

Upgrading Direct Marketing by Using the CRM Concept

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Mass communication techniques and promotion mix which included advertising and sales promotion were favoured in previous decades. Recently direct marketing as a new tool with high development potential has become their competitor. Target markets and media became very fragmented and thus inhibit companies' efforts to approach mass markets. Direct marketing is a tool which comprises precise targeting of customers by using a variety of different techniques like data bases, e-marketing, direct mail, telemarketing, mobile marketing, promotion with direct response and catalogues marketing. Internet technologies offer several innovative tools for adapting marketing mix to specific business problems. Improvement of the Internet created new business opportunities and potential competitive advantages, some of which are of lower costs and prices, a perfect customer service, a wider variety and a products' customization. Along with computer technology, the Internet and database software developments, a most important company activity is becoming a two way communication between the companies and their customers. Customer relationship management (CRM) is a new concept which, as a result of changes made in management, strategic business planning and personalized customer services, develops fast. Developments of new information technologies have influence on business transactions to change from product push strategy to customer pull strategy, which will, as a result, change the position of the customer in the chain value. Customers, as most important company assets, are becoming sophisticated and increasingly demanding in their purchasing behaviour. In order to improve the company's competitive position it is important to analyze several aspects of Customer Relationship Management: Customer Selection, Customer Acquisition, Customer Retention and Customer Growth.

1. Introduction

In order to adequately respond to the challenges of the modern business environment, we must take into account some specific features of the situation the Serbian economy and society are in, but also the developments of the world theory and practice, primarily in the fields of marketing and management. New business strategy creation and the quality of business environment are key preconditions for the competitive growth of our economy.

The growth in Serbian competitiveness should be sought in shifting the focus towards the microeconomic level of the business decision making, as well as in adopting a new philosophy of production – strategic management and innovation. One way to significantly enhance the competitive level is the development of direct marketing via the CRM (Customer Relationship Management) concept. The focus of market oriented business shifts increasingly towards the consumers, as companies become aware of the growing importance and role the consumers play in profitable business activities. The companies explore, monitor and try to identify the existing and anticipate the customers' future needs and desires, since the basic aim of any company is to meet the needs in a profitable way and create customer loyalty, as basis of a long-term growth.

The companies' response to the change in demand, as well as a continuous adjusting the products and/or services to the customers' needs are only some elements that affect the customers' overall satisfaction and loyalty. It is necessary to carry on a segmentation and targeting processes of prospective clients and create marketing campaigns geared to each segment individually.

2. Features and concepts of direct marketing

Direct marketing is an activity by which a direct relationship between the company and a customer is created, its basic features being:

1. *the direct marketing is interactive*, which means that there is a two-way communication, i.e., a mutual contact between the participants (the company and the customer) in the communication process;
2. *the direct marketing implies (prompt) response or customer's reaction*. The customer's response may be: a telephone call, direct mail, an enquiry to get more specific information, an order, etc.
3. *the results of the direct marketing activities (customers' response or reactions) are measurable*. The results of the direct marketing activities are most commonly expressed in the form of response rates, which specifies a percentage share of the number of customers responding within a total

number of “contacted” customers, or in the form of a rate of conversion of enquiries into orders, that specifies a percentage share of the number of orders in the total number of enquiries.

Compared to the mass marketing (marketing based on varied forms of mass communication with customers), the direct marketing has a number of advantages (1, pp. 315-319):

