HOW TO CHOOSE THE RIGHT CRM FOR YOUR BUSINESS

evolution
crm systems

YOUR ROADMAP TO CRM SUCCESS

WHY READ THIS GUIDE?

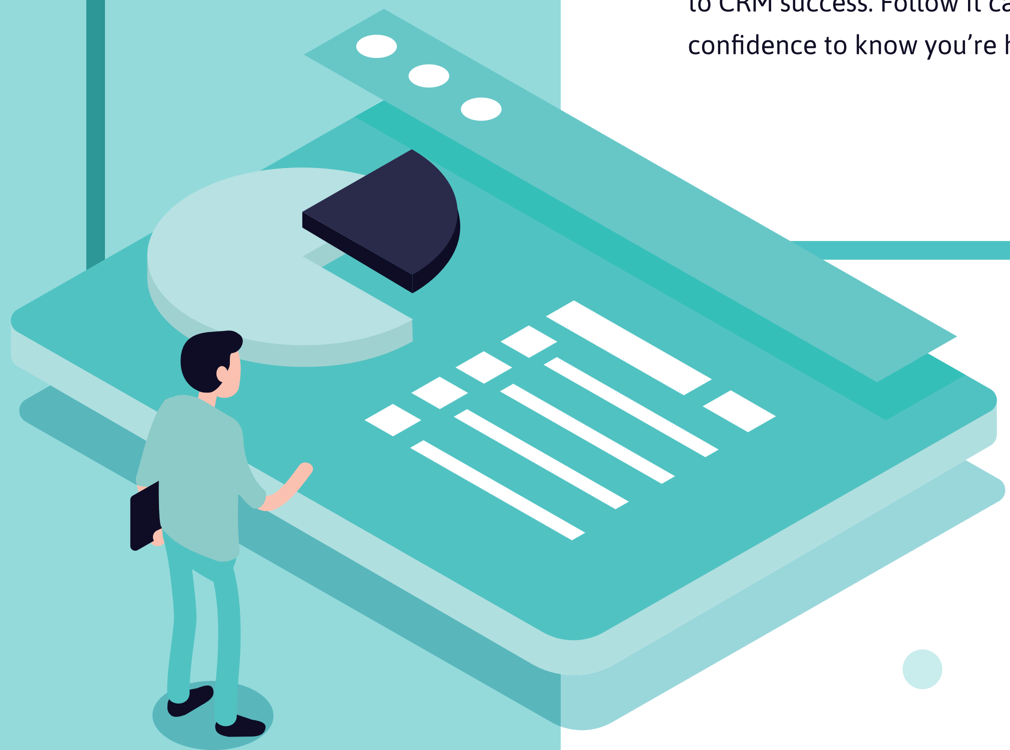
So, you've been tasked with finding the perfect CRM solution: one that will single-handedly solve a myriad of business challenges and transform your organisation.
No pressure, right?

Managing a CRM selection process is no small undertaking. It requires a significant investment of time (mostly yours) and money (your organisation's). There are many moving parts to coordinate, a laundry list of technical requirements to consider and multiple stakeholders to keep happy.

What's more, because implementing a new CRM isn't something businesses do every day, few people have experience managing a project of this type - and organisations don't generally have a tried-and-tested process to follow.

Long story short, there's very little guidance out there to help you navigate your way through a complex and unfamiliar landscape. To help you make the right choice for your business before you embark on the journey, you need smart, impartial advice from people who've been there, done that.

This guide maps out a simple five-step framework to choosing the right CRM for your business. It's based on many years of experience guiding companies big and small down the road to CRM success. Follow it carefully, and it will give you the confidence to know you're heading in the right direction.



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CRM: A PLAIN ENGLISH GUIDE

We try to avoid jargon wherever possible, but in our world there's a lot of it floating around. Here's a glossary of some commonly-used terms that may help you on your CRM journey:

CRM (Customer Relationship Management) — An approach to managing all your business' relationships with customers and potential customers.

Configuration — describes the ability to make changes to your system via an administration console, without the need to customise using a software developer.

