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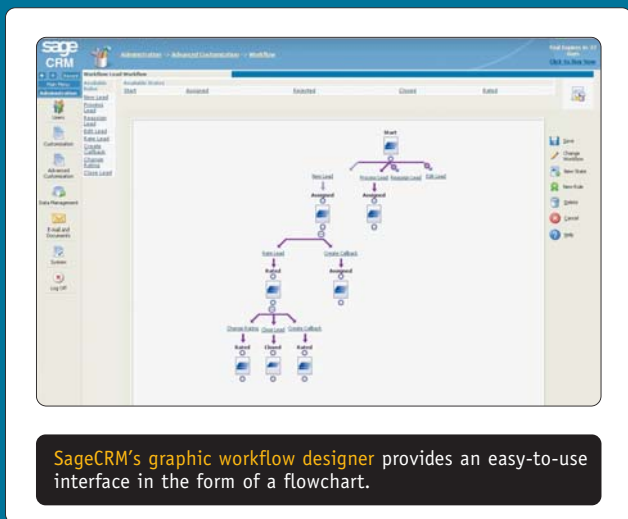
CRM hosts promise top-notch customer service plus better access for mobile salespeople. We tested six offerings; Sage Software edged out the competition



Because customer relationship management software is time-consuming and expensive to implement and maintain, more companies, especially small and mid-size businesses, are considering outsourcing. In 2002, just 8 percent of SMBs looked to outside providers for their CRM initiatives. This will grow to 33 percent by 2009, according to Gartner, by which time businesses will be spending nearly \$1 billion on CRM services. We decided to evaluate CRM service providers to see what advances are driving the growth.

But before we get to that, don't take this review as a blanket endorsement of hosted CRM operations. On the contrary, deciding whether to turn over something as critical as CRM to an outside party calls for soul-searching on both the IT and business sides—after all, customer relationships are the core of your business. The big question is, can getting a single CRM system from an outsourcer help your salespeople do their jobs better? Take a moment to determine the pros and cons of each approach. Do you want your entire customer database to reside in the hands of a third party? Do you believe the CRM provider will stick around? What are its service-level agreements—do you trust that it won't have service-provider or software problems that may not be fixed right away? Are your business processes unique, and if so, can an outsider offer the flexibility you need?

You also must ensure that your data will be protected. How secure are the hosted provider's hardware and software? How regularly are backups made? Are those backups stored off-site in a secure location? In addition, once your information has been uploaded



SageCRM's graphic workflow designer provides an easy-to-use interface in the form of a flowchart.

By Pete Payne

to the provider and you've accumulated months or years of work, how difficult will it be to bring that information back in-house?

Looking Outside

We put out a call to CRM outsourcers to help NWC Network Services, a technology services company NWC Inc.'s IT department runs in its spare time. After all, the widget maker's systems run like clockwork, so why not leverage NWC Inc.'s global sales force and extensive customer data stores to support our Red Bull addictions? In addition to mid- and high-end network equipment routed through NWC Inc.'s suppliers, NWC Network Services sells preconfigured specialized equipment, such as Linux computer clusters and preconfigured load-balancer and Web server farm racks. It also offers hourly consulting services and support contracts for the equipment it sells.

Our mission for the vendors: NWC Network Services wants to gain control of its sales process. The problem: NWC Inc. uses disparate databases to store customer data. For example, presales lead information resides in Excel spreadsheets, Outlook contacts and mobile devices within the sales department. Existing-customer info (contracts and post-sales data) is stored in a Microsoft SQL database at company headquarters. A separate SQL database contains inventory information for our regional offices.

To qualify for this review, the services must provide CRM features without requiring any server infrastructure at the customer premises. The products must provide back-end integration with existing enterprise data stores and support offline activity with two-way data synchronization. We limited our offline and synchronization tests to Outlook. Other desired features included customization, integration, extensibility, customer support, marketing and usability.

Entellium Corp., NetSuite, RightNow Technologies, Sage Software (formerly Best Software), Salesforce.com and TriVenture answered our call to provide a hosted CRM service that would let

NWC Network Services migrate NWC Inc. data to the service provider, then off-load support for our customers and field sales staff, both connected and disconnected. TriVenture resells Microsoft's CRM offering through its CRM OnTarget service. Siebel declined to participate.

We specified that the services give users access from unknown and changing IP addresses, as would be the case with a mobile sales force, and chose Microsoft Outlook as our mail client, primarily because of its widespread enterprise adoption. We did not test PDA support.

