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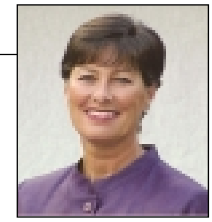

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Information, Information Everywhere ...

And Not a 360-Degree View in Sight

Imhoff wishes to thank Lisa Loftis for her contributions to this month's column.

The popularity of customer relationship management (CRM) is forcing many organizations to jump on the CRM bandwagon whether they want to or not. As more organizations execute customer-focused business strategies, customers themselves become more demanding about the treatment they receive when interacting with these organizations. Sophisticated customers now require consistency of knowledge and treatment across all the points of contact within an organization. Therefore, why is it that many organizations have not managed to develop the 360-degree view of the customer vital to CRM success? The difficulty lies in the combination of several factors: diverse customer information requirements across the business community, past (sometimes substantial) investments in technology and a lack of understanding of how to migrate existing customer systems to quickly and effectively meet business need.

Let's use a charitable organization as an example of how successful organizations can develop a 360-degree view. A high-priority goal of our charity is to get to know our donors well enough to tailor marketing activities that match donor preferences and to convey to donors via personal contacts that the company understands and appreciates their charitable giving efforts.

The impediment to this understanding is that while the organization has sophisticated donor analysis and contact strategies, most donor information is housed in the business units that collect and use it. There are also multiple business requirements around customer information, enough to form a long list of future IT projects. Addressing requirements for coordinated donor information and providing a 360-degree view of the donor proves to be problematic. Deciding the priority for addressing identified business requirements adds an additional layer of complexity.

Sound familiar? To resolve these problems, let's walk the charity through an exercise called a customer information environment assessment. The assessment is designed to ensure that business and technology work hand-in-hand to develop a clear and accurate view of the existing environment, the target environment and the business priorities driving the organization to CRM. It consists of three key steps:

1. Assessing the current customer information systems to identify strengths, weaknesses and gaps.
2. Asking business users to prioritize customer information needs.
3. Matching business priorities to the projects identified in the technical assessment to form a customer information road map.

In the first step, the charity compares its donor information systems to industry best practices. For clarity, we will use the Corporate Information Factory (CIF) architecture as our best practice comparison (for additional information on this architecture, search "Corporate Information Factory" on DMReview.com). A technology architecture such as the CIF acts as a road map or diagram, guiding the developer in understanding how all the parts and components interact and cooperate. It also provides a foundation for communicating with the business areas about the role each customer application will play and the benefits each should deliver. The charities assessment reviews the following types of systems:

Business Operations (BO) are the core operational systems (billing systems, product or policy systems, call center and sales force automation systems, front-office systems, etc.) that run the day-to-day business processes in an organization. In the BO area, the charity has several call centers, each with a different donor database. It also has a Web site donor database. Donors are believed to be duplicated across these operational systems.

Business Intelligence (BI) provides the capabilities required for the strategic analysis and decision making in the organization. BI consists of the data warehouse, data marts and associated analysis and reporting tools. For BI, our charity has a heavily used data mart containing information on one set of donors but missing information about others, and an active and responsive reporting group that answers business unit queries through a mixture of ad hoc reporting from the data warehouse, SQL extracts from operational systems and the acquisition of information from third-party data providers.

Business Management (BM) enables organizations to act on the analysis results generated within business intelligence. BM consists of the operational data store (ODS) component of the CIF. An enterprise customer profiling system is a good example of a CRM business management system. The charity is lacking a comprehensive donor profiling ODS that could connect the donors currently distributed through the various call center and Web databases.

Three potential technology projects surface when comparing the charity's donor systems to the CIF. These include: construction of an enterprise donor ODS that will reconcile duplicate donor information and provide a consistent view of donors across the various call centers and the Web, expansion of the current BI environment to provide an enterprise view of donors for analysis and marketing activities, and addition of information into the data warehouse and construction of associated data marts to eliminate the current operational queries and expand business unit analysis capabilities.

In the second assessment step, a combination of interviews, report reviews and facilitated sessions is conducted with business units from customer-facing areas. Donor information needs such as the following are identified and documented:

- The ability to see a single view of the donor and all activity that donor has had with the organization when answering service calls or soliciting event participation.
- The ability to understand the characteristics of the most profitable donors and to understand their giving patterns in order to better target marketing campaigns.
- The ability to understand aggregate giving patterns by geography, by event and by program in order to develop organization-wide key performance indicators (KPIs).

The group is then asked to rank the needs by importance of the need to the organization and by level of satisfaction with the information currently available to satisfy the need. Combining these two ranking factors will highlight those business needs that have highest importance to the organization while providing the lowest satisfaction.

The last assessment step involves combining the business priorities and the identified technology projects to build the road map. Assuming that the charity ranked the business priorities in the order in which they are listed here, then the road map should contain the following three projects in the order listed:

1. Construct a donor ODS that will integrate donor information across all operational systems and resolve duplicate donors. This will provide the business with the capability to see a single current view of their donors when carrying out the personal contacts in the call centers and in the field. Note that this will help facilitate the personal contact portion of the charity's high-level goal.
2. Expand the current BI environment to include a consolidated view of all donors regardless of source. This will provide a comprehensive environment for marketing analysis and will also facilitate the organization's high-level goals.
3. Bring additional information into the data warehouse and construct data marts to determine organizational KPIs. This will allow the organization to monitor the impacts of the first two projects on organizational performance.

When the assessment is complete, the charity has a sequenced list of projects that have been sanctioned by the business community and that match business requirements and organizational objectives. They now have a clear path to developing the 360-degree donor view as well as the architecture to fully support these needs. DMR

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