



Importance and Growth of CRM during a pandemic

Adam Benitez- Perez

Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences

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Author(s)**Adam Benitez-Perez****Degree**

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This research aims to give an understanding of the growing importance of CRM as software during a pandemic where people are spending more time at home and less at work and that's from both the business perspective and customer perspective. This significant disruption due to the pandemic has made Customer relationship management software an integral part of staying connected and organizations have caught on to that.

The research also shows the difficulties experienced by businesses. Giving the history and growth of CRM, along with its change with the times, gives a better insight into the adaptation and importance of what CRM truly holds for businesses, big or small. The huge impact of the 2019 Pandemic, which caused a worldwide shutdown, showed the true resilience of economies and businesses. During this lockdown, a lot of businesses that depended on face-to-face services took a huge hit and a lot of them went into bankruptcy. Similar scenarios occurred for businesses that were slowly transitioning their business focus into the digital space but even so it was not enough to reach out to the customers that were usual visitors. The issue is the emphasized importance of the CRM system during a pandemic and the impact it can have on business processes and ways of communicating and staying connected. It is interesting to see how businesses adjusted to this world-changing event and still were able to keep in contact with loyal customers and reaching out to potential customers became a top priority. CRM has been a great way for businesses to stay connected with customers and maintain data.

The research method for this thesis included many forms to understand the growth and importance of the different types of CRM from blogs, books, websites, and survey questionnaires to the companies utilizing the tools along with the urgency.

Keywords:**Customer relationship Management, Covid-19, CRM growth, pandemic**

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1 Introduction

It is known that (CRM) Customer Relationship Management is for handling all your company's relationships and interactions with your customer and potential customer. This plays a vital role in engaging with customers. It involves a multitude of tools used to structure, automate, and customize business processes. The purpose of this is to grow your business and grow relationships with your customers.

The key here is staying connected, the way this is properly maintained and used to improve customer relationships is with a cloud solution nowadays but keeping up and staying connected with customers has become the primary focus. Especially during the 2019 Covid pandemic that has caused a global shutdown of companies and businesses that had all employees onsite. During the global shutdown, Countries agreed to only allow for emergency work and priority workplaces for example grocery stores and medical places for a prescription which were local to stay open so economies can thrive and survive during the pandemic. The rest of the businesses had to close their onsite workplaces and have everyone work remotely. This was a fast and difficult transition due to the fixated patterns companies and businesses had in the functionality of the workforce and environment.

From small to large CRM is very important in keeping in touch with the customer needs and potentially turning the customer into a loyal customer to even an ambassador. A lot of business processes can be integrated into one CRM system instead of many different systems for example instead of having a separate system for calendar and email along with using other apps like Microsoft 365 and google. This would be very time-consuming so instead of having a confusing workflow CRM allows for these scenarios to be stitched together in one place which will be less confusing and allow customer data to be handled and accessed in one place.

CRM has become more important than ever before due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It is interesting to see the transformation and rapid growth of CRM importance in these unique times. Especially for small businesses in a situation where an economic shutdown is a massive hit to their survival and customer relationship. It seriously impacts the norm of business flows that businesses were accustomed to. CRM integration is the issue Where a lot of the time organizations

fail to implement CRM It was widely accepted at first to be used in the service industries. Nowadays it is widely used as a tool that has transformed the way we see communication and functionality under 1 software. CRM software in IT is a hot topic but the growth and importance it has shown in many industries trying to thrive are important to understand (Priyanka Meena February 2021).

1.1 Background

(CRM) Customer relationship management is a managing approach in a sense that create a combination of practices and strategies tailored toward relationships and engagements with customers and potential customers. It may be viewed in different ways depending on the viewpoint definitions of CRM may vary. Some may see it as a framework for doing business others may see it as a strategy used in doing business and others take CRM as a utility to manage customer relationships (Priyanka Meena February 2021). The purpose of this is to greatly increase customer value, corporate profitability, and in the end shareholder value. The integration of these systems has been a part of a growing transition for almost all businesses. The pandemic has sped up the need to stay connected with customers more than ever before due to the demand of customers and the priority in staying connected businesses have over anything else with their customers.

1.2 Goal

This is to get the side of the main users of CRM perspective from businesses small and large. Utilizing CRM and what shift has the pandemic caused or if there even was a notice of impact in the use of CRM during the Covid-19 pandemic. The reason being is That CRM is an all-in-one package for businesses when it comes to tracking, finding new leads, growing, and establishing a connection at many points including automation. The multifaceted platform allows a scope of communication that was a perfect matchup during the pandemic so understanding why may be interesting to know.

1.3 Structure

Starting with What is CRM and after explaining it, I will further go into the growth it has taken from its inception to now and its integrations. Showing how CRM

evolves from its most basic form into the dominating force that has turned into an umbrella tool. Allowing the integration of many functionalities and automating a multitude of areas that would otherwise seem separate into one place can make the compartmentalized old approach of usual business practices into a more seamless way of staying connected.

What it entails and its capabilities we will go further into the market growth, then the growth during the pandemic with its growth from the beginning up to now showing the occurrence in growth from being a competitor with other businesses in the CRM space to a standard business practice that is critical in keeping up with today's climate. That would be mainly about the Importance and growth during a pandemic of CRM during the pandemic.

1.4 Research Questions

The attempt to understand the shift that occurred with customer communication came to light as the pandemic set us back to a place where face-to-face as a reality may not exist and businesses have never thought of the times, we are in to even exist. Customer relationship now isn't as face-to-face as it once was. The same goes for employees even when it came to being at the office for the full 40-hour work week that was expected. So, the research set out to evaluate if businesses notice the change in using CRM during the pandemic and its importance. So, there are two questions I will set out to explore and that is:

1. Did the pandemic have an impact on CRM use and its importance? if so, why?
2. How has CRM growth and importance changed?

1.5 Survey Questions

To better understand the rapid integration and growth of CRM before, during, and after the pandemic and also the importance it holds compared to any other time. This includes businesses small and large during the shift to the digitalization of almost all business processes. The survey was given to individuals that work in the field that utilizes CRM and positions that centered around CRM use. The survey was given to 12 people 2 were females and the rest were males. The work where survey responders worked in the fields of Salesforce, SSH, Showell, and Telia.

1. Has working from home changed your work life?
2. Did you notice any changes occurring in CRM importance and integration during the pandemic?
3. Do you see CRM being a standard across the board meaning for all small and large businesses
4. Utilizing CRM systems and tools?
5. Did the pandemic speed up the urgency of implementing CRM software?
6. Priority to communicate with customers and stay in touch
7. Communication among fellow employees and staff meetings
8. The need for Software tools to be used under one platform?
9. Automation in the work environment
10. Focus on online work and customer relationships?
11. Customer experience and communication?