Turning Over the Jewels

The most daunting part of testing was our first task—copying data from our Oracle database to the vendors' CRM servers. Each provided import tools for this—a Web-based wizard, an Excel template or an Excel toolset. All methods required that the data be output in an expected format. All the vendors support comma-separated files; SageCRM also imports data stored in Excel files, and NetSuite supports XML imports using smbXML, an extension of the popular XML language.

Once the file format was decided, we uploaded the input file with the tool provided, then defined the data fields as they corresponded to the target product. Most often, this involved selecting, from a drop-down list, the item that corresponded most closely to the field from our existing database. For instance, if the current data field being mapped was the last name in the contact file, we would select some iteration of “_lastname” or “LastName.” Each of the products provided many more mappings than we needed and let us define our own field mappings if necessary.

Importing is the trickiest part of the migration process. Not only must you know how your data is defined, you must understand how it should be defined once it enters the CRM system. All the products we tested let us import the basics—contacts and leads—and thankfully, each vendor gave us extensive written documentation and examples. We liked the Excel spreadsheet templates NetSuite provided, which let us perform these mappings offline. NetSuite also stands out for the variety of items that can be imported, its ease of use and its support for XML.

Immediately after loading our data, we defined users and roles. RightNow and NetSuite provide the most detailed and useful tools for this task, offering comprehensive and easy-to-use screens with detailed help available throughout. However, all the products we tested allow for fine granularity when defining users and their roles, including the ability to set permissions on individual fields, if desired. This level of detail could get overwhelming—fortunately, each product offers standard roles, including system administrator, sales staff, customer support staff, manager and company officers, that we could use as is or as templates for defining custom roles. Each supported our B2B and B2C sales models well, offering customization tools to rename fields and objects as necessary to fit our business model.

End users will need access to the CRM system, but complexity will kill many of the efficiency gains realized by outsourcing. We found the tools provided to sales representatives—for example, dashboards—adequate across the board. The most usable front ends were those from Entellium, Microsoft and SageCRM; these more graphical systems do a good job of hiding CRM complexity behind well-designed and organized screens. The other products provide as much information, but we sometimes had to click

Executive Summary

HOSTED CRM

IT groups have heard—and had—the argument before: Are the convenience and cost-saving benefits of outsourcing worth the loss of control? Those looking to gain the advantages of CRM will find the in-versus-out debate especially touchy—customer data is the lifeblood of any company. Consider: Are your customer service applications highly customized? Do you have tight security restrictions, perhaps based on regulatory requirements? Do you have the IT expertise and initial funds to bring CRM in-house?

Still here? Then you'll be interested in our latest review of hosted CRM offerings. We tested services from Entellium Corp., NetSuite, RightNow Technologies, Sage Software (formerly Best Software), Salesforce.com and TriVenture, which resells Microsoft Corp.'s CRM offering through its CRM OnTarget service. We had some trepidation turning over our data, but once we got rolling, we were pleased with the services provided. Our Editor's Choice award goes to Sage Software's SageCRM.com 5.7, which wowed us with its well-designed interface, though the competition is hot on its heels and all the offerings leave room to improve.

through many screens or tabs to find it.

Performance was acceptable in all but one case—the RightNow product was much slower than the others. At first, we thought it might have been because of our test system, but even on a faster test machine, screen refreshes still lagged far behind those of rivals.

Each product integrates with Outlook using an installable client program that adds buttons and/or folders to the Outlook interface, and this is how we evaluated offline potential. Our Outlook testing checked support for offline work, such as creating tasks or e-mail messages, and later synchronization with the hosted CRM data. Also, this testing verified that the data synchronization was two-way—changes to the CRM data were reflected in our local copy of Outlook, and our local Outlook changes were applied to the CRM system. All other interfacing with the CRM software was through Web browsers. Microsoft's client was, unsurprisingly, particularly good at integrating CRM functions with Outlook, but the tools from SageCRM and Sales-

Force also performed well.

We then tested how easy (or not) it was to synchronize data between the remote client and our server. Each product successfully synchronized all modified, deleted and added records between the client and server, providing for two-way data integrity. In addition, each synchronization tool gave us the final word on how to handle conflicts, either beforehand by defining prioritization rules (for instance, all records from the client will replace duplicates on the server) or by prompting us as the synchronization occurred. None of the synchronization tools stood out; each performed the job as expected in a workmanlike fashion.