- *Precise aiming (targeting)* – addressing specific, well defined target segments of existing and prospective consumers;
- *Controlability* – a possibility to control the media, message and other elements of the direct marketing campaign, such as the timing of activity, costs, etc.;
- *Personalization* – a possibility of addressing consumers on an individual basis; on the basis of a historical analysis of purchases, a psychographic analysis and an updated and well-developed database it is possible to create messages in such a way that they appear to be “made to measure” of each individual customer. This is why direct marketing is often called the “one-to-one” marketing.
- *Invisibility of strategy* – direct marketing is good in concealing the marketer’s strategy from the competition.
- *Economising* – modern database management systems allow direct marketers to select the best prospective buyers (prospects) for any product they wish to sell, and therefore reduce costs by the unit of order.
- *Possibility of testing* all variables affecting the success of the promotive campaign, such as mailing the customers list, the delivery size, the contents, the format of advertizing message, the shape and colour of letters, etc.
- *Possibility of cross-sales* – analysing the database of the existing buyers of a given product, direct marketers can obtain information on the customers’ possible needs for other products;
- *Possibility of creating long-term relationships with customers* – on the basis of updated and well-developed databases, the “real”, loyal and profitable customers can be identified with whom the company should create closer contacts and develop permanent relations;
- *Possibility of integration* with other elements of the marketing communication system – direct marketing is easily supplemented by other elements of promotive and marketing mix, allowing for a well-devised and integrated marketing communication.

A basic drawback of direct marketing is reflected in very *high initial costs* in attracting customers. Direct mar-

keting can be an especially *expensive form of promotion* if used towards only one sale. Besides, certain forms of direct marketing, such as direct mail and telemarketing, are very *aggressive* and are an *attack on the customer’s privacy*. Finally, if used inefficiently, direct marketing *may endanger the corporate reputation* and result in a decrease in sales.

Forms of direct marketing are often defined in terms of media, or means used in conveying advertizing messages. The basic media of direct marketing are:

- mailed media (direct mail and catalogues);
- printed media (newspapers and magazines), and
- electronic media (telephone, radio, television, cable television, the Internet).

A very large number of factors affect people’s behaviour and they can be classed as internal and external. Internal factors (psychological) refer to the mental state, the customer’s personality and his/her character traits. They affect the formation of customers’ attitudes and views and are strongly influenced by external factors. External factors are environmentally created factors that affect customers.

Until the appearance of marketing as a scientific discipline that gave rise to a succession of other disciplines, the customer had a marginal position and a passive role. The customers’ behaviour is a discipline focusing upon the customer and studies him/her both as an individual and as a member of the community, aiming to learn about their behaviour and about the factors that influence the behaviour. It does not, however, deal with the development and definition of the strategy of establishing and maintaining the customers’ relations, but serves as background for other disciplines that are being born. In the past decade or so a succession of new marketing concepts have developed, giving the role and importance of marketing a new, long-term dimension and focusing on developing not only the loyalty, but also the long-term collaboration and partnership relations with key buyers and customers; therefore, as such, they present a dynamic aspect of direct marketing.

- The most commonly mentioned **direct marketing concepts** in this context are as follows:
- Relationship marketing;
- Customer Relationship Management (CRM);
- Retention marketing;
- Licenced marketing;
- Loyalty marketing;
- Database marketing;
- Interdependent marketing;

- One-to-one marketing;
- Frequency marketing;
- Partnership marketing;
- Real-time marketing.

2.1. Relationship marketing:

The relationship marketing paradigm dominates the modern marketing practice, but also the academic circles, regardless of the fact that the ideas it is based upon are not new. The research has shown that the term *relationship marketing* is a specific challenge to the traditional marketing practice and academic thought. This is a new conception founded on the basic marketing premise, that it is a profitable way of meeting the customers' needs, viewed in the long term. The approaches to the development of programs and strategies as well as necessary elements differ as to whether, in terms of ensuring the ways of building stronger and longer-termed relations, it is regarded as a specific marketing field or as a development of the existing conceptions.

The importance of customers (and other partners) is stressed in a large number of cases, as is the development of long-term relationships with them, however, too much attention is paid to various sections of programmes and strategies, instead of their analysing as a whole. Therefore some authors stress the types of rewards the companies are to ensure, others pay particular attention to the customer cycle and the relationship marketing position within the organizational structure, while others still highlight the components and elements of the relation marketing, however, without a defined strategy and program, etc.

Relation marketing can, of course, be observed on different levels. The basic three are the following:

- Tactical level (similar to the activities in improving sales);
- Strategic level (stress on the development of partnership relations with customers);
- Philosophical level (reflects the essence of the marketing philosophy – the whole organization focuses upon the delivery of total satisfaction to customers and maintenance of its own business).

