

HELP IS ON THE WAY: BEST PRACTICES IN CRM IMPLEMENTATION VIA SYSTEMS INTEGRATORS

December, 2014

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Report Highlights

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Users of CRM systems integrators (SI) report 17% better customer retention

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SI-supported CRM users are twice as likely to provide mobile and disconnected access to the platform

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30% more sales reps regularly use the CRM when it is supported by an SI

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Choosing an SI? The top Best-in-Class attributes focus on what they've done for your peers

Customer Relationship Management platforms long ago migrated from an optional to "must-have" status for virtually every enterprise sales team today. Deploying an effective CRM, however, requires expertise and perspective that does not always exist within your organization. This Research Report explores how systems integrators are most effectively engaged by wise sales operations leaders.

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Poor CRM implementations often do co-exist with underwhelming sales results, but the causal relationship is not as clear-cut as the haters would prefer.

"We're not hitting our sales number consistently enough, so the obvious solution is to replace our CRM." Too often, this side-stepping of a sales organization's real problems provides a flawed justification for doomed-from-the-start, rip-and-replace busy work for contemporary sales operations practitioners and IT staff. Rather than holding difficult conversations that might reveal legitimate weaknesses in sales management, training, products, or marketing, plenty of sales leaders instead point a finger at the technology enablers used by their team. CRM is typically the prime suspect. Why? Because so many companies see tepid rates of CRM adoption; struggle with inaccurate forecasts based on thin, rep-provided data entry; and fail in integrating account and opportunity records with other enterprise customer data silos.

Just Shoot the Messenger - It's Far Easier than the Alternative

It's so easy to blame the CRM for inadequate sales results because, like an El Nino weather phenomenon, without really understanding why, we know it's there and it's definitely bad. But it remains a convenient scapegoat at which everyone loves to point the accusatory finger. Ironically, however, poor CRM implementations often do co-exist with underwhelming sales results, but the causal relationship is not as clear-cut as the haters would prefer. Both outcomes, in fact, can stem from a very common leadership flaw in business-to-business (B2B) sales circles: hubris, arrogance, and an "I've got this" attitude that prevents seeking external or objective guidance around how to do things better than the way we currently handle them. Because many sales leaders were once high-performing quota-carriers themselves, earning multiple trips to President's Club and living the good life, the pride and Teflon coating generated by those successes can doom the very same practitioners to an over-reliance on self-reliance, at exactly the moments when

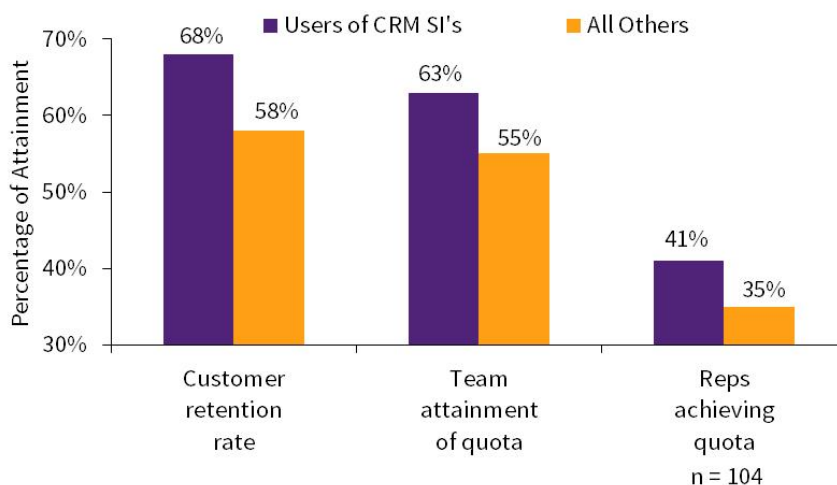
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objectivity from other capable practitioners could benefit them the most.

Hence, replacing the CRM as an antidote to missing quota is, by itself, often a short-sighted Band-Aid that merely covers up more deeply rooted problems. These include leadership, talent, and yes, technology issues within sales enterprises. If, however, a legitimate business case exists to upgrade or replace a corporate CRM platform - supported, for example, by measurable lapses in productivity, validated decreases in customer spend or retention, or costly sales team turnover - then today's sales leaders are well-advised to check their ego at the door, and consider an external systems integrator (SI) for the job. This is because using an integrator puts less pressure on IT, leverages the provider's expertise from helping other companies, and generally progresses far faster than homegrown initiatives.

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Figure 1: Sales Performance Results Support Outsourcing Your CRM Deployment



Source: Aberdeen Group, November 2014

Based on Aberdeen research published in *