Next, we defined our workflow, aka the process pipeline, a series of tasks that each salesperson must perform when moving a customer through the CRM system. Workflows, which also can apply to customer-service processes, ensure that the necessary tasks are always performed for each customer and aid management in gathering metrics for evaluating sales. If, for instance, the workflow metrics indicate that customers stay

REAL-WORLD
LABS®

REPORT CARD

Hosted CRM Software

| | Sage Software SageCRM.com 5.7 | Entellium PRO-Activity Release 2005 | Salesforce.com Winter '05 Enterprise Edition | NetSuite 10.5 | RightNow Technologies CRM 7.0 | Microsoft CRM from TriVenture CRM OnTarget |
|---|-------------------------------------|---|---|---------------|-------------------------------------|---|
| MANAGEMENT | | | | | | |
| Data handling (10%) | 3 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 3 | 3 |
| Role definition/ access control (5%) | 4 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 4 |
| Workflow definition (5%) | 5 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 3 |
| Forecasting (5%) | 3 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 2 |
| SALES STAFF USAGE | | | | | | |
| Overall usability (5%) | 4 | 5 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 4 |
| Navigation (5%) | 5 | 5 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 4 |
| Performance (5%) | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 3 |
| Browser support (5%) | 3 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 1 |
| AVAILABILITY | | | | | | |
| Offline (10%) | 4 | 2 | 5 | 3 | 3 | 5 |
| Synchronization (10%) | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| CUSTOMIZATION | | | | | | |
| Interface (5%) | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| Behavior (5%) | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 3 |
| Integration/extensibility (5%) | 3 | 3 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 3 |
| FEATURES | | | | | | |
| Case management (5%) | 4 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 4 |
| Reporting (5%) | 3 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 5 | 1 |
| Customer service (5%) | 3 | 5 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| PRICE (5%) | 4 | 5 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 5 |
| TOTAL SCORE (100%) | 3.60 | 3.55 | 3.55 | 3.45 | 3.40 | 3.30 |

A≥4.3, B≥3.5, C≥2.5, D≥1.5, F<1.5 A-C GRADES INCLUDE + OR - IN THEIR RANGES. TOTAL SCORES AND WEIGHTED SCORES ARE BASED ON A SCALE OF 0-5.

B-

B-

B-

C+

C+

C+

MANAGEMENT Includes data import, export and creation; staff security (such as permissions, roles, access), work assignments and tracking; workflow definition; and forecasting, all from a management role.

SALES STAFF USAGE Comprises tracking work, tasks, forecasting, system navigation, perceived performance during use, support for browsers and operating systems.

AVAILABILITY Includes offline availability and ability to work when not connected to the hosted system; synchronization with Outlook.

CUSTOMIZATION Contains customization of the interface, behavior (such as workflows, scheduling, actions); integration of the hosted system with the enterprise; and extensibility of the hosted system.

FEATURES Includes case management (incidents, service, knowledge base); report availability, use and customization; customer service for users of the hosted CRM system.

Customize the results of this report card using the Interactive Report Card®, a Java applet, at www.nwc.com.

in the Opportunity phase for a long time, you can perform a targeted analysis of that part of the process. Defining the workflow was easiest with SageCRM. A graphical interface, similar to a flowchart, made the process easy to understand and manipulate. The other products used text to define the workflow, and though these were usable, SageCRM makes a strong case that a graphical presentation of business processes goes far in simplifying complex tasks.

Reporting also was a key testing criteria. We wanted a decent number of predefined reports as well as customization capabilities—no matter how many slick, well-defined reports are provided, you will need to view your data in a way that nobody anticipated. RightNow CRM does an excellent job here—the tools we used to customize our reports were easy to use and detailed. The generated reports let us click on any graphic to view the underlying data, a very useful feature.

Related to reporting, forecasting is the ability to project sales, set quotas and track actual sales in relation to the quotas set. A popular management tool, forecasting is becoming increasingly useful to front-line sales staffers as a way to track their work and challenge themselves. Entellium, Salesforce.com and RightNow provide the best forecasting tools of the products we tested.

CRM software is not only for selling to customers, but also for supporting employees. Each product we reviewed provides tools for case-management activity, for example, which might include a way to track incidents, some service solutions and a knowledge base for both internal use and external customer access. SageCRM, Entellium, RightNow and Microsoft came out slightly ahead here for their simplified interfaces and ease of use. The Salesforce.com and NetSuite case-management tools did well, but they're difficult to use.