1.6 Objective

The goal of this thesis is to research the transformational growth of CRM and adaptation during a pandemic. With the growing value of CRM systems in the world economic market, It has become standard practice to use CRM solutions, so the growth is intriguing but understanding what has made the speed of adaptation due to Covid-19 is important. The reason it is important to understand it is the general shift to customer-centered business and digital connectivity with customers never becoming primary from small to large businesses.

During a time when customers do not want to travel or cannot travel due to lockdown so the relationship with customers and engagement mostly through online marketing is the only way to stay connected and reach out to people. I will attempt to give an interview questionnaire for CRM software use employees to give a better understanding of how the pandemic has shifted their approach and engagement toward their customers.

which is a selling app to companies. A lot of businesses may still miss this shift, but CRM is becoming the standard for businesses worldwide. It's interesting to see the transformational growth CRM has gone through from its inception to its dominating role in the field of business. We take the role it plays in business and shows the value transition it brings in making the business-to-customer and business-to-business relationship seamless and non-stop before the pandemic and the effects of it during and after the pandemic.

Data collected and statistics gathered from many organizations and reports made will give a better analysis of the reasoning behind CRM's rapid growth during the pandemic. Salesforce, for example, is the leader in CRM software as a service and their lead in the race for dominance in the market space at this point is unmatched but there is a shift in CRM services that is rapidly growing. Noticing that many researchers have noticed the rapid growth of CRM integration has now taken on a lead role due to the pandemic is great to see.

2 Customer Relationship Management

For businesses to grow successfully they must optimize their way of functioning in comparison to their competitors. For this accomplishment to be met it means having an increase in their employee productivity along with their customers' needs being met with the expected product performance and service. The execution of "right" choices and the speed it is expected to be done is at a high level and demands information. This information comes from customers, prospects, business operations, and even other businesses. To respond to these levels of informative data organizations have centered their focus on customers. This means analyzing the customer's point of view when making decisions and changing business practices so, in the end, the outcome allows for a better customer experience (Sandra Gudat 2020).

CRM processes are centered around attempting to get customers and keeping a connection with the customer. The processes involved also include structuring the customer data analyzing that data and using those analytics to make useful information that will allow for valuable insight. (Martin Gesner 2022) started in the 1970s during this time businesses notice a need to become more centered around being customer focused rather than product focused.

The reason Businesses use CRM software systems is that it allows members which are in groups or individuals within an organization to home in on customer relationships through better methods of communication and sales. It grows the relationship in a more personalized way which may lead to a more customized experience resulting in their demands being met.

The CRM software itself can be adjusted to fit the business's expectations. It also allows businesses to manage many processes at the same time with each having its customized layout modules, fields, and navigation that would meet the expectations of the business. The CRM system also helps with up-to-date information on marketing along with leads that assist you in analyzing and figuring out what the outcomes and potential may be (Hermenegildo Gil-Gomez 2020). Which allows your business to be on the go.

The majority of CRM users are from the service, IT, and manufacturing sectors. SelectHub user survey revealed that 325 CRM users were from the services sector as the other two IT and manufacturing sectors (Bergen Adair 2022).

2.1 Customers

In CRM there is usually a specific type of customer which is internal customers, External customers, and prospective customers. The relationship shall always be kept retaining the customer and also understanding the wants and needs of what's to come from the business side and the customer's experience. This relationship may result in upselling or even ambassadors and loyal customers. On the interaction level with CRM, it equates to customer value which is the level of customer satisfaction through your business. Customer loyalty is key to building a strong foundation in communication with customers and keeping the relationship alive which can turn into upselling, gathering feedback, and utilizing customer data more efficiently (Commence CRM 2018).

2.2 Management

Customer Relationship Management can be a set guide that companies use also known as customer management and support. A way in which tools an organization uses to maintain and analyze customer engagement and information in a customer's lifecycle. In the end, resulting in a better business relationship with the customer, pushing sales, and helping in raising customer loyalty. Human management and artificial intelligence may go hand in hand to benefit the future of CRM. Regardless of the human need, there's no doubt analyst is speaking more about the growing importance on artificial intelligence software can have on CRM as a whole. It is seen as something that may increase the usability of CRM for example making sales cycles done a lot quicker, adjusting price and logistics, Decreasing support call costs, and much more (Marshall Hargrave 2022).

2.3 Customer Loyalty

It is vital to notice the value of customer satisfaction due to what it would mean for the economic growth and success of businesses, due to this reason it may raise customer loyalty and engagement which may reduce customer dissatisfaction that can lead to losing a customer. Business still depends on customer loyalty. CRM helps in many ways when it comes to customer loyalty. The CRM functionality allows for the capitalization of customer data, increases the ability on staying in touch with customers, and structuring and organizing customer loyalty. The concept behind customer loyalty is the customer returning and the reasons for that are great customer service, good customer reviews, and social feedback, and the customer keeping their promises toward their customers (Guy Kawasaki 2020).

2.4 Salesforce

The powerhouse in CRM systems and becoming the leading system in the market for Customer relationship management. Started in 1999 by Marc Benioff, Parker Harris, Frank Dominguez, and Dave Moellenhoff. Salesforce is a CRM platform that allows for sales, marketing, service, and commerce to be handled and maintained all under one platform which is a cloud-based software that allows for mobile social blockchain and artificial intelligence (Brian O, Connell 2020).

This allows for the software to handle many business processes that would take a lot of time on tasks and put them under one platform which allows for time spent on those tasks to be used on more critical areas in business. During the early phase, they came up with the V2MOM strategy guide. The acronym is based on 5 methods vision, values, methods, obstacles, and measures. Focusing on giving their workers a simple view and structuring the business on its main purpose. Salesforce was created as a cloud and (SaaS). The architecture of Salesforce has primary parts involved which are Leads, opportunities Campaigns, and many more to create but have 3 main parts that are the enterprise application, Database, files, and documents. (Rajesh Rajaan 2021).

The applications of other projects have become a part of the salesforce massive umbrella. These consist of many applications used by different companies like SAP

ERP systems, PowerBI, and many more. What also can be merged into the CRM system is the gathering of many databases for example DB2 and Oracle. The final piece to Salesforce CRM architecture is documents and files. The three are analyzed by the system and outcomes of the Salesforce CRM that contains the customer's information that allows for the capabilities to trace the growth by account and leads. (Makrand Thakkar, Rajesh Rajaan June 28, 2021)

When 2000 came around the official website salesforce.com was launched on February 7.

