

Good technology, bad technology

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There has been so much to write about lately that I might have to break my own rule and file two pieces this week. I write this and other columns for fun, not profit, and I need to discipline myself to both tend to the for-profit knitting, and keep from over exposing myself. If I wanted to publish more frequently, I'd look into political punditry and then where would the country be?

At any rate, the last two weeks have exposed me to the down side of becoming reliant on technology. It's not like we have a choice in many cases, our lives demand we split our time to enable us to multi-task and try to be in multiple places in nearly the same instant and the only way that happens is through reliance on technology. When things go bad, it's frequently not a pretty sight.

Take, for example, a colleague from another analyst firm who will remain nameless. We attended a vendor event recently and her PDA device developed a nasty predilection for rebooting itself in the middle of use. Some of us might actually relish being incommunicado for a spell but not her. As a renowned authority on CRM she has clients that seek out her ideas and advice incessantly and while she might be treading a show floor somewhere, she might be simultaneously taking calls and receiving and sending e-mail, so when the little device that connects her to the rest of the world gets temperamental it's not a good thing.

Customer service nightmare

Things break, that's expected, and this piece is not about the imperfectability of man-made objects; it's about the needed perfection of human mediated processes. My friend found a land line and called support and that's really what this is about. Appar-

ently the support desk at the company that provided her PDA and network service was pretty inept at handling the problem and doing the right thing.

For example, they didn't log her problem into a support database despite the fact that they have one of the premier CRM systems in the world (as an aside, you really don't want to get caught doing something that lame when dealing with a CRM expert). So when her problem was not resolved the first time, it was infuriating for her to have to restart at step one. They also couldn't handle her problem — shipping a new PDA and authorizing it to the network with her present phone number — because she was not in her home town. Needless to say, she was transferred a few times in a process that resembled something Dante wrote about several centuries ago.

Finally, when the line had gone quiet too many times she asked for a number she could call to get the authorization done by herself. Here's the kicker, the agent on the other end of the line had to go to another room and get the phone number off a whiteboard and bring it back to the conversation. Why wasn't that in a database?

People and process

All's well now, it only took my friend about 30 hours of intermittent calls and hassles and time away from her business to get things resolved. The bottom line lesson I get from this is that CRM is only as good as the people who use it and they are only as good as the people who lead them and who are responsible for integrating all of it into a coherent business process. That's plenty of evidence to show, once again, that CRM is really about people and process, not data and technology and that we forget this at our peril.

I was also going to complain about my own recent experience upgrading my anti-virus software. It took me about as much time as my friend though I was treated to more of the latest technology for fending off customers. The support Web site gave me lots of information that I dutifully (and wastefully) printed out so that I could install, de-install, re-install, re-de-install, and finally re-re-install the product. All this for a routine renewal! Incredibly, I found that if you download the upgrade and the file is corrupted, you can only re-download for 60 days unless you have bought extra insurance (next time they can ship me the CD).

In the process I learned a lot about Windows — most of which will be forgotten until something else happens. But I won't bore you with the details, suffice it to say, I'm in the market for anti-virus software that installs as easily as a virus.



About the Author



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Denis Pombriant is a well known thought leader in CRM and he is the founder and managing principal of the Beagle Research Group, a CRM market research firm and consultancy. In 2003, CRM Magazine named Pombriant one of the most influential executives in the CRM industry. Pombriant's latest white paper, "The New Garage" discusses the emerging new enterprise software industry business model.

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About Beagle Research Group

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This document was researched and written by Beagle Research Group.

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