Customisation — describes the process of adding new or adapting existing CRM features that can't be configured through the admin console so that your software is more closely tailored to your individual business needs. This process requires a developer.

Full-featured — To be classed as a CRM, a product must have core features like contact and task management, calendar/reminder features and basic reporting. However, a full-featured CRM solution has a wider, more feature-rich range of modules and functionality such as quoting, advanced reporting and email integration, and is highly configurable and customisable, with the ability to automate business process. Full-featured CRM also comes with a powerful mobile app and is accessible from the cloud.

On-demand — a CRM that is hosted and managed online by the vendor and therefore doesn't require any investment in installation, hardware or software. It's ideally-suited to small or medium-sized businesses.

Open technology — describes technology that is non-proprietary (ie. tech that's not exclusively owned by one organisation), making it a less expensive product to develop and customise.

Per user — a way of calculating the cost of your software solution based on the number of staff members who will need access to the system.

Plugin — a software component that adds a specific feature to an existing program and allows for added functionality. Some examples are Mailchimp, Email Marketing and Xero Accounting plugins.

API (Application Programming Interface) — This is what allows different applications to communicate. Think of it as an interpreter, without which none of your plugins or applications would be able to understand or talk to each other.

STEP 1:

IDENTIFY THE BUSINESS CHALLENGES YOU NEED TO SOLVE

Long before you start researching potential software vendors or speaking to external consultants, it's essential to have a clear understanding of why you need a CRM solution and what people across the business need it to achieve. This internal evaluation process is a critical step that ensures you start from an informed position, helping you to engage your stakeholders and gain their buy-in from an early stage. It'll also provide you with the intel and insights you need to get your project green-lit.

START WITH THE PROBLEM

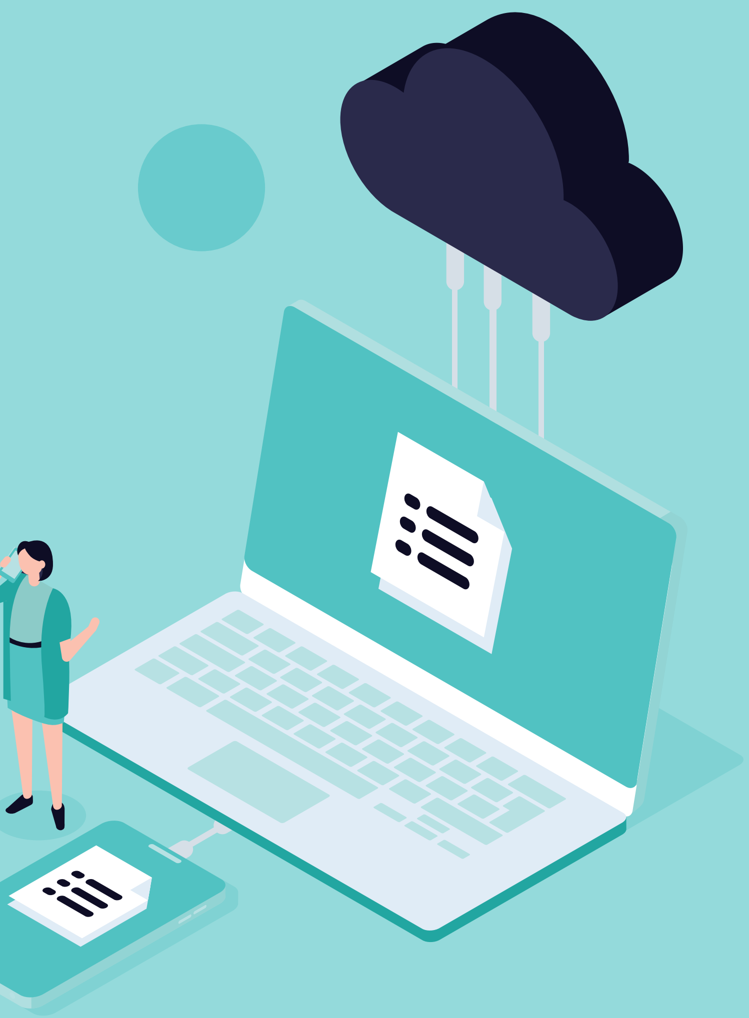
Start by considering the business problems you need to fix. How might your business' bottom line be improved if you could find a way around these issues? What other positive impacts and business benefits might be realised as a result of solving these particular challenges?

