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ROLE OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT) IN EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF CRM PRACTICES

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ABSTRACT

In this present paper an attempt is made to understand and analyze Role of information and communication technology (ICT) in effective implementation of CRM practices Information and Communications Technology (ICT) is often used as an extended synonym for information technology (IT), but it is a more specific term that stresses the role of unified communications and the integration of telecommunications such as telephone lines and wireless signals, computers as well as necessary enterprise software, hard ware, storage, and audio-visual systems, which enable users to access, store, transmit, and manipulate the information. Retaining customers will lead to the creation of sustained competitive advantage and improved profitability for the company. Information technology acts as an enabler in the whole process.

KEYWORDS

ICT, CRM practices.

PRELUDE

ICT (Information and Communications Technology - or Technologies) is an umbrella term that includes any communication device or application encompassing: radio, television, cellular phones, computer hardware and software, satellite systems and so on, as well as the various services and applications associated with them, such as video conferencing and distance learning. Information Technology has grown in various directions in the recent years on natural evolutionary path has been the development of the database industry and its functionalities. Data collection, data creation, data management including its storage and retrieval, database transaction processing and data analysis and data understanding has been the way in which it has progressed so far. The term ICT is now also used to refer to the convergence of audio-visual and telephone networks with computer networks through a single cabling or link system. There are large economic incentives to merge the audio-visual, building management and telephone network with the computer network system using a single unified system of cabling, signal distribution and management. The term Infocommunications is sometimes used interchangeably with ICT. In fact Infocommunications is the expansion of telecommunications with information processing and content handling functions on a common digital technology base. Any marketer will put in sincere efforts to maintain a long term relationship with the customers, which will ensure sustainable competitive advantage in the long run. As it is relatively easier to retain a customer than acquiring new customer, relationship marketing is becoming one of the major element of the corporate strategy for many organizations. Relationship marketing is concerned with the creative development, and enhancement of individualized customer relationships with target customers and customer groups resulting in maximizing the total lifetime value of the customer. The adoption of relationship is the essence of doing business in the modern times. But to achieve this, companies need to develop information enabled systems so as to have direct contact with customers. Retaining customers will lead to the creation of sustained competitive advantage and improved profitability for the company. Information technology acts as an enabler in the whole process.

USING INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY TO HANDLE CUSTOMER CALLS AND INQUIRES

Help desk: Organizations are flooded with inquiries from customers, sometimes thousand a day. Organizations can establish help desk to answer telephonic calls, emails, fax and even face to face enquiries. Expert systems can have used to expedite helpdesk to facilitate customer search information and it also speed up the work of the help desk employee.

On-line client contact manger: It is a web based tool that helps a sales person to contact with the prospective customer either face-to-face meeting or a telephonic call or email. Web based tools like emails and teleconferencing are used to communication and aid decision making.

Point of sale terminals: These provide faster customer checkout, identify customer preferences and also help to improve inventory content.

Electronic groups: E-groups created for salespersons, help each other to solve the problems. To reduce the load on the post-sales service teams, customers are allowed to use online, the status of the service delivery cycle using a login and a password. Sophisticated software enable customer to find answers by themselves in the corporate database.

Telemarketing: Here, telecommunication and information technologies are used to execute a marketing program for customers who want to shop from their home. It can be done by telephonic calls generated by the computer. Telemarketing being include generating sales leads, gathering information, providing information, improving cash flows, fostering customer service.

Intelligent agent: An intelligent agent is software that assists people to automate repetitive tasks, intelligently. It summarizes the complex data and even makes recommendations. These agents provide greater customized services for customer helping business to market their products to a wider geographical area. They can send automatic email reply over 90% customer queries received. They work around the clock in different time zones and can converse language in which they are programmed. Web based intelligent agents can be used to customer with product and service, facilitating better service.