We also looked at how each vendor handles support. Live phone support during business hours, with Web knowledge bases and support systems available around the clock, were de rigueur, as was e-mail support within a reasonable time. However, Entellium stood out for its live chat feature that let us reach out and touch a

customer-support representative 24/7. And, this support option is free, rather than an add-on, which is a welcome change from fee-based live support outside of business hours. To test support, we asked the rep about extensions to the software. His answer was immediate and helpful.

Finally, we questioned each vendor about its back-end setup. Each uses redundant systems for databases and Web servers. In addition, our privacy is protected with multiple layers of authorization required for access and strict need-to-know guidelines. Database backups are performed periodically and stored off-site in secure locations. For performance and maintenance reasons, data is not stored in encrypted form in the database. Backups are also not stored in encrypted format. The browser communication is encrypted using SSL. The vendors also assured us that they do everything possible to protect against Internet-based attacks, including traffic monitoring for DDoS (distributed denial of service) attacks, shielding against SQL injection attacks, preventing site hijacking and providing other countermeasures to promote safety, security and around-the-clock access to our data. Each vendor also performs in-house security audits, has third-party audits performed periodically and allows for customer audits on a case-by-case basis.

Once the final browser window had been closed and the last synchronization made, we chose Sage Software's SageCRM as our Editor's Choice. It stood out because of its well-designed interface and the consistency with which it scored in all categories. However, as the report card shows, the differences between these products are slight, and they're growing smaller each day as updates are rolled out.

Entellium's Pro-Activity tied for the second spot with Salesforce.com. Entellium matches Sage in ease of use and service, but its reporting tools are limited, as is its offline usage. Salesforce.com provides some slick features, but we didn't think its overall feature set justified its high price. Fourth place went to NetSuite, whose data importing and management tools made importing and managing our data easy. However, as with Salesforce, the software's high price hurt its overall score.

HOW WE TESTED HOSTED CRM SOFTWARE

Hosted CRM offerings are required to do more than their in-house kin. Not only must they provide the standard CRM functionality, they must ease migration of existing customer data and provide tools to allow for offline work. To explore the abilities of our six participants, we defined a scenario based on a perceived business need of NWC Inc. We used multiple browsers and OSs to simulate a real-world situation where sales staffers must use systems not necessarily familiar to them or approved by the enterprise. In addition, we have found that the same version of a browser may operate differently on different OSs.

We required each product to support offline and online usage. In addition, each had to provide importing and exporting tools to ease data migration. We also evaluated integration, extensibility and customization, as well as

ease of use from management and sales perspectives. Finally, we reviewed each service on how well we could perform standard CRM activities, specifically data handling (import/export/creation), offline usage and synchronization. Sales staff usage was focused on connected and disconnected activities; however, standard CRM functionality and management tools were also evaluated.

To access each product, we used Microsoft Internet Explorer 6, Mozilla Firefox 1.0.4 running on 32-bit Windows XP, Mozilla Firefox 1.0.4 and Konqueror 3.3 on KDE 3.2 running on SuSE x86_64. Windows XP was run on a 3.0-GHz AMD64 with 512 MB of RAM or a 1.2-GHz Duron with 128 MB of RAM. We ran SuSE 9.1 Personal on the AMD64 machine.

We tested Outlook integration using Outlook 2003 on the Duron machine.

Internet connectivity was through a cable modem operating at a minimum of 3 Mbps.

We exported data from NWC Inc.'s Oracle9i database using standard SQL query tools and formatted as CSV files. Exported data included contact information, which was tweaked to provide lead and account info as needed. Our data contained 3,200 contacts and accounts, and consisted of text-based fields such as last name, first name, account name, customer and business address information, and contact information such as phone number and e-mail address. We threw in some fake credit-card numbers and expiration dates to test how well each importing tool handled information not typically related to contacts or accounts. Finally, we included examples of B2B and B2C customers as part of the data set.

RightNow took fifth place with exceptional reporting capabilities and extensive customization options, but requiring Internet Explorer for staff access and its slow performance brought its score down. Finally, Microsoft's product took last place in a very tight group of products, with outstanding Outlook integration and an affordable price as its strong points. However, limited forecasting and reporting customization, combined with a lack of browser support, may discourage some customers.