In 2001 salesforce gains in customer growth and has more than 3,000 consumers leading the growth rate in CRM companies. By the end of January 2002, the revenue reached \$22,400,000.

At the end of 2002, the number of consumers increased to 5,740 and users were 70,000 of diverse languages from 107 countries. Along with the rise in revenue reaching \$51,000,000 for that year.

2003 salesforce 2.0 is released and by this year their revenue reached 100 million which becomes the year they initiate the files to go public which was done in the last month of the year.

2004 Salesforce released their IPO on the New York stock exchange which garnered around \$110,000,000 while revenue reached a staggering \$176,000,000 For that year and grew to 12 offices worldwide.

Salesforce has grown into a powerhouse and an ecosystem of innovation that stood tall against the rest. Especially during the pandemic. The forecast shows a growth

(Figure 1).

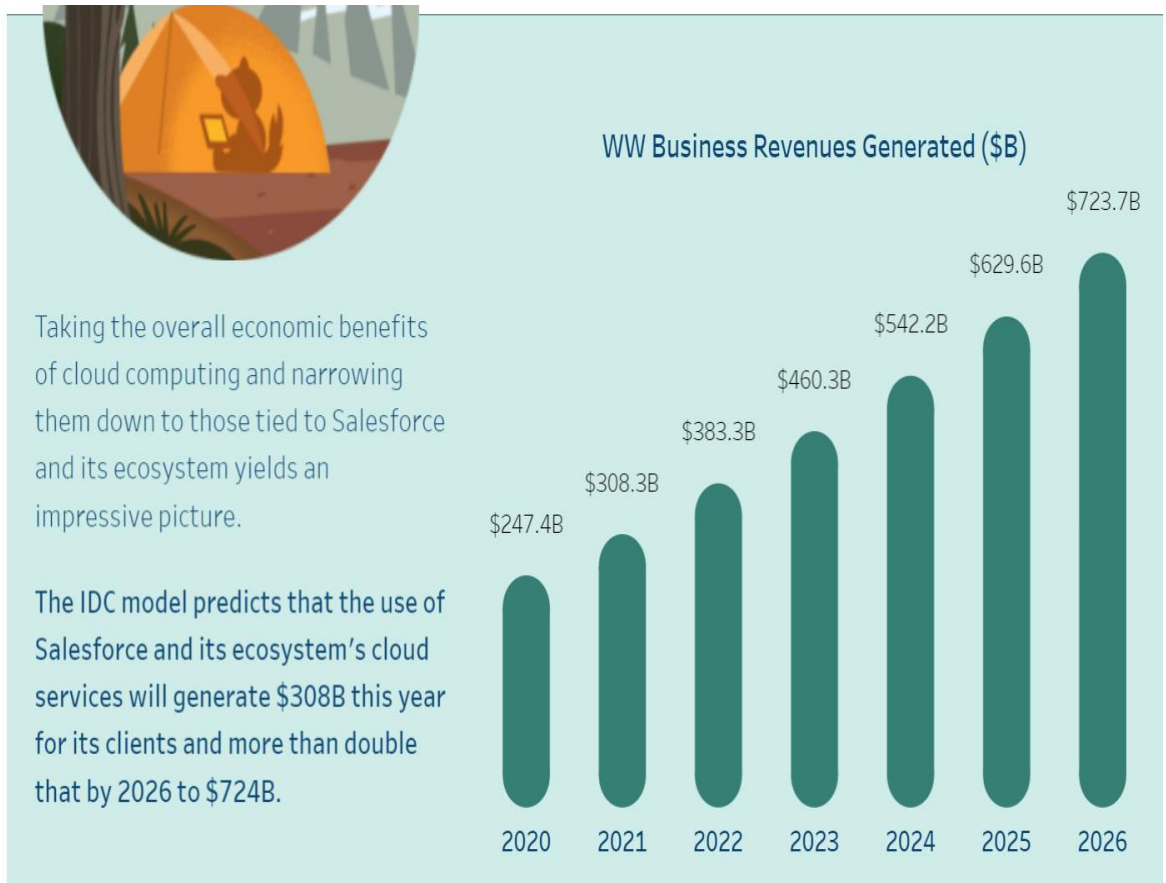


Figure 1. (SalesforceEconomy2021)

The integration of ERP and salesforce complemented a need that was vital to keeping up-to-date pricing and information which automated the checks and balances across the platform.

3 CRM growth

From the beginning journey of the ledger which was known as the oldest proof of CRM which were simply paper and pen to write down customer data. Until the Rolodex where information was stored on a paper with contact information, structured from A-Z on a rolling device in the early 1950s to mainframe systems in the early 1970s into database marketing in the early 1980s than during the late 1980s Contact management software was created. Early 1990s sales force automation began and after that, in the mid-1990s the Birth of CRM Acronym was known officially. Mid to late 1990s CRM on mobile was introduced. In the late 2000s, SAAS/ CRM on the cloud was introduced and gained traction globally (Arthur Zuckerman, Blog Mar 31, 2015).

According to analysts at Gartner customer experience summit 2019 CRM software purchases grew by 15.6% (Figure 2).

CRM Software Spending by Vendor, Total Software Revenue Worldwide, 2018 (Millions of U.S. Dollars)

Company	2018 Revenue	2018 Market Share (%)	2017 Revenue	2017 Market Share (%)
Salesforce	9,420.5	19.5	7,648.1	18.3
SAP	4,012.2	8.3	3,474.4	8.3
Oracle	2,669.0	5.5	2,492.9	6.0
Adobe	2,454.8	5.1	2,017.2	4.8
Microsoft	1,302.0	2.7	1,132.1	2.7
Others	28,371.7	58.8	24,962.0	59.9
Total	48,230.2	100.0	41,726.7	100.0

Figure 2. CRM software spending by vendor, Gartner (June 2019)

3.1 Beginning

What started as simple beginnings has now transformed into a diverse and highly advanced system that greatly increased the overall customer experience and business interactions with customers. The evolution of CRM strategies has centered

around maintaining and building customer relationships the way this is accomplished is by personalizing the experience.