A large extent of interrelations is seen between relationship marketing and direct marketing and the CRM concept via different types of loyalty marketing which in turn can be viewed both as a separate conception and as part of relationship marketing.

2.2. Customer Relationship Management (CRM)

The CRM (Customer Relation Management) or *managing the relationship with customers* is a relatively recent concept that increasingly improves, due to the

changes in management, in strategic business planning and in the personalized customer service. In a modern market-oriented economy, alongside the advance of the computer technology, the Internet and database creating software, the two-way communication between the company and its customers or clients becomes a priority in business activities.

The Internet technology affects the changes in business transactions from the product push strategy to the customer's pull strategy, namely, the change that will result into the change of the customer's position in the value chain. Hence it is of vital importance to consider the elementary dimensions of the Customer Relationship Management (2, pp. 81-86):

- Customer selection;
- Customer acquisition;
- Customer retention;
- Customer growth.

The CRM means the possibilities, the methodology and the technology that allows for a company to work through the customer relationship regulation. The basic purpose of the CRM is to enable the companies to manage customers more efficiently by presenting reliable systems, processes and procedures.

The CRM is a corporative level of the strategy focusing on creating and maintaining lasting relationships with customers. There are a number of commercial CRM program packages supporting the CRM strategy in the market, however, it is not a technology per se, but a substantial change in the organizational philosophy, that places the stress upon the customer. These program packages, i.e., the development of a respective software and hardware, allow for the CRM system to become a largely automated process, the purpose of which is not only to offer information, but to serve as a significant support in decision making and in the market situation analysis. A successful CRM strategy, however, cannot be carried out by just installing and integrating the program package and cannot be executed in a moment. Change must occur on all levels, including the company policy, employee trainings, marketing systems, information management etc. This means that all the aspects of business must be harmonized with the CRM principles.

In order to be efficient, the CRM process must be integrated via marketing, sales, as well as via the customer relationship. A valid CRM has to:

- identify factors that contribute to a successful customer relationship;
- create a customer relationship practice;

- adopt measures necessary to make a good CRM;
- develop a customer -friendly relationship;
- suggest questions to be put to customers in order to solve a problem;
- propose a solution to the customers complaining about the service;
- monitor all the sales aspects, as well as support to customers.

In establishing the CRM segment in the company it is of greatest importance to specify the aspects that are crucial for its business, the information to be served to customers, to give an insight into the customers' financial past record, to identify the effects of CRM segments and to identify unnecessary information. The possibility to eliminate the unnecessary information is a very important aspect of the CRM system implementation. When creating a CRM structure, a very important task of the company should be the provision of as detailed information as possible for its primary (loyal) clients.

The CRM can be defined as a business strategy the purpose of which is to bring into accord the revenue and the profit with the customers' satisfaction and the value delivered to them, taking into consideration a number of levels: measuring, customers' behaviour, processes and technologies. For fruitful customer relationship to be developed it needs aligning all the elements in the company. The necessary elements in building a fruitful customer relationship are:

- knowledge (market and customers appreciation);
- targeting, i.e., offer streamlining and adapting;
- sales (customer acquisition);
- service (customer retention).

Of crucial importance are strategy planning and development, organization, implementation, as well as the CRM process control. Therefore the process of successful CRM concept implementation can be observed through (3):

- strategy development;
- information analysis;
- needs identification (appreciation of customers, their needs and desires);
- change definition (corporate revolution – from a reactive towards a proactive approach);
- building the future (building the corporate business and technical structures to deliver the expected benefits to the customers);
- measuring results and improving the CRM system.

While the transaction marketing, based on the idea that the customer should be subject to some influence so that the transaction be effected as fast and as efficiently as pos-

sible, the new marketing and relationship management concepts insist upon creating and maintaining contacts with every individual buyer (4, pp. 164-195) even after the transaction has been completed, which significantly contributes to the increase in the company's competitive advantage. A research carried out in the EU in 2006 confirmed that the firms without a developed CRM:

- lose an average of 50 percent of their clients over the period of five years;
- about 65 percent lost clients have actually left because of bad service and communication;
- the costs of acquiring a new customer are five times the costs of retaining the old one.