Sage Software SageCRM.com 5.7 SageCRM is a full-service hosted CRM offering at a competitive price. Your sales

B- staffers will appreciate how easily they can move through the system, while managers will like the graphic workflow designer. The designer displays workflow rules and states using a flowchart, and behind these graphics we could define to whom the rules applied or what action should be taken when a rule is invoked. Pick lists made the task even simpler, and we liked the available JavaScript customization.

In fact, customizing the software was a breeze. We added attribute categories to capture information specific to NWC Inc. regarding people, leads, cases and more. We then tweaked escalation rules to prompt activity outside of normal workflow rules. For example, we sometimes must notify sales staffers through e-mail that they are late with the IT payola. Additional customization definitions include languages, field names and screen elements.

The SageCRM client worked well with the browsers tested, though there were some cosmetic issues on the Linux platform, such as visible gaps between screen elements. Although this wasn't enough to impair functionality, with sales staff using the system from all over the world, it's important that Web-accessible software be compliant with as many browsers as possible and work well across platforms.

For offline use, the SageCRM Outlook software provides bet-

ter-than-average functionality. The software changed our main Outlook window so it looks and behaves like the browser-based CRM product. The interface an end user sees in Outlook is similar, if not identical, to what is seen through the browser, reducing training time and helpdesk calls.

You can integrate the software with in-house products through Web services. The software also is extensible, with extensions for accounting integration, POS, EDI and other services. Reporting was par for the field, as was customer service. We found the expected number of predefined reports and the usual report customization tools, and several tiers of support are available.

We do have one gripe: Exporting our data for backup to our servers was more difficult than with rivals. We first had to define a view of our information and then export the results of that view. Most other products let us export all our data in one step. We could have requested that Sage support staff provide a data backup, but this seems to be an unnecessary limitation.

SageCRM.com 5.7, \$69 per user, per month.
Sage Software (formerly Best Software), (800) 873-7282, (925) 461-2625. www.sagecrm.com

Entellium Corp. Pro-Activity Release 2005 Like SageCRM, Entellium's Pro-Activity benefits from a well-designed and implemented interface. We were wowed by its

B- "Take Me To" drop-down, which provided instant navigation to nearly any location in the system, and its "What would you like to do?" selection, which offered context-sensitive tasks based on the screen we were viewing. When we were working with the dashboard, for example, the "What would you like to do?" drop-down provided a link for creating a contact or lead; when we hopped over to Reports, the drop-down provided options for creating reports. These drop-



Detailed Testing Process

- We asked our hosted CRM providers to make their systems available with, at a minimum, one admin user.
- After logging in to the system using our admin credentials, we imported our data into the hosted system. At a minimum, we imported lead and contact information. We also attempted additional imports and found that data were available.
- We added user accounts, including those for sales staff, a sales manager and a customer service representative.
- We reviewed existing user roles and added test roles.
- We created a lead and assigned it to the sales staff.
- After logging in as sales staff, we worked the lead until won, according to the default workflow rules defined in the system.

- We simulated sales staff offline usage through Outlook, creating a contact in Outlook.
- We then synchronized Outlook and the hosted CRM system, ensuring that the newly created contact was inserted into the CRM system and the CRM system's data was inserted into Outlook, as appropriate.
- We evaluated forecasting from the sales staff and management perspectives. We used a management role to evaluate workflow definitions and modifications, as well as to gauge customization ability, including changing the interface, system behavior, integration and extensibility.
- We then created a customer support incident and assigned it to the customer service representative.
- The customer support representative worked on the support incident accord-

ing to the default workflow defined in the system.

- We evaluated reporting from a management, sales and customer service perspective, and rated customer support for the hosted CRM user.
- Throughout the testing process, we rated the hosted CRM systems for their ease of use, interface navigation, performance, and browser and operating system support.

All NETWORK COMPUTING product reviews are conducted by current or former IT professionals in our own Real-World Labs[®], according to our own test criteria. Vendor involvement is limited to assistance in configuration and troubleshooting. NETWORK COMPUTING schedules reviews based solely on our editorial judgment of reader needs, and we conduct tests and publish results without vendor influence.

downs reduce “click fatigue” and speed navigation through the software.

The well-organized Entellium Pro-Activity desktop is one of the best. Several useful, real-time displays, including Revenue Analysis, Quota Tracking and Pipeline Dashboard, provided immediate feedback on system status.