CRM has a rocky history and does not have a clear path as shown today with customers and what businesses relied on, for example, Rolodex, which was created in the 1950s was the main CRM system along with filing cabinets and folders. So even before computers existed firms were putting transactions and customer information on paper. This method did not allow for analytics to be properly created due to separated processes of gathering data was a huge time consumption. (Demetra Edward 2020)

3.2 Independent mainframe

Mainframe systems came to be during the the1970s which were mainframe computers that allowed for the possibility for businesses to input Customer data like personal information including transaction history into a digital database. Taking manual files and digitizing them for the simplification of data search and storage. They were stand-alone mainframe systems that uses also included sales automation. Different database systems were used to run multiple instances at the same time. Which gave virtual machines a segmented approach for applications to be used as if they were on different computers (Demetra Edward 2020).

3.3 Database marketing

The start of the CRM systems came to be due to the business collecting customer information but having no means to communicate or prioritize it. The pioneer of the digital Rolodexes and database marketing was Robert and Kate Kestenbaum which was in the Early 1980s when the shift occurred from paper to digital and that was including the Rolodexes. The way database marketing worked was by gathering customer data and analyzing it. This combination along with statistical modeling allows for a more personalized experience with customers and potential leads. In 1986 contact management software began. (Demetra Edward 2020) How a company's customer data is analyzed is impactful in direct marketing which is a component of CRM.

Keeping in mind that it includes a 360 capability into ways in supporting customer service sales and marketing. So, to be clear database marketing can be done separately and CRM is the system that allows that capability. They are separate things that simply show Database marketing as one component of the CRM system. The CRM system allows for marketing to be automated. This can be the automation of emails to potential customers.

Social media may play a significant role in a lot of businesses' outreach in marketing. The downside to social media is that you may have a lot of followers but with the algorithm of the platform you may only be able to reach a few the other downside is if the platform disappears all your followers will be gone along with the platform. This is where database marketing becomes crucial due to the organization gathering customer information and that information is used to create a specialized experience catered to the individual customer and store personal and purchasing data on the customer (Sheryl Green 2022).

3.4 Contact management software

Which is a wrapped term for data management software (Arthur Zuckerman 2020) At its beginning Conductor software was started in 1986 by Mike Muhney and Pat Sullivan. Which created a new project called "YES!" Which later changed to "ACT!" A year later they released the first contact management software. This acronym stood for Activity Control Technology and rebranded to automated contact tracking.

Other companies took notice and released their own CMS software. It allowed companies to save and structure customer data more easily. Today there are many contacts management software's that are a vital component to almost every company. In 2022 the 14 best contact management application tools range from Hubspot which is a free contact management CRM Application tool and a lot more integrated as compared to ActiveCampaign which is a paid Customer experience automation platform CRM application (Arthur Zuckerman 2020). These are just 2 of the thousands of contact management software available. That can be a part of each business's needs and even with many allowing for the capabilities of integrating other tools and features needed for the businesses.

3.5 Salesforce automation

A software app that provides software tools that are used to automate the sales of a business and workflow is known as (SFA) Salesforce automation which automates administrative duties that may be repetitive and can be a stand-alone system this occurred in the early 90s. The types of (SFA) are Marketing Automation (MA) and Service Automation (SA) What it focused on were activities that were often done repeatedly that were usually administrative tasks (Act 2017).

The reason for this was due to the enormous time spent on non-revenue-generating tasks which took two-thirds of administrative tasks accounting for 29.7% of the time which could have been used in revenue-generating tasks. When (SFA) was introduced, it allowed more time for sales reps to focus more on sale-generating activities. From Rolodex to customer 360. The platform allows the user to develop on top of it. Which makes it a fully customizable platform with a data model to fit the needs of your business.

These tools range in their functionality, for example, tracking and alerting, managing the sales pipeline, and scheduling appointments, based on company analytics the CRM can be adjusted to assign leads even automatically to the proper sales rep which creates lead prioritization and lead assignments, Creating reports and team collab. All this can seamlessly be cloud-app integrated.

3.6 Mobile CRM

There are a lot of benefits when mobile CRM was introduced. It allowed for interactions and accessibility to be at any time and anywhere. In 1999 Mobile CRM was introduced by Thomas Siebel company named Siebel sales to handle which also was known as the most popular sales force automation software. In the 90s ERP vendors such as Oracle SAP Peoplesoft joined in on the mobile application side of their CRM system.

Studies have been done and the results are clear internet users are migrating From PC desktops and laptops to mobile devices. Customer satisfaction raised to 74% Along with benefits in sales and business processes exceeding 73%. (Denis Zhinko 2019). So, it is clear that the shift of CRM on sales productivity had reverberations globally. Companies that used mobile CRM saw a reach of 65% in sales quotas being met by sales reps as opposed to a less reach of 22% in sales quotas being met by sales reps in businesses that didn't use mobile CRM. (MacDonald, 2021).

3.7 Cloud base SaaS CRM system when Salesforce launched

Most CRM users rather use a cloud-based CRM system A year later they released the first contact management software. Select Hub survey showed that 56% would rather use the CRM cloud as opposed to an on-premises system (Bergen Adair 2022).

3.8 SugarCRM

Which is an open-source system founded in 2004 that has become a mainstream CRM vendor which has seen over 16 consistent quarterly revenue growth which ranges yearly up to 80% which has made sugar CRM a serious vendor in the market. Founded by John Roberts, Clint Oram, and Jacob Taylor Sugar Open Source was created and accessed through a free and open-source development software called Source Forge, and through the outcome of that June 2004, SugarCRM was founded which accumulated \$2 million venture capital. From that a month after came the first version of Sugar Open Source which was version 1.0 3 months following the initial version there were over 25,000 downloads followed up by a v2.0.

The number of end users which most likely come from the free community edition is well around 1.5 million users which are using 26 languages spanning 120 countries. The reason the growth and success have been achieved is the diverse choices at customers' disposal. Which range from on-site installation on a cloud maintained by SugarCRM, if not it can be other clouds the customer chooses.

The products offered by SugarCRM are:

- Sugar Community Edition
- Sugar Professional

- Sugar enterprise
- Sugar Ultimate

Sugar Community Edition: It is the free starting version whose purpose is for developer growth and learning the functionality of the SugarCRM platform. These are known as their current products and more to come (Blog Staff writer 21 Jan 2021).

4 Importance of CRM for Organizations in today's climate

In today's shift of economic uncertainty, there's one thing for certain. customers want to be more in the loop and kept in contact with customer support and important updates all around Information and data collection is the importance but at the center is the constant interaction with the customer which nowadays sales force is the leader in doing and maintaining with the capability's the cloud base service provides and many others. On the business side of using CRM, it gives a greater use in making informed business decisions the reason being is the CRM platform allows for the storing of customer data and giving access to business leaders for evaluation. Before a lengthy process of data collection was now simplified and verifiable with relevant data shown using the CRM program (Rachita Rake 2021).