CAD/CAM (Computer Aided Design / Computer Aided Manufacturing): This allows products designed with CAD to be input an automated manufacturing system that makes the products. This can be used to reduce the cost of customization of products and accurately meet the requirement of the customers.

SBR/IVR (Skill Based Routing / Interactive Voice Response Systems): Information technology finds its wide application in business process outsourcing. In BPO, the right contact is very important. A technique called SBR – skill based routing is used where it quantifies the various skill sets of agents and matches them with the nature of enquiry. The call is passed to the agent who is best equipped to handle the call. IVR – interactive voice response systems which is used to relieve simple and monotonous calls.

ROLE OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY IN RELATIONSHIP MARKETING

There has been a paradigm shift in the approach towards marketing i.e., marketing is moving from a transaction based approach to a new paradigm called Relationship Marketing. The traditional activities which emphasized the role of customer acquisition as the primary role of marketing have been replaced by relationship marketing, which recognizes that marketing actually starts after the sale is complete. Information technology has an important role to play in the overall functioning of relationship marketing. According to Adrian Payne, "In considering how CRM should be implemented, information technology has a pivotal role to play in enabling companies to maximize profitability through more precise targeting of market segments and the micro segments within them". In modern times, companies have a marketing, information regarding the consumers and channel partners is collected on an individual base and is used to design the products and services as per the individual requirement. Here, suppliers tend to cooperate with the distributors and retailers on an individual basis so as to serve the customers well.

The technology tools like databases, data warehouses, and data mining etc. which are available to the marketers to assist companies in increasing the customer value and company's profitability. Information technology is of great help in gathering and managing data required not only for a better understanding of the customers but also in framing the appropriate relationship marketing strategies to be adopted as present and future. Moreover, IT can enable the companies to determine the importance of customer acquisition, customer retention and his lifetime value. Research studies have shown that 5% increase customer retention will lead to around 20% to 125% increase in profits. According to Gronroos (1994), there are two essential elements of relationship marketing, promise and trust. These elements determine how a relationship is established, maintained and enhanced.

As a result of the profound developments in the field of information technology, the knowledge is slowly but surely replacing natural resources and capital as the basic requirement for running a business. Also, the access to an infinite source of information is aiding in the shifting of power from the marketers side to customers side. This is new state of the customers transforming the traditional marketing from a transaction orientation to a relational paradigm. The marketing dynamics are changing from product driven to customer driven. This in turn requires a good relationship among all the members of the channel, and customer. This IT is enabling the marketing to move towards relationship marketing the companies need to make use of appropriate technologies to improve customer acquisition, customer retention, and customer's lifetime value. The primary job of the management is to develop proper relationship marketing strategy and then develop appropriate information technology base as per their requirements. They require a proper blend of databases, data marts, data warehouses and electronic commerce. The ultimate objective for the incorporation of information technology in the overall marketing strategy is to create opportunities for increasing the profitability with the aid of customer retention, acquisition.

RELATION BETWEEN IT AND RELATIONSHIP MARKETING

There is marked parallelism between the developments in information technology and transformation in the marketing process. This has led to the rise of new technologies like the World Wide Web, electronic commerce and so on. These technologies have arrived "just in time to assist the marketers in implementing the potential aspects of relationship marketing. Moreover technologies have become affordable which is enabling the marketers to deploy widely across a wide spectrum of customers. There exists a symbolic relationship or a virtue cycle between advancements in information technology and the change in marketing paradigm towards relationship marketing. Relationship marketing has grown because of the developments in information technology, some pitfalls of traditional marketing, the increased expectations of the consumers and rising competition.

TECHNOLOGIES OF CRM

In today's market place, attracting and keeping customers is critical to the continued existence of any business. Many companies look to customer relationship management, which is a business strategy focusing on acquiring, cultivating, managing and retaining customers, to help them manage all aspects of customer relations. CRM emerged in the early 1990s when software companies began developing applications to automate the sales process through contact management tools. CRM has evolved into a strategy that uses technology to achieve its goals.