Another Entellium strength is customer service. Our “customer incidents” were handled in a logical progression, moving from creation through management-defined routing rules until closed. We could archive incidents and reference them again later, or we could add them to a customer-searchable knowledge base. Finally, if desired, customers can be granted self-service access to the customer care package, letting them create and manage their own incidents.

We found Entellium’s forecasting tools stronger than Sage’s, providing a cleaner interface. We liked that forecasts created by sales staffers could be submitted directly to their managers, reducing paperwork shuffling. Managers can create forecasts for themselves or for their staffs or teams. These Group Forecasts provide an immediate overview of how the team is doing as a whole, easing one of management’s most important tasks: understanding team performance.

Like SageCRM, Pro-Activity performed well in all browsers on all platforms tested. Entellium also offers the strongest customer-service program of the services tested. Along with the standard package of voice, e-mail and Web support, Entellium provides 24/7 live chat. Better yet, this useful service is included in the price of the software and provides a sense of security rivals can’t match.

As for integration, we could link to our in-house software using Web services. Although premade extensions were limited, Entellium offers custom development. The company said the most commonly requested extensions are those that integrate with in-house accounting tools.

Although Pro-Activity is strong and performs the majority of CRM tasks well, three areas kept it in second place: reporting, offline usage and data exporting. The service offers about 20 built-in reports, compared with many dozens offered by the other products we tested. Also, the report-generation interface isn’t as robust and doesn’t offer the level of detail its rivals do.

In addition, the Outlook plug-in does not provide a graphical interface to the CRM software. It does offer basic synchronization, but little else—it’s essentially a repository for notes, tasks and e-mail messages, with no method for flagging items as CRM-specific. For a mobile sales force, this could be a serious limitation.

BY THE NUMBERS

Forrester surveyed 94 business and IT executives about their satisfaction with CRM applications:

29

Percentage of those surveyed who are satisfied with how easily CRM applications integrate with existing data applications and sources

34

Percentage of those happy with how easy it is to work with CRM software vendors after buying their applications and services

\$3.2 billion

Projected spending for new CRM application licenses in 2005

\$600,000

Average cost of enterprise-class CRM license

Source: Forrester Wave: Enterprise CRM Suites, Q2 2005

Finally, as with SageCRM, data exports can only be done piecemeal, an unnecessary hindrance that makes a simple task difficult.

Entellium Pro-Activity Release 2005, \$59 per user, per month. Entellium Corp., (800) 539-9973, (206) 262-9400. www.entellium.com

Salesforce.com Winter '05 Enterprise Edition

Salesforce.com has long been perceived as the “one to beat” in hosted CRM, and we did find that its suite offers the best cus-

Btomization of all the products we tested, letting us change nearly any item to suit our business needs. This doesn’t mean the other products don’t allow these customizations. They do. Salesforce.com was just the most flexible. We could customize or add data records, custom fields or record types; create pick lists; modify forms; change tabs; and more. All this was available through the CustomForce interface and was organized in an easy-to-use format. We customized many field labels, giving them names that made more sense to our organization, and changed the names of navigation tabs to better reflect our structure. Salesforce.com also provides a translation workbench, a tool that lets you translate the entire site’s interface into one of several languages.

Salesforce.com also provides superior integration and extensibility when compared with the other products we tested. CRM data and functions are available through Web services, as well as through custom extensions from partners and third-party developers. These extensions provide integration with Microsoft Office, proposal management tools and Web portals. Salesforce.com actively encourages open-source development of integration and extension tools and products. These tools are available through Salesforce.com’s On-Demand Marketplace (for partner extensions) and Sforce.com (for developers).

Importing data was simple. A Web wizard walked us through the process and provided useful tips, and our data didn’t need any modification once imported. We were told of errors and allowed to clean them up or ignore them during the import process. Exporting data is just as simple: Our entire set of data was exported in a few steps, easing archiving efforts tremendously.

Browser support in Salesforce.com tied with NetSuite for best in the review. The product simply worked well on all the browsers and OSs tested. We found the dashboard highly customizable, with user-selectable text and graphic elements. However, as with NetSuite, the large number of elements available in the system can be overwhelming. You’ll need to budget a good bit of time for training.

Offline work is well-supported by Salesforce.com. Our Outlook plug-in provided a suite of buttons that let us flag e-mail messages, tasks and appointments, integrating them with the CRM system upon synchronization. Contacts were synchronized as well.