Along with worries of a recession, there is instability in many aspects of business processes that are complex to simply ignore. Businesses are speeding up the digital transformation approach and implementing more CRM use cases in many ways in the foreseeable future. The different functionality of CRM increases the market on a global scale. Data can be accessed by many users of the CRM solution due to the multiconnection between customers and sales teams. Which allows for a more precise way of handling activities that in the end increases productivity. The Customer relationship market by application is also growing rapidly into the foreseeable future according to the CRM analytics segment.

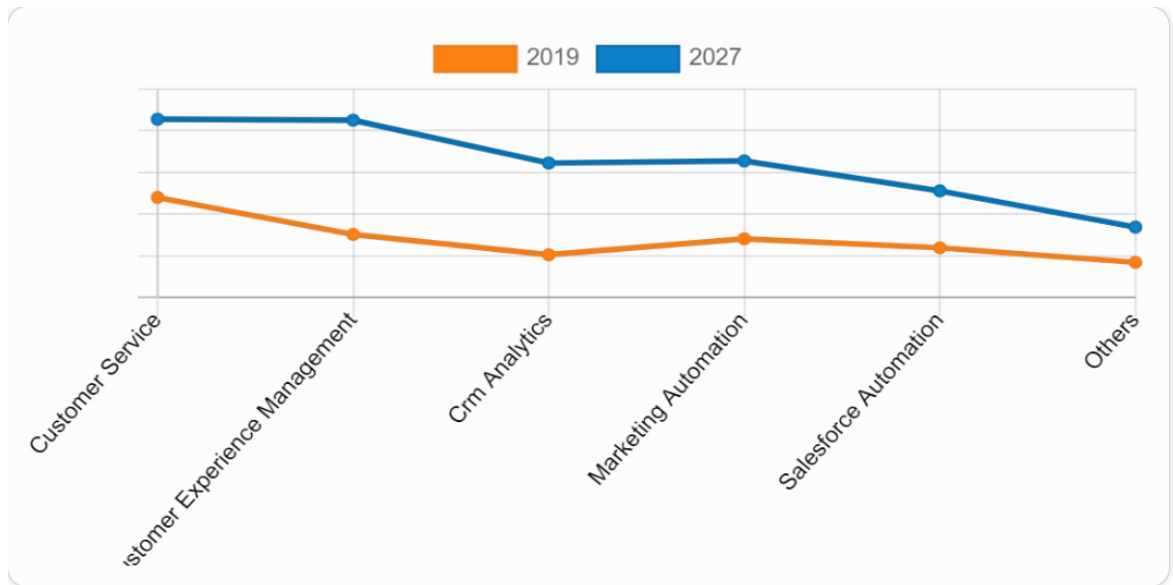


Figure 3. Customer Relationship Management Market By Application.
(Rachita Rake 2021)

The reason for this growth is due to the covid-19 pandemic and the need to increase focus on customer engagement for extended periods. Along with the use of customer relationship software for small and medium-sized businesses worldwide.

4.1 Social CRM

Is a way of engaging with customers through social networking sites such as LinkedIn, YouTube, and many other social media platforms. Social CRM brings together the platforms of social media and the CRM system that gives insightful data on Customer engagement with a business, brand, or product to increase the standard of customer interaction. (Karolina Kiwak 2017) SCRM gives advantages that a basic CRM system may not provide which is the focus on potential customers by using social media sites and gives easier and more personalized customer service and marketing tactics.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, SCRM has become the primary step in getting new customers through marketing and advertising. The reason being is most people were out of jobs and an economic shutdown occurred. As for the businesses that kept on a lot were forced to shift and had to revert to remote work. During this time

social media had seen an uptick in online users. By 2020 Social interactions world-wide had risen due to the coronavirus outbreak a survey was conducted worldwide and as of March 2020 on average people spent 44% longer on social media. (Nestor Gilbert 2022) (Survey by GlobalWebIndex, Mar 2020)

Customer relationship management (CRM) is centered around the collection and management of data and information of a customer's lifecycle that includes direct advertising while social Customer Relationship Management (SCRM) complements that with the social media engagement aspect. Communication and relationship give the link between customer to customer but also business to customers. This allows for direct communication with your audience and up-to-date feedback on products and services.

The benefit of social CRM is the way information is now passed directly to consumers and how information and marketing can now be in both the consumer's power and the businesses for example a person can create a social media page and have people engage with them on the company or product. This is highly prevalent on YouTube which is the 2nd most-used search engine the following google. YouTube users mainly on watching a video and interact with creators which may be a channel specifically focused on reviews of a product (Ana Khlystova Feb 20, 2020).

These content creators can have subscribers in the millions with views ranging from a few to multimillion in just a few days and even one depending on the social media influencer's popularity. (Pat Research 2021) These views also can occur live as the product is first launched and received by them or even pre-launched. So, they get the product that is not even out yet where they directly give their review, comment, and feedback to their viewers (Amy Watson 2020). Giving their loyal followers and viewers an outlook on what is to come, and their feedback can be valuable information used to adjust the product before launch This is just the customer aspect of it.

It allowed companies to better understand their customer needs by watching consumer-to-consumer engagement and therefore better customer service and a more optimized approach to customer relations and customer feedback. On the business

side business to consumer, they can create social media accounts and have a direct engagement with consumers with real-time information and feedback to better optimize the product, marketing, customer service, and customer experience.

Catching the trends and behavior of consumers allows businesses to even be aware of the best time for marketing. SCRM marketing is one of the new and efficient ways of marketing (Pat Research 2021). Due to the capabilities of the software in searching the customer data and figuring out what the consumer is wanting to buy. The leading Social CRM system software in use today are Agile CRM, Agora pulse, Salesforce, Microsoft Dynamics CRM, Simplify360, Nimble, and Conver social.

4.2 Integration capabilities

Allows for the capabilities of linking different functionalities into one system that funnels business processes that would otherwise be handled through different channels. It is known that CRM systems are underutilized. Depending on which CRM software is used it may come with a variety of choices in capability or is more precise as a base model for CRM use. One of the popular CRM software is HubSpot CRM which is great for getting started fast and staying on route with already implemented business tasks (Arthur Cole 2019).