OPERATIONAL CRM

An **Operational CRM System** involves the direct interaction with the customer (front-end). Operational CRM is the aspect of CRM dealing with the automation of customer-facing, or "front office," processes. These processes include sales, marketing and customer service. Since operational CRM involves the automation of customer-facing processes, it relies heavily on the use of computer technology to achieve its goals.

Sales Force Automation: Sales force automation uses software applications to automate sales activities. The activities automated include: lead management, sales forecasting, contact management, and quotation and proposal generation. Lead management software allows businesses to qualify and assign sales leads, or opportunities. Sales forecasting software uses historical sales data to forecast future sales. Contact management software enables companies to manage customer communications from many sources, including websites, emails and faxes. Quotation generation software generates sales quotes from input data, and proposal generation software automates the process of producing sales proposals.

Marketing Automation: Marketing automation refers to the use of software applications to automate marketing campaign management and event-based marketing. Campaign management applications enable targeted communications and offers through the use of customer-related data. Event-based marketing uses events, such as a purchase, to trigger communications and offers to customers.

Service Automation: Service automation enables companies to manage customer service interactions through the use of technology. Customer service automation includes: issue management, inbound call management, queuing and routing, and service level management. Issue management software enables companies to manage customers' problems by storing information about a problem, routing it to the appropriate personnel for resolution and tracking its progress during resolution. Inbound call management software identifies incoming calls and retrieves historical information related to the call. Queuing and routing software manages customer service calls by ensuring that they are routed to appropriate personnel in the order received. Service level management software enables a company to monitor and manage the quality of service of its key performance indicators.

ANALYTICAL CRM

An **Analytical CRM System** uses customer behavior and perceptions in order to provide actionable business intelligence (back-end). Common elements includes:

- Data Mining
- Data warehouses
- Decision support

On Line Analytical Processing (OLAP): The need for non static reporting systems has led to the development of online analytical processing (OLAP). Data is now used in a proactive way that provides value for the firm. This approach uses computing power and graphical interfaces to manipulate data easily and quickly at the convenience of the user. The focus is showing data along several dimensions. The manager should be able to drill down into the ultimate detail of a transaction and zoom up for a general view.

