing on. As your data gets more granular, you can see where the leads came from, especially what pages they signed on from or if they came from a particular ad or social media campaign.

Fred Elias recommends customizing workflows based on how frequently you want to interact with a lead. While some methods focus on a high quantity of lead touches, others take a more nurturing approach. The key is to predetermine the lead touches, so they naturally flow from one another. They can be customized even further, by where the lead comes from and what interests they have already expressed.

5. A Centralized Customer Experience

While the initial sales automation process is essential, onboarding customers over the first ninety days is where sales automation and CRM really shine the most. Samir Desai encourages experimenting with how a fitness concierge can assist new members, and how smartphone apps can direct them to the appropriate classes and services. These unconventional methods can also be incorporated into the overall platform, allowing for a very customized experience.

Ultimately, the goal is for the chosen platform to become the core information center for all employees. Without a single platform or database to work from, the team ends up hopping from program to program to get the whole picture. Information can slip through the cracks, and if it is too difficult, people won't use it effectively, as Robert Brewster points out.

To overcome this, Samir and his team took a step back, and mapped out the journey, detailing all of the touches. By determining the desired message, the method, and the timeline, they could ensure that the customer was getting the best of their sales and marketing efforts without being overwhelmed. In the process, it developed a genuine, cohesive story that they were proud to stand behind.

6. Sound Technological Investments

Emmett highlights why SFA and CRM are essential technological investments for any business. It boils down to hitting the top three reasons to invest:

- Saving money, by reducing inefficiencies in workflows throughout the company.
- Making money, by acquiring new leads smoothly and quickly.
- Reducing risk, by eliminating overlapping efforts and avoiding customer overwhelm.

While initially he was reluctant to triage leads based on scoring, an A/B test showed that he got three times the results when using triaged leads versus un-triaged. Without consistently evaluating your leads in a streamlined system, sales opportunities will be missed.

Personalized messages with smartphone apps add a welcome touch, and in the future more facilities will be targeting who are walking near the building. Experimentation with special offers and in-club targeting are innovative ways of taking CRM to the next level.

7. Beyond the Sales Team

The process of integrating CRM into the rest of the facilities team follows a natural flow, according to Fred Elias. Membership is an ideal place to start, as they can do a great deal with the lead information that has already been acquired. Then, hand over the new customer to the fitness department, who can target them based on their needs and interests. To encourage retention, bring the service department on board and show them the capabilities now available to them. As each department sees the benefits, they will welcome the new platform.

Take the time to manage social referrals. Samir Desai maintains a social command center, where his team can monitor social channels and send key messages to potential leads. They focus on both brand mentions and general health and wellness, bringing people into engaging conversations, which converts into solid leads. This avenue continues to grow, and more facilities could benefit from social awareness and interaction.

Fred Elias recommends tagging referrals separately and sending them down a special workflow. He has found that they are actually in a different place in the overall lead generation system, and require a customized approach. By addressing their specific needs, they can become a customer much more quickly.

You want to reinforce to your entire team that every lead is an asset. As Robert Brewster says, you have to take care of this just like it was cash on the floor. Leads are valuable, and take great care to put the information in the right place, or else it will be lost forever. He devotes one person in each sales department to confirm that leads coming from multiple sources are being put into the CRM.

“You've got to take care of leads like it was cash on the floor.”

Robert Brewster, CEO

The Alaska Club

Encourage social referral methods. Give existing members incentives to make referrals, such as discounts. Also give them the tools to make referrals, such as easy social sharing buttons and referral URL generators. Samir recommends this method of lead generation, to improve acquisition and retention. Fred Elias also mentions that digital leads and referrals are worth scoring higher, as they tend to convert slightly more quickly.

Conclusion

Sales automation and CRM solutions are more than just advances in technology, to keep facilities in line with the times. Rather, they bolster the sales process from start to finish, boosting lead generation, improving message customization, and providing a more enjoyable customer experience.

They also bring the sales process out into the open, involving more of the team in nurturing and supporting leads throughout their journey. This increases personal responsibility and ownership of a customer, providing a sense of playing a part in growing the business.

Choosing the right sales automation and CRM solution depends greatly on your preferred level of investment and technological customization. Regardless of the chosen platform, the overall goal is to develop a single database of record, to collect and draw lead and customer information from. This allows all departments to understand where a lead has been, and where they are heading.

As technology advances, sales automation and CRM methods will continue to evolve. Experimentation at meeting leads where they are will bring them toward a more user-friendly experience. However, the standards of good sales and marketing messaging will remain the same, regardless of format. With a strong platform to build from, facilities will be able to reach more leads in a more comprehensive way.



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