THINK ABOUT HOW YOU'LL MAKE THE BUSINESS CASE

Who needs to sign off on the project? What will you need to demonstrate in order to gain their approval? Consider recruiting influential people within the business who can help you make your case to senior decision-makers.

IDENTIFY INTERNAL CHAMPIONS

For your project to succeed, you'll need support from across the business. Remember, it's not just salespeople that benefit from CRM: identify key people across your marketing, operations, finance and executive teams, as well as sales, who can help you to champion the project to the wider business not just in the lead up, but throughout implementation and beyond.



DEFINE YOUR STAKEHOLDERS' PAIN POINTS

Identify who your internal stakeholders are and think about how you're going to convince them to come on this journey with you. Consult with each and every one of them to establish their individual needs and priorities. Each will have differing requirements specific to their business area, but there will still be some things they'll have in common. Don't get bogged down in whether all of these challenges can be solved via CRM yet - establish their pain points first and work back from there.

LAST BUT DEFINITELY NOT LEAST, CONSULT WITH BUSINESS LEADERSHIP

Not all stakeholders are created equal. For your project to get the support it needs, the business outcomes you've identified have to align with your leadership team's priorities. Getting their seal of approval on the project goals and functional requirements before you progress to the next stage is a non-negotiable.

> **“ OUR SOLUTION NEEDED TO SOLVE CHALLENGES FOR A NUMBER OF DIFFERENT TEAMS WITHIN THE BUSINESS, WHICH MEANT WE REQUIRED A CENTRALISED, FULLY-CUSTOMISABLE SYSTEM WITH PLENTY OF FLEXIBILITY.**
>
> **RACHEL MERYMENT - CERTIFICATION MANAGER**
> HACCP INTERNATIONAL

STEP 2:

RESEARCH THE TECHNOLOGY

Once you've done your due diligence and compiled your CRM wish-list, it's time to begin researching software options to see which could be a good fit. It can be a little bit like going down the rabbit-hole, so here are a few things to consider:

KEEP AN OPEN MIND.

Desktop research is an obvious first place to start researching vendors. However, you'll soon discover that to access product information or watch online demos on software vendor websites, you'll have to surrender your contact details - so expect sales calls and a steady stream of email content to follow. While some of this follow-up information can be useful, it's designed to push you into the decision-making phase as quickly as possible - so try to keep an open mind until you've fully explored all your options.

HEAR WHAT OTHER USERS HAVE TO SAY.