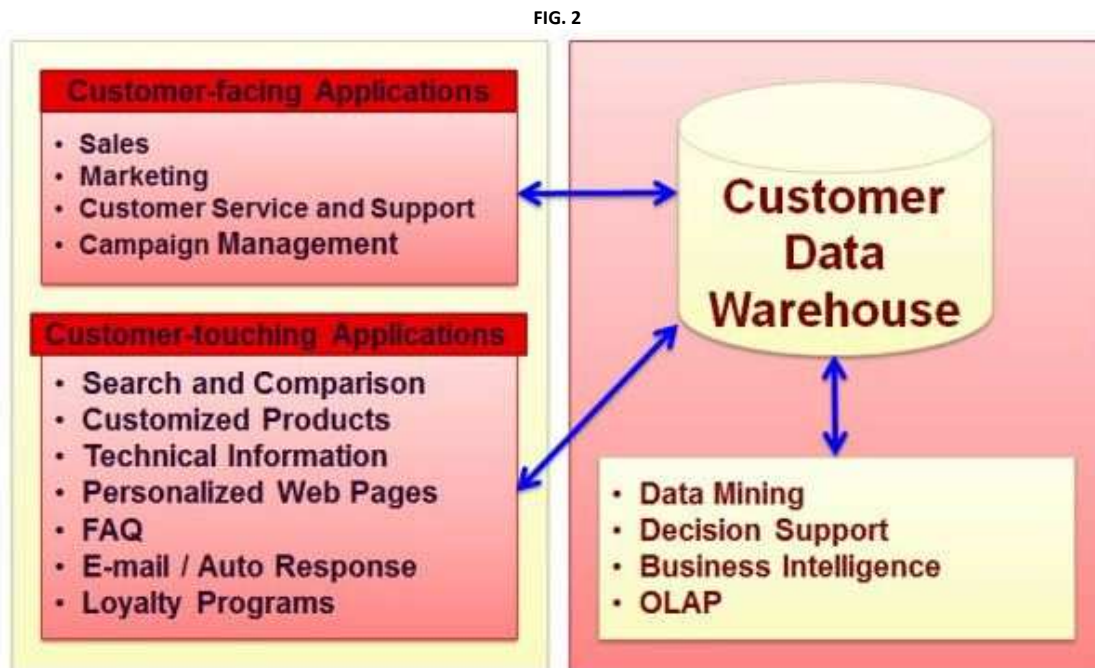
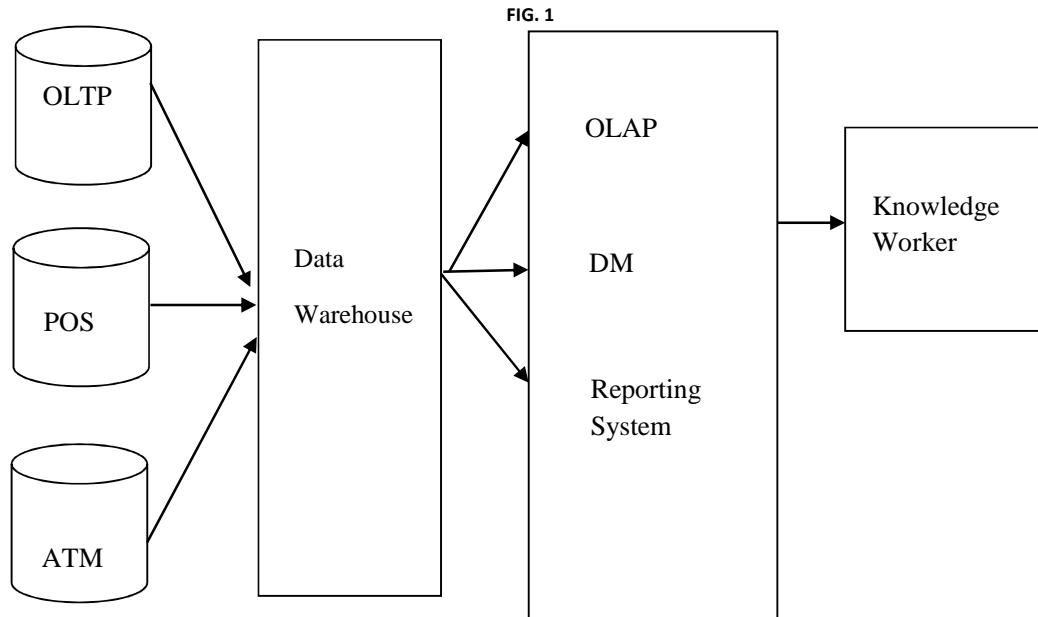
OLAP has several strategies:

- It is a powerful visualization tool
- It is an easy to use interactive tool
- It can be used as a first step in understanding the data

It has also some limitations:

- It does not find patterns automatically
- It does not have powerful analytical techniques.

These limitations are actually the main strengths of DM. It appears from this analysis that data warehousing, OLAP, DM, and operational systems can be integrated in a single framework to serve the needs of knowledge workers. This model is shown in following fig:



CONCLUSION

Information Communication Technology helps in not only collecting data, analyzing it and learning about the markets and the customers but also assists in transmitting the right information at the right place, in right quantity and in right tempo. This may help the marketers in maintaining long term relationship with the customers. Every transaction with the customer is an opportunity to gather information, invest in relationship marketing and build shareholder value. Moreover, the real time communication enables the marketer to influence each transaction as and when it occurs. Thus, IT has a greater role to play in expanding the opportunities of marketing. The process of gathering information about the customers during each transaction helps the marketer to have complete knowledge about its customers and also build the relationship with the customer.

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