Forecasting was easy to do, and we liked getting immediate feedback—instead of simply creating a report, the Salesforce.com forecasting tool is an interactive screen that allows for “What If?” exploration of, say, sales forecasts. This will help sales staff and managers better understand their sales effort and goals.

Still, the bottom line is that while Salesforce.com is strong in the aforementioned areas, its feature set, management, reporting and customer service were only average. And its price was the highest, at \$125 per user, per month. Ouch.

Salesforce.com Winter '05 Enterprise Edition, \$125 per user, per month. Salesforce.com, (800) NO-SOFTWARE, (415) 901-7000. www.salesforce.com

NetSuite 10.5 NetSuite's service provided, by far, the best tools for importing and exporting our data. The importing interface uses Excel templates to assist with data mapping, making it easy to map fields and letting us save our work as it progressed. In addition, NetSuite imports the greatest number of CRM entities, including accounts, employees, vendors, customers, leads, prospects and contacts. This greatly simplified and sped up the migration of our data while preventing the almost-guaranteed typos that come from hand-entering



hundreds or thousands of records. Exporting data was done in a few easy steps, giving us a ready backup-and-recovery option. NetSuite also offers one of the most powerful staff-management tools we saw. These tools let you control who uses the CRM software within the enterprise and how they do so. Staff permissions, roles, territories and other criteria were simple to define, with numerous templates available. With the exception of RightNow, most products we tested offer these tools but couldn't match NetSuite for ease of use and detail. It also was easy to customize the desktop so it showed data important to our manager, including

hundreds or thousands of records. Exporting data was done in a few easy steps, giving us a ready backup-and-recovery option.

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Hosted CRM Software Features

| | Entellium PRO-Activity Release 2005 | Microsoft CRM from TriVenture CRM OnTarget | NetSuite 10.5 | RightNow Technologies CRM 7.0 | Sage Software SageCRM.com 5.7 | Salesforce.com Winter '05 Enterprise Edition |
|-------------------------------|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| Data | | | | | | |
| Import | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| Export | Y, by group; no full export available | Y, by group; no full export available | Y | Y, by group; no full export available | Y, by group; no full export available | Y |
| Site security | SSL supported, third-party audits, customer audits available | SSL supported, third-party audits, customer audits available | SSL supported, third-party audits, customer audits available | SSL supported, third-party audits, customer audits available | SSL supported, third-party audits, customer audits available | SSL supported, third-party audits, customer audits available |
| Data lookups | Y, via lists | Y, via lookup fields | Y, via lists | Y, via lists | Y, via lists | Y, via lists |
| Role-based security | | | | | | |
| Org chart | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| Geographic | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| Communication | | | | | | |
| E-mail | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| Documents | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| Customer service | | | | | | |
| Incident tracking | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| Knowledge base | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| Offline ability | | | | | | |
| Outlook integration | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| Synchronization | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| Reporting | | | | | | |
| Built-in | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| Custom | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| Sales-focused | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| Management-focused | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| Customization | | | | | | |
| Interface | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| Behavior | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| Interface | | | | | | |
| Supports major browsers | IE6, Mozilla Firefox 1, Konqueror 3.3 | IE6, Mozilla Firefox 1, Konqueror 3.3 | IE6, Mozilla Firefox 1, Konqueror 3.3 | IE6, Mozilla Firefox 1, Konqueror 3.3 | IE6 for staff access, Mozilla Firefox 1, Konqueror 3.3 for client access | IE6 |
| Dashboards | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| Workflow | | | | | | |
| Lead assignment | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| Task tracking | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| Management overview | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| Forecasting | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| Enterprise integration | | | | | | |
| Web services/XML/SOAP | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| Additional modules | Y, limited | N, provides for Great Plains integration | Y | Y | Y, Enterprise Extensibility module or Integration Server | Y, commercial and OSS supported |

Y=Yes, N=No

staff forecasts (generated in real time), schedules, pipeline information and tasks.

In tests, NetSuite's browser and OS support were good. This interface flexibility is somewhat offset, however, by the volume of available options. We can foresee end users missing important information or being intimidated by the system. As far as features go, we found NetSuite's case management, reporting and forecasting just middle of the road, functionality-wise, and suffering from way too much complexity. For example, the user interface can be overwhelming, with many options available on each screen. We found this excess complexity a recurring theme—and a weakness. For instance, when adding an opportunity, we were presented with a screen containing two tabbed areas, one with six tabs and the other with four. All the tabbed areas and their fields were not required, but even knowing that, the number of options was daunting. Hiding or otherwise delaying the visibility of these fields until the user needs them would greatly simplify the interface.