Also, Salesforce still pushes forward in dominating the CRM market by allowing the integration of many different business processes into one platform that allows for ease of access for users to interact with customers under one umbrella, this includes Power BI capabilities, SAP, automation, and much more. Fresh sales which are more having an easier UI/UX approach. Pipedrive CRM is usually used by smaller projects but can handle whatever capacity of any business. Nimble CRM merges communication channels from online and social media platforms to simplify analyzing and building potential customers. CRM adoption in the United States is around 83.6%, 85.7% in Europe, and 75.9% in Asia-Pacific. (Nestor Gilbert 2022) (Source:2021 Professional services maturity Benchmark)

5 CRM Adaptations

CRM shifted during the pandemic and the transition being is, it allowed for easier transformation for businesses to go virtual during the pandemic. The way this occurred is by having the system more data and customer-focused and organizing data so it's more focused on the customers and prospects that they are targeting and not a w It has revealed that CRM was very imp ay that is broadcasted to the world. CRM history has shown a better view of how companies use and view CRM systems. The pandemic was a time that revealed a revelation. The adaptation brought on new understandings for example the new governance model that shifted positions into better viewpoints to have a better end goal (Kimmo Kanerva 2017). These included super users the roles of IT in each division, and Digital and CRM steering groups to reach goals at a better and faster pace for decision-making and sales targets (Kimmo Kanerva 2017 Blog).

That was the way companies and organizations approach CRM systems. Organizations were underprepared for the overnight virtual reality for businesses. It has become the most important role for customer relations and connections to be at the forefront of these evolving times. CRM now has allowed for the integration of Business intelligence.

5.1 CRM during Covid-19

Salesforce has been strong on its core value and that's trust and innovation which has helped in the digital shift during the covid 19 pandemic. Digital infrastructure is starting to be seen as a vital base plan and goal for Europe. Salesforce is connecting with Gaia-X a cloud-based project together launched by the French and German governments in June 2020 that started a cloud-based data ecosystem for ground-breaking information technology and advanced security and data protection together creating a digital economy for example which is a new path paved with creating the digital new age we are shifting into. (Denis Terrien 2020). CRM market performance has been growing in other regions along with upward trajectory in market revenue is also most likely to occur. Globally it is estimated that the total CRM software market growth can potentially be around 43.5 billion by 2024

(Pang et al., 2021). As of 2021 the most valuable software worldwide based on the findings of financial planning and investments advisory companies at 56.55%. Leading the pack is CRM and Financial planning at 26.46%, Portfolio Management at 15.46%, Trading/rebalancing at 4.60%, Investment analytics at 3.71% risk tolerance 2.27% and document management 1.99%. (Nestor Gilbert 2022). The CRM market is estimated to reach a global worth of \$46.03 billion to 96.39 billion by 2027 according to allied market research (Rachita Rake 2021).

Managing customer data in CRM allows for a seamless overview of the customer lifecycle and access under 1 platform that can adjust and adapt during changing times. There are advantages businesses can have used CRM during the pandemic. The advantage that it brings is stopping the loss of data. A lot of businesses handle large data from many aspects of the customer, Sales, content creation, and many more. During this unique time of the pandemic when data handling and communication aren't as strong with the workforce due to becoming distant is cause for concern with data handling.

CRM allows for the managing and saving of difficult and advanced size of data. CRM tools are key to staying connected with data transferring and handling. Keeping connected is also a key advantage to using CRM during the pandemic which CRM provides email and chat to handle inquiries and queries. Due to this occurrence, CRM is a 360 system, and this system also allows for the automation of many different business functionalities. Even the most advanced CRM software can allow for the scalability of becoming an even better system that can transition to very advanced handling that would take some updating. Which leads to optimization and systematization Coordinating responsibilities and activities that down the line benefit productivity. Automation helps in alleviating the repetitive tasks that wouldn't be as simple and dealt with in sub-compartmentalized ways (Demetra Edward Dec 30, 2020).

on top of that CRM, automation system filters data into their correct destinations with the best precision. CRM has benefited Businesses in a way that allows for cost reduction the pandemic itself had made businesses lay off workers. The core

functionalities of a business were at risk and CRM alleviated those worries due to it being a highly resourceful technology.

Data analysis showed that with CRM the average return on investment for every dollar spent was \$8.71.

Figure 4. (AuraCRM2020)

Tracking data and reaping the rewards of the information storage under 1 place made the option more accessible to see and use without trying to gather the data from many other compartmentalized data sets (AUROCRM 2020). The capacity at which CRM is used to facilitate different functions spans many uses.

There are many categories, and some are:

- CRM for E-commerce
- CRM plugins
- CRM software
- Enterprise CRM
- Marketing Automation
- Open-Source CRM
- Real Estate CRM
- Retail CRM
- Sales CRM

(AUROCRM 2020).

6 CRM Transition to Customer Experience (CX)

Due to the functionality of CRM along with the analysis of business processes from the customer's point of view can provide an outcome that can increase customer satisfaction (Scott Kostojohn 2011 p.6). The customer relationship process has rapidly grown the customer experience to a level where customer experience benefitted the most from the outcome of the relationship and the longevity. Now when the pandemic occurred is when the shift became more dynamic to understand. CRM has always been an important piece to the communication between customer and brand and now when the pandemic hit CRM has taken on a much larger role in the customer life cycle (Karolina Kiwak 2017).

The sales data suggests customer satisfaction has become the dominating force rather than customer experience for sales. This is not to be confused with teams of marketing and sales implementing CRM to give a greater customer experience. Find and keep customers and receive more optimized approaches for getting new customers that in the end will be beneficial for the company (Bergen Adair 2022).

6.1 Covid-19 and Customer experience (CX)

Customer experience has drastically changed how we perceive expectations and how well those demands are met. Businesses that were accustomed to the shift and change that occurred in a span of a few years were suddenly accomplished within a month or a few. The pandemic has curtailed that slow transfer into a demand that was met almost instantly. This was noticed by companies that had an on-site workforce that notice online work was possible and achievable long term with a positive outlook with not much downturn due to today's software (Jeannie Walters 2022). At the beginning of the pandemic and the shutdown, supply and demand were not smooth due to the shipping problems that occurred and delayed order shipments. The online demand was felt hardest by the organizations that were new to the digital transformation and digital experience. (Rebeka Carter 2021)

Customer experience leaders are also understanding and learning new things about the processes and routes for both customers and employees through these unprecedented times. There were many shifts as a direct result of the pandemic mentioned in the 2022 state of CX report. 5 of those were the rapid digital transformation that noted around 41% of organizations that took focus toward a more customer-centered view on digital journeys at the end that was beneficial for both the consumer and business (Jeannie Walters, Blog post-2022).