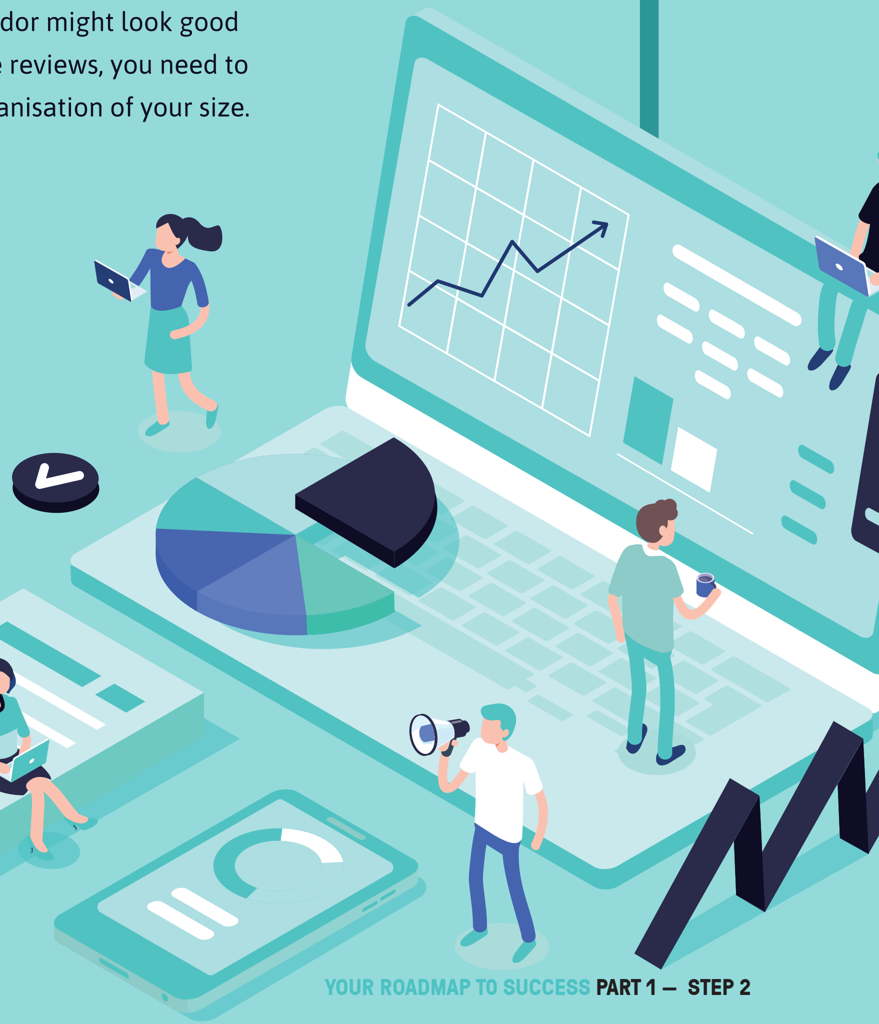
Spend some time reading reviews from actual users to get a good sense of the pros and cons of each product. Dedicated software review sites like G2 Crowd and Capterra give you instant access to feedback from thousands of users. As with all review sites, some comments should be taken with a pinch of salt - but by learning what others like and dislike about the product, you should be able to notice some patterns emerge. This process can also help you compile a list of useful questions to ask when you begin meeting with vendors and implementation partners.

USE INDUSTRY INSIGHTS TO COMPARE THE MARKET.

Trawl Google for relevant analyst reports from credible business research firms like Gartners and Forrester. Gartner Magic Quadrants reports are well worth a read: they compare vendors based on Gartner's standard criteria and methodology as well as providing in-depth analyses and actionable advice.

REMEMBER THAT ONE SIZE DOESN'T FIT ALL.

An important point to be aware of while you're in the research phase is that CRM customers vary greatly in size, from micro-businesses right through to large enterprises, and many products are designed with a particular business size in mind. So while a vendor might look good on paper and have plenty of positive reviews, you need to check that it's the right fit for an organisation of your size.



STEP 3:

SPEAK TO AN IMPARTIAL EXPERT

If you've done your homework properly, by now you'll have drawn up a shortlist and have a pretty good idea of which products you want to explore in more detail. It's time to take the next step and speak to an expert.

Here's where a lot of businesses fall down - because they assume this means meeting with product vendors. In fact, your first conversation shouldn't be with a salesperson at all: it should be with an implementation partner.

> **WE KNEW THAT BUYING OFF-THE-SHELF WOULDN'T COME WITH THE LEVEL OF SUPPORT OUR BUSINESS NEEDED. HAVING THAT ADDITIONAL GUIDANCE FROM THE VERY OUTSET WAS CRITICAL AND GAVE US THE CONFIDENCE WE NEEDED TO MOVE FORWARD.**

ANTHONY GRAY - GENERAL MANAGER
MIG TRAINING

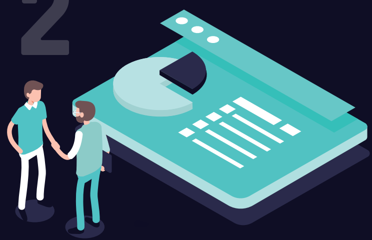
WHY CONSULT AN IMPLEMENTATION PARTNER?