NetSuite did provide above-average integration and synchronization with Outlook and performed well when disconnected from the CRM system. We also found it customizable and extensible, letting us tweak field names, forms, screens and nearly every other element in the product. But this couldn't overcome NetSuite's high price: At nearly \$100 per user, per month, it's the second most expensive product offered and nearly twice as much as the least expensive competitor.

NetSuite 10.5, \$399 per month base (includes one user), \$99 per user, per month each additional. NetSuite, (877) NETSUITE, (650) 627-1000. www.netsuite.com

RightNow CRM 7.0 RightNow's offering provided the best reporting tools of all the products in the review, with a wealth of



predefined reports accessible through the analytics interface. When we couldn't find the report we wanted, it was simple to modify an existing one or create one from scratch. In addition, report results are well-laid-out and when possible provide a graphical result, which can be clicked on and drilled into for further analysis of the data.

Staff-management tools rivaled those of NetSuite, providing a hierarchical interface for defining not only user roles but also the relationships of those roles. In addition, permissions were easy to set. RightNow CRM also provides extensive behavior-modification options—we could define tasks based on time of day, activity, person and more. These behaviors could occur as part of the standard workflow surrounding a sale or support issue but also could be defined elsewhere in the system.

Data export is allowed only through reports. As with some of the other products, there's no way to export data en masse. Support staffers said they could export the data for us, but this seems unnecessarily complex.

Navigating the interface took some getting used to, as the product is divided into multiple browser windows, called consoles, each providing a particular functionality. Reports are generated and used from the analytics window. There are also sales, support and other consoles available. These consoles rely on Microsoft .Net, which brings up a primary weakness of the soft-

ware: The RightNow CRM suite relies on Internet Explorer and will not work with other browsers. Web visitors to your CRM site—for example, customers needing support—can access what they need with multiple browsers. But your staff must use Internet Explorer. In other areas, RightNow CRM offered features comparable to the other products we tested.

RightNow CRM 7.0, starts at \$50,000 for a two-year license for 25 users. RightNow Technologies. (877) 363-5678, (406) 522-4200. www.rightnow.com

Microsoft CRM from TriVenture's CRM OnTarget service Like SageCRM and Entellium, Microsoft has put considerable work into simplifying the CRM experience. Its interface is



clean yet powerful, grouping necessary tasks into separate areas, including workplace, sales, customer support and reports. In addition, Microsoft places menus along the top of the workspace, similar to an application menu, with File, New, GoTo, Tools and Help options. This familiar interface will reduce training time.

We expected Microsoft CRM to boast exceptional integration with Outlook, and we weren't disappointed. The Microsoft plug-in fully integrated with the Outlook environment, letting us create e-mail messages, tasks and appointments and automatically migrate them into Outlook during synchronization. Outlook pick lists, such as customer or contact name or company, are populated automatically with data from the CRM environment. Finally, an e-mail message received in Outlook can be promoted to a CRM activity with the click of a button, closing the loop.

The product's data-importing tools were adequate but not exceptional, and the export process was a mixed bag. Unlike rivals, Microsoft CRM didn't require us to create a special report or view to export data. Instead, the contents of nearly every screen are available for export as an Excel spreadsheet or CSV file. However, there is no way to export all the data at once. We had to download our information screen by screen.

Microsoft CRM requires Internet Explorer as its browser; obviously, this limits the platforms on which the product can be used. In a world of ubiquitous Internet access, we'd like to see wider support. For fun, we did try accessing the CRM system with Firefox and Konqueror, but the site refused us gracefully.

Another area where Microsoft CRM lagged behind is reporting. Even though the software contains useful predefined reports, we couldn't customize them unless we bought Crystal Reports Enhanced Edition for Microsoft CRM. One of the most important tasks of CRM software is reporting on the data being managed, otherwise analysis can't be fully performed and data completely explored. If reports can't be customized easily, you run the risk of missing some business opportunities. This limitation also has an impact on forecasting, which is available only through reports. Reliance on a third-party app is a serious weakness in an otherwise strong offering.

Microsoft CRM from TriVenture's CRM OnTarget service, Professional Version, \$55 per user, per month. CRM OnTarget, (877) 546-6212, (888) 546-6211, (206) 546-6211. www.crmontarget.com 