Business strategies that shifted were around 39%. Organizations know how competitive the market is so adapting to the new times meant changing their approach and adapting. A lot of CEOs have different opinions and approaches to disaster recovery and business persistence. In the Commission report by Google IDG information gathered showed that some leaders wanted a new approach to disaster recovery while others wanted to make room for online work and joint effort capabilities.

CX leaders have a multitude of things to be aware of in the success of change when it comes to the customer journey and the well-being of both employees and customers being satisfied resulting in an optimized business environment.

33% of organizations Created new Services and products due to the covid 19 pandemic (Jeannie Walters, Blog post-2022).

There is a transformative process for customer experiences to take effect in a successful manner and approach for businesses and it is now a framework to back the success of implementing the proper approach (Sheryl Green, Blog post-2022)



Figure 5. Customer experience Framework (Sheryl Green 2022)

7 What's to come

As the pandemic passes and everyone seeks to go back to normal work lives. There was a noticeable shift that may not be undone and was in the background for many businesses before the pandemic that took center stage and finally took it as a necessary step in staying connected. CRM Investments and what it means for the future.

Before the pandemic, the CRM systems in place were geared toward compartmentalized categories, private contacts, and levels of importance in pipelines and funnel management (Danny Estrada 2021). When the covid 19 occurred the shift and urgency of utilizing digital tools in connection with customers and prospects were now a part of business's standard practice and a way to view these opportunities from a different viewpoint. Data use also took center stage as users had to input data in ways that were time-consuming now with data automation that allow the users to focus more on the customer.

With this approach, CRM may be seen as the voice of the customer in some ways. Due to CRM becoming the platform to orchestrate and adjust to customer needs everything comes together. Due to the rapid growth of importance in CRM adaptability, it was a critical step in working our way back to normality and connectivity with customers (Danny Estrada 2021).

Demand and communication have taken the front seat to all businesses trying to remain successful during a time where post covid has people working from home when usually work is done at an office or workplace. This is a shift that is a start that businesses are seeing as a potential for growth (Tony Kays 2020). According to Kays, 77% of small companies have taken the covid-19 pandemic as a start for change and opportunity.

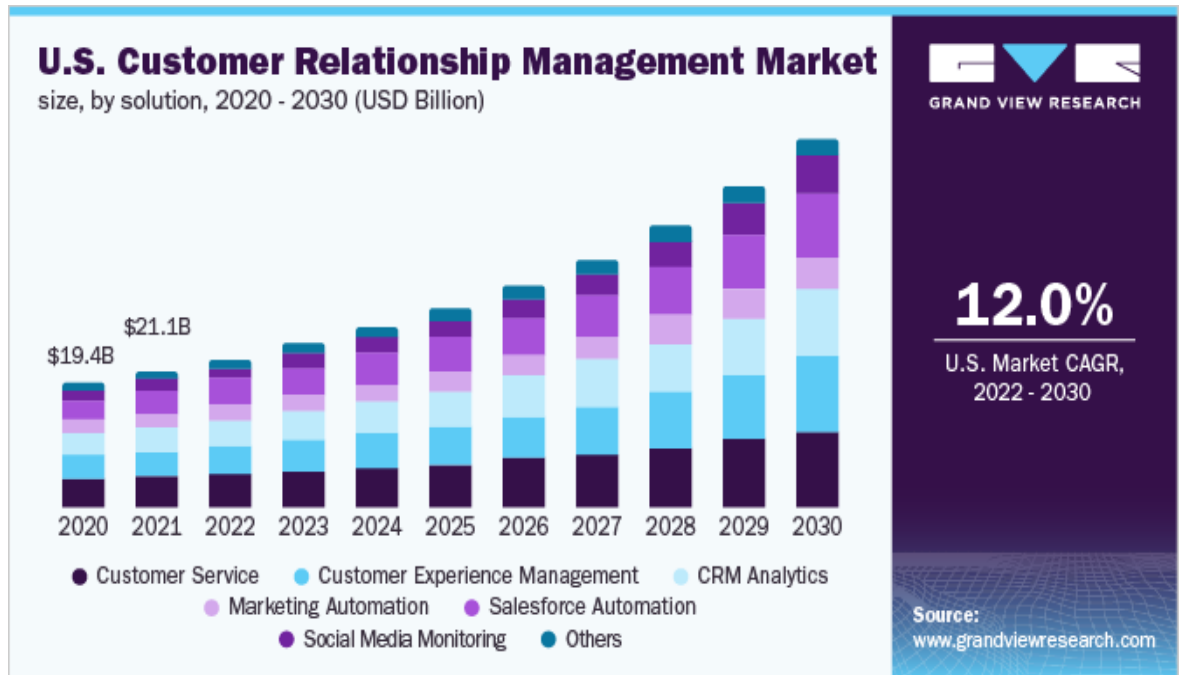


Figure 6. (US CRM Market, Grandview research Published Date: Feb 2022)

Market analyst report Reveals that there is rapid growth in the CRM ecosystem that is only gaining traction in the foreseeable future. It is simply a good thing for innovating how we connect without burdening the businesses on compartmentalizing the data and information from customers and work life in general and making it more manageable in a seamless way. Customers also benefit from this by gaining more awareness of a company's consideration in staying connected and having the users more involved as a customer and a user of the CRM ecosystem. In the end, this pandemic has shown that CRM has helped everyone in business stay connected and grow during a time that did a lot of the opposite (Grand View Research, Feb 2022).

8 Implementation, data collection, and method testing

The Qualitative research is attempting to give answers to the noticeable shift in CRM implementation during the pandemic and what the experience is like while the shift occurs. My focus was getting In-depth insight into CRM's impact during covid-19 and the thoughts of individuals using CRM. The key takeaway is the day-to-day transition from office location use and being more physically social with customers and staying in touch. CRM allows for easy connectivity in many work-life applications that were compartmentalized to be under one place. If there may be a difference or impact.

The survey given was to establish how the impact and importance have grown using CRM during the pandemic and before. Around 10 participants from backgrounds in IT and businesses, in general, use CRM systems for their work. It gives an insight into the growth of CRM importance and what their personal experiences were during the pandemic and before the pandemic occurred. Understanding if the pandemic has forced businesses to change their customer relationship strategies. The survey question is qualitative and gives a better understanding of what they go through with the shift from onsite to online and if there is a noticeable change in the way CRM is used and implemented across the work environment. Also, to see if they notice the need for CRM as a primary tool in staying connected with customers.

When given the survey the respondent is only made aware if they can answer a quick survey on their experiences of customer relationship management before during and after the pandemic and what they have noticed. It would further solidify the findings and establish an awareness of the changes happening when it comes to staying in touch with customers.