Implementation partners are experts in helping businesses manage and rollout CRM projects. They each specialise in a particular CRM, but unlike vendors, whose work is done once they've sold you their product, implementation partners are in it for the long haul. Their job is threefold:

1

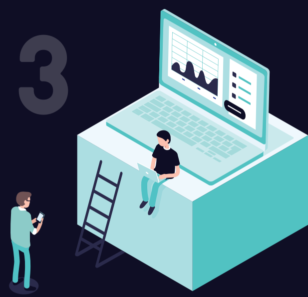
To help you select and design your CRM implementation strategy and make sure it has all the features and requirements you need. This includes plugins and third party products your vendor may not be familiar with.

2



To lead your business through the onboarding process with minimal friction.

3



To provide continued guidance and support beyond the initial implementation phase.

Because an implementation partner is invested in the longterm success of the project, it's not in their best interests to sell you on their CRM if it won't solve your business problems. As such, you can feel confident that any advice you receive is impartial.

Find someone that specialises in your preferred CRM product and get the ball rolling by requesting an initial free consultation. This could be as simple as an informal phone call, or it could involve a meeting at your office with key stakeholders. Not only can this process help you assess the suitability of their software, it may also help you improve your business case: a good implementation partner should be able to identify additional business benefits that you may not have considered but will make your proposition even more compelling.

Think of this step as a qualification process through which you can establish whether the product will meet your needs and budget, and whether the partner is someone you want to engage with further. If the answer to all of these questions is yes, then you're ready to move on to Step 4...

STEP 4:

SELECT YOUR IDEAL PRODUCT AND PARTNER COMBINATION

This is the point at which you'll get into a more in-depth evaluation of the product; it's also an opportunity to evaluate the partner and get a feel for how they do things.

For the reasons outlined in the previous step, engaging an implementation partner to help you navigate your way through this complex process is highly recommended, particularly if you're opting for a full-featured CRM. However, this isn't a decision you should rush into - after all, this is a long-term relationship we're talking about. Deciding who will guide you on the journey is just as critical to the project's success as choosing the right technology.

Before you engage anyone, you need to feel confident that they not only have excellent product knowledge and expertise, but can add real value to the project in a way that a vendor could not. Equally importantly, you need to make sure that the chemistry is right and you can see your teams working well together. A good way to gather this intel is by requesting a technical demo.

WHAT TO EXPECT FROM A TECHNICAL DEMO

You've already started the partner audition process with your very first conversation, where you discussed your topline requirements and confirmed that the software is a good fit. Now it's time to get into the details. A technical demo will give you an opportunity to learn more about the product, how the partner positions it and, crucially, how they both fit together. Through this process you should be able to establish what the partner considers to be the product's key areas of value and any extra benefits it could provide, as well as get a feel for their working style and overall approach.

At this meeting you should also gather info on pricing to assess whether your preferred solution will work within your budget. Remember, you'll need to cover not only the cost of the software itself, but professional services to support its implementation. Rates can vary but a basic rule of thumb is to allow at least the same amount for implementation as you allow for technology.

By the end of this session, you should have enough information to make a call on whether or not to progress. You may want to bring some key stakeholders with you to get their input on the decision.

FINDING YOUR PERFECT MATCH:

YOUR IMPLEMENTATION PARTNER CHECKLIST

Use this simple checklist to audition potential partners and check they can deliver the goods across four critical areas.

PRODUCT KNOWLEDGE & EXPERTISE

- [ ] Do they have a deep technical understanding of the product?
- [ ] Are they part of the product vendor's certified partner program?
- [ ] How much experience have they had with CRM and with the recommended product?
- [ ] Have they provided you with evidence of past project success?

VENDOR CONNECTIONS

- [ ] Does the vendor recommend them for quality of service?
- [ ] Can they access key vendor contacts on your behalf?

BUSINESS ACUMEN

- [ ] Do they understand your business requirements and are they able to clearly explain how the technology will meet them?
- [ ] Have they brought to your attention areas that you've not considered or any potential issues that you were glad to be made aware of?