Whereas the firms with a developed CRM concept:

- grow approximately 60 percent faster compared to the competition without a developed CRM;
- expand their market by the rate of 6 percent annually;
- charge 10 percent plus for their products;
- realize the return on investment (ROI) of 12 percent;
- a 5 percent increase in the customer loyalty may result in a 25-85 percent increase in profitability.

The CRM focuses upon creation and maintenance of lasting relationships with the customers. Although there are a number of commercial CRM program packages in the market that support the CRM strategy, it is not a technology by itself; it is rather a crucial change in the organizational philosophy that places a customer in the centre of attention. The program packages, i.e., the development of appropriate software and hardware allow for the CRM system to become a largely automated process, with a task not only to provide information, but to serve as significant logistics to decision making and the situation analysis in the market. A successful CRM strategy however cannot be conducted by just a simple installation and integration of a program package and cannot be executed overnight. Changes have to occur on all the levels, including the company policy, the employee training, the marketing systems, information management, etc. That means that all aspects of business must be shaped in accordance with the CRM principles. The efficiency of the CRM process, which should be integrated through marketing, sales, and customer relationships means (5):

- identification of factors contributing to successful customer relations;
- development of the customer relationship practice;
- development of customer-friendly processes;
- devising questions that will help solving potential customers' problems in a most adequate way;
- suggesting the solution to the customers complaining about a product/service;
- sales monitoring as well as customer support.

In establishing the CRM concepts it is most important that a company stipulate the key aspects of business, such as which information should be served to customers, what the customers' financial history is, what the effects of the CRM segments are. A very important aspect, too, of the CRM structure implementation is the identification and elimination of unnecessary information. When creating a CRM structure, a major task of the company should be collecting as accurate as possible information on its primary (loyal) clients. In this context the CRM can be defined as a business strategy the purpose of which is to balance the revenues and the profit with the customers' satisfaction and the value delivered to them, within which a number of levels should be taken into account: measuring, customers' behaviour, processes, and technologies.

The basic structure of the CRM is three-fold:

- Operational – basic business processes (marketing, sales, services);
- Analytical – serves as support in the analysis of customers' behaviour and conducts the business philosophy and technology;
- Collaborative – provides contacts with customers by way of telephone, fax, the Internet, mail, direct contacts, etc.

The Customer Relationship Management combines the business strategy and technology aiming to identify, attract and retain long-term relations with customers – by creating *value* that results from the interaction between a business organization and customers. The CRM includes the knowledge of strategic management and Internet technologies, and the purpose of this concept is to identify the opportunity to establish profitable relations with clients, creating new relationships as well as retaining such profitable customer relationships.

As a strategic set of activities the CRM starts with a detailed analysis of the company's organizational strategy, and ends with measuring value for shareholders. The concept of competitive advantage that simultaneously generates value for both the customer and the company is a key to the CRM success, being a managerial approach to creating, developing and establishing relationships with precisely defined target groups in order to optimize the value for the customer, the corporate profitability and consequently, the value for the stakeholders. It is for this reason that the CRM is highly positioned on the priority list of the modern corporate agenda and is closely associated to employing information technologies, necessary in implementation of customer relations marketing strategies.

3. The long-term customer relationships development strategy

The long-term customer relationships concept must always have in mind the value chain of the customer relationships development, that is, the activities to be undertaken in order that profitable relationships should be developed. The customer relationships management chain is based upon four steps:

- definition of offer value;
- segmentation, targeting and positioning;
- business operations and delivery systems;
- measuring and feedback.

Strategy is the basis of the development of long-term relations with customers and key partners. The basic aim is to deliver a quality service and thus enhance a lasting customer satisfaction, which is a precondition of unquestioned loyalty. Customers' loyalty means the rise in profits which all affects the satisfaction and loyalty of employees in a services delivering company (customer and employee satisfactions are mutually conditioned). In order that the concept be conducted there must be some basic preconditions, and they are defined as to the concept needs. They comprise (6, pp. 124 – 126):

- Top management, leadership and vision oriented, expert and competent, aware of the value and importance of services marketing and long-term relationship development;
- Project team to introduce a concept into the organizational business practice, for the service providing companies that have not implemented it so far;
- Designing an appropriate micro- and macro-organizational structure of the company oriented to customers and to services;
- A governing service corporate culture;
- Appropriate technical-technological preconditions (primarily as regards the development of a data basis and information technology);
- Availability of the required human resources on various levels, the key factor being the persons that interact with clients;
- The necessary capital.

The phases of the long-term relationships with customers include: data collecting, data analysis, establishing and maintenance of long-term relationships, as well as the concept implementation monitoring, analysis, and control. The basic elements of the long-term relationships development stem from the elements necessary for a proper functioning of marketing in the field of services, and they are the following:

- Getting to know the consumers, their needs and desires, their characteristics, the influence of certain factors upon their conduct;
- Marketing, i.e., market-oriented thinking;
- Achievements of modern concepts that place the emphasis upon the customer relationships nurturing;
- Company capabilities and needs;
- Understanding the role and importance of every individual included in the service creation and delivery processes;
- Long-term way of thinking and behaviour;
- Operations are conducted company-wide.

Hence the process of long-term relationships development can be divided into the following steps:

- Data base formation;
- Customer identification and classification;
- Customer personalization;
- Customer differentiation according to their values and needs;
- Interaction with customers;
- A service process adjustment, treating every customer as an individual through direct contact or automated process;
- Loyalty program creation – rewards and added values;
- Continuous concept improvement (control, measuring and feedback information).

Introducing a new concept into the company is an investment into the future, therefore we must start from a planned long-term approach. The company must analyse the profitability of investment into the concept development and must compare its performance and results to the results of the leading companies in the industry and wider. At the same time, specific features of the company must be properly observed.

Threats and possible errors in the concept implementation have to be located and corrected. In the analysis of strengths and weaknesses in the concept implementation special attention should be paid to the following potential problems (7, 106):

- An assumption that the customer does want long-term relationships to be built (perhaps there is no reason whatsoever that the customer would ever want to go back to the seller, or the customer chooses to avoid being dependent on the seller);
- An assumption that a client (individual) is willing to interact and act together. An assumption that an individual's satisfaction is sufficient per se;
- If clients are transferred to "higher classes" and are notified as to how important they are for the company, their expectations grow higher;

- A problem not to "hurt" the clients that are not the "top" ones, either as regards their profile, or the attention paid to them by the company, however their contribution is important;
- A problem of change in the rules governing the relationships with key clients-donors that may cause confusion;
- Certain awards are introduced that prove to be unnecessary, since the clients would act in the same way even without them, therefore this is unnecessary cost;
- Sometimes clients build a relationship, not because they are loyal, but because they have no other choice, i.e., there are no appropriate substitutes. The change in the situation may result into negative effects, since the majority will leave.

Varied research conducted among the different level managers in the banking, telecommunications and public service sectors in the U.S.A. have shown that the biggest obstacles to the introduction of the long-term customer relationships are the speed required to introduce and activate the concept, the organizational culture, the issue of capital necessary for the process to start and a host of other initiatives present in companies.

The concept of long-term relationships means a continual interaction between the company and the customers. The communication between the company and customers is to ensure specific connections to be created, developed and improved. The course of these relationships, i.e., the method and the site where the customer and the company meet and exchange information must also be paid attention to.

To ensure the interaction we must achieve an accord between the interaction itself and the communication process, but also meet the other elements affecting positive attitudes forming (personal experience, influences by friends and family,...), those that will favour the brand and be a precondition for loyalty. The customer must be shown that the company cares about his satisfaction and his attitude.

Especially important in developing the long-term relationships are the following types of communication with customers:

- direct contact (by telephone or in person);
- direct mail;
- Internet and e-mail

In addition to these, the importance of certain promotional mass media (advertising in the first place) and word-of-mouth advertising must be understood. Mass

marketing in media is used parallelly, to acquire prospective new customers, but also to remind the existing customers of the products. The word-of-mouth advertizing is not under the direct control of the company.

There are, however, some limits in the communication with customers and some rules that have to be observed (7, p. 207):

- do not initiate interaction with the customer without a clearly defined aim;
- do not ask the customer the same question more than once;
- carry out the interaction in between two customer's choices (purchases);
- start interaction not with the product, but with a customer;
- interaction should be direct and adjusted to the concrete customer;
- make sure the customer (always) welcomes the interaction;
- a good approach is to use a principle (and technology) of mass adjustment to reduce the costs and make the message personal;
- protect the customer's privacy;
- initiate the dialogue by putting at disposal a phone number to be dialled free, or printing the web site address on whatever is connected with the company (business cards, memoranda, billboards, etc.);
- make sure the customer is well aware of the value of the interaction, otherwise it will not serve its purpose;
- take care of the customer's time (you cannot learn everything about the customer at once).

Establishing a dialogue with the customer is important because:

- dialogue is a means to acquire information;
- information is translated into knowledge (that is, knowing the customer and his/her wishes and needs);
- knowledge serves as basis to adjusting the offer and achieving customer growth;
- efficient and effective action brings customers' satisfaction, customers' trust and familiarity;
- customers' satisfaction, trust, and commitment bring in their loyalty;
- loyalty brings profit.

4. CONCLUSION

The interaction with customers initiates the company's profitability and the customers' satisfaction, since modern, highly competitive, business conditions require the

company to search for new, more efficient and more effective ways to enter the market, because the market performance of the company depends primarily upon how successful it is in meeting the customers' needs, thus creating loyalty and consequently the growth in profits. The majority of firms claim that their products and services are geared to the customers' needs and requirements, however it does not show in practice. Reasons are numerous, the key ones being the inconsistent implementation of the marketing concept, the growing needs and desires of the modern customer and the limitations of the classic marketing approach.

To formulate the marketing strategy rules it is necessary that we know both the customer and the way he purchases and uses products and services, as well as what causes his satisfaction or dissatisfaction. The overall activity must be market-, that is, customer- oriented. The starting point must be the customer's value for the company, hence the company has to adjust its behaviour to this fact, with the techniques and concepts of direct marketing contributing to this to a large extent.

The last couple of decades of the twentieth century bring a succession of new marketing concepts giving the role and importance of the customer a new, long-term dimension and focusing upon developing not only loyalty, but also long-term collaborative relationships with key customers and consumers, with a significant aspect of personalization of these relationships. The best and the most profitable customers merit the best treatment. The marketer's task is to identify his best customers and to maintain a continual and personalized communication with them. In order to obtain valid response and measurable results the marketing manager has to be trained to create the "customer's intelligence" on the basis of hundreds of incoherent details that a number of sectors collect in a day.

The CRM solutions are designed in such a way as to provide knowledge required to develop and implement "smart" strategies in order to maximize the customer's profitability, thus ensuring the competitive advantage for the company. The analysis of the CRM technologies helps us understand the customer, so we can avoid acting anew when a problem arises, but act proactively, discovering hidden possibilities to meet the increasing demand of the customers.

The key factors of the CRM concept success are the customers' expectations the firms should anticipate. Hence it is necessary that a platform should be created which allows for the communication with the customers, for collecting and for the analysis of essential information they

provide. Specialised statistical software packages within the web-sites allow for monitoring and collecting replies to various questions that can be stored in a respective data base. Therefore the record can be kept on the customers' habits and special interests they may have.

The objective the companies wish to achieve is to influence prospective customers to buy, to subscribe, to register, to answer questionnaires and polls, to generate recommendations, thus contributing to the company's competitive position in the long run. Prospective customers, as well as the company, have their own objectives – satisfaction of their needs and understanding, as well as strategies to achieve what they planned. The measure of the company's ability to persuade prospective customers to plan action and carry it out is the conversion as a result of the company's effectiveness and the customers' satisfaction. The process during which the customer becomes and remains a real customer, contributing to the company's business by his loyalty, is based on proven principles that incorporate analysis, the art of communication, the CRM concept and the fundamental knowledge of economics.

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