The question set out to understand what the feeling was like with customer relationships being only online from B2B and B2C. Which gave a first-hand account of the impact the pandemic was having and the sense of transformation it was having across the board from business small to large old to new. With the survey given I was even able to give a survey to a worker in a start-up company. The survey given was a multiple-choice survey which consisted of 4 from no change, not much change, noticeable change, and big change. To see if CRM has changed their way

of staying in touch with customers and is beneficial toward searching for prospects and coping with the adaptations.

8.1 Survey questionnaire and findings

Giving 11 questions gave a first-hand understanding of the transition and adaptation of the CRM during the pandemic and allowed for the point of view of everyday users who use the CRM system with customers and amongst their peers at work. I gave the survey to 11 people working with CRM applications allowed for them to be more direct in their choices without going into confusing details which they may not understand in the market but from down the line how the effects in their day-to-day business importance with staying connected, in touch and developing a relationship with customers using CRM may have grown in many ways due to the pandemic. Here are the survey responses:

Question one

11 people answered out of 12

“Has working from home changed your work life?”

50% have responded

- Big changes”

This question was asked to see if the Pandemic made a change in their day-to-day experiences in their work environment and work life in general.

On question two

11 people answered out of 12

“Did you notice any changes occurring in CRM importance and integration during the pandemic?”

90% responded

- Noticeable changes”

This question was asked to see if the CRM system used before the pandemic took a more important role in its use case during the pandemic.

On question three

11 people answered out of 12

“Do you see CRM being a standard across the board meaning for all small and large businesses?”

30% between 2 answers

- Noticeable change and
- Not much change”

This response was to determine if the pandemic has shown that there is a need for CRM to be a central role in staying connected with customers along with being the umbrella tool needed by businesses to stay in touch during the pandemic and move forward.

On question four

11 people answered out of 12

“Utilizing CRM systems and tools?”

90% responded

- Noticeable change”

The purpose of this question is to see if the utilization of CRM systems and tools has grown in their day-to-day use before, during, and after the pandemic. The reason for this is to understand the awareness of the importance of taking effect in employees' use of CRM.

On question five

11 people answered out of 12

“Did the pandemic speed up the urgency of implementing CRM software?”

75% responded

- Noticeable change

To see if the CRM has taken center stage during the pandemic in staying connected with many aspects of work life.

On question six

11 people answered out of 12

“Priority to communicate with customers and stay in touch

80% responded

- Big change”

To see if communications in many other formats have become the use of CRM to stay connected.

On question seven

11 people answered out of 12

“Communication amongst fellow employees and staff meetings?

33% between

- Big changes
- Not much change”

Scrum meetings have been a part of many businesses, but this was to simply evaluate if there are any changes in the way communication is done in the work environment.

On question eight

11 people answered out of 12

“The need for Software tools to be used under one platform?

60%

- Noticeable change”

This was an important question due to the fact a lot of businesses have much different application software for different aspects and functionality in the workspace when it comes to communicating with customers, Notifications, Emails, schedules, and much more.

On question nine

11 people answered out of 12

“Automation in the work environment

50%

- Big change”

To see if there were changes in processes that took many repetitive tasks hours to get through was automated and making those tasks off-hand and allowing employees to give focus to more important tasks.

On question ten

11 people answered out of 12

“Focus on online work and customer relationship?”

80%

- Noticeable change”

This was to get insight into online work being the norm for many jobs before that required in-office visitation. Now was there a difference between online work and customer relationships? It was always a part of working life but now that online communication is a must staying connected was important to know if they noticed the shift in importance

On question eleven

11 people answered out of 12

“Customer experience and communication?”

70%

- Noticeable change”

This question set out to see if the experience with customers is different than before and substantial responses are toward yes being that there is a significant shift in communication with customers.

Due to the competitive nature of business, it is a survive-or-die mentality in the market. Salesforce has purchased many different applications to have many different tools under 1 umbrella. Big organizations have shifted to making CRM an essential tool and a centerpiece in their business. The covid19 pandemic we have experienced prepared us for the future ahead.

9 Conclusion

With this new shift in business relations with customers due to the Covid-19 pandemic shut down it became very difficult and swift how detached businesses became during the pandemic. It is important to understand the growth of CRM adoption for better-personalized approaches with customers and allow a better access point to satisfy both sides for customers and businesses. It's very intriguing to know how the transformation had made CRM a dominating force in the market and an integral part of economic infrastructure due to the insightful combination of integrating customer data from many different areas into one platform that can seamlessly engage with a customer. This allows for a business to better adapt to their consumer needs and how engage their prospects more efficiently.

Making an ecosystem of information for both the Customer and business to thrive in a more personal way without going through the time-consuming separate ways can also become overwhelming for both the company and consumer. The reason being is people are under the impression that data is being excessively used for other purposes beyond the understandable

Covid-19 has woken a lot of businesses up to what has always been integral in staying connected with customers and that's the personalized approach that CRM software provides. A lot of people may not realize but even the simplest applications used may have CRM in the background simplifying the interaction between you and the web service. With customer demand and communication being businesses' biggest priorities.

It is understandable that during the pandemic there was a rapid shift to making CRM systems a part of almost every company small to large. We are at a time when communication and connectivity have gone digital. The pandemic simply sped up the process that companies knew was coming but came at a time when Covid 19 restrictions made working from home mandatory and customer relationships the top priority.

9.1 Reflections

I notice this research in understanding changes and figuring out the shifts is important for success in businesses and work life in general. CRM, in this case, gave a unique view into businesses moving forward due to the fact during the COVID-19 pandemic businesses were at a crossroads of staying connected with customers or simply fading into the background. Which in turn is to accept the customer relationship as being the basic format of compartmentalized communications. The key findings allowed a better view that is justifiable to the changing times that we may never be going 100% back to normal in most work environments. This realization is an exact groundwork for working life.

In terms of working from home and not being mandatory to come to work every day has made adjustments to make work-life sustainable for businesses and employees when it comes to the primary purpose of any business. That is the customer. Writing my thesis was additionally an enlightening and challenging experience, and expert increase is non-stop development. I will simply task myself to use the capabilities I have realized to understand the vital role of staying connected with customers. The questions I wanted to figure out in this research have been answered. There is a change and a shift due to the pandemic of CRM integration in business. CRM is a mandatory step in staying afloat and a standard practice for businesses that have now reached center stage. Businesses that were slowly integrating CRM now have sped up the urgency for businesses to stay in contact with customers and many more. The multi-tool capability the CRM provides is what truly separates it from other software in the market.

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