CULTURE & CHEMISTRY

- [ ] Are they professional in the way they've presented their solution and interacted with you so far?
- [ ] Do your businesses share similar values?
- [ ] Do you have a good rapport with them and feel confident they will provide value to your organisation over time?

YOUR IMPLEMENTATION PARTNER CHECKLIST CONT.

So, you've gone through the above process and found a partner you feel comfortable with. It's time to commit - almost. As part of this next step, ask your partner to present a more comprehensive follow-up demo where they can address any specific needs and requirements you may have, along with more detailed pricing around your preferred implementation and software options.

If you haven't already done so, now's the time to bring key stakeholders and decision-makers into the conversation. It's part of your implementation partner's job to help you engage stakeholders and ensure they buy into the project, so a good partner will carefully tailor the demo to showcase exactly how the solution will meet their requirements and thereby galvanise them into making a decision. This is yet another instance where implementation partners can add real value over vendors, who will only provide a standard software demo regardless of your individual business requirements.

STEP 5:

LOCK DOWN YOUR BUDGET, TIMELINE & MUST-DOS

If you've reached this step in the process: congratulations! Getting a CRM project across the line is no small achievement. But before you dive headfirst into implementation, there are a few more operational hoops to jump through first.

ESTABLISH YOUR TIMELINE.

There's no set timeframe for planning and implementing a CRM solution - it really depends on the size of the organisation and its priorities. And while some businesses can take months to go from that initial decision to implementation, it's possible to move much faster (provided you don't miss any key steps out of the evaluation process.)

When establishing your timeline for implementation, ask yourself if there are any key dates in your business calendar that you need to hit, or any compelling events that you need to be up-and-running for, and work backwards from there.

WORK OUT WHAT'S ESSENTIAL.

It's important to understand that you don't need to do everything at once: a gradual rollout is a far more efficient approach to implementation. Trying to achieve too much too quickly can slow down the decision-making process and prevent you from moving forward, so our advice is to think big, start small, and move fast. Work out the minimum you need to do to make the project worthwhile, as this can often be done quite quickly. Quickstart packages usually have a fixed price for common implementation scenarios and can be done in two to four weeks.

FINALISE YOUR BUDGET.

Now you have a timeline and plan of attack, you should be able to lock down budgets for both software and implementation. But don't assume you have to spend your entire professional services budget in one hit: releasing your implementation budget in stages based on your individual business needs can be an equally effective approach.

It's also wise to consider a budget for ongoing access to your implementation partner for solutions support and additional services.

HOW MUCH WILL IT COST?

Here are a few rules of thumb to follow when assessing the cost of your CRM project.

MAKE SURE YOU COMPARE APPLES WITH APPLES.

Low-cost, low-entry models do exist, but full-featured CRM requires a much bigger investment. It's important that you understand not only your own business requirements, but also the features of the software edition you're considering. Don't make the mistake of choosing a low-cost, entry level edition to later find that you need to upgrade to the expensive version. It's best to know what you require (and what you're getting) up front so that you can budget accordingly.

BEWARE OF HIDDEN COSTS.

Subscription models can sound appealing when they're broken down into a monthly cost per user. But multiply that cost over a year and a growing head count, and it can quickly soar. It's also not unusual for subscription models to quote on a per month basis, but require payment annually, up front.

Remember the software:implementation ratio. Always allow at least as much budget for implementation as you allow for the software itself (most projects fall between a 1:1 and 1:3 ratio). If you require a high level of customisation and integration, then you can expect implementation fees to be somewhat higher.

ALLOW BUDGET FOR THIRD PARTY PLUGINS & OTHER RELATED COSTS.

Most organisations will identify at least one area where they will require a plugin to meet their business needs.

CONSIDER THE POTENTIAL COSTS FOR INTEGRATION & API CALLS.

The API is what allows other products and plugins to communicate with your CRM. Without it, these programs can't talk to each other.

WHERE TO FROM HERE?

Implementing CRM is a long road with many twists and turns. Whether you're still in the consideration phase or you've already embarked on your CRM journey, we're always happy to share our expertise with fellow travellers. Feel free to contact us with your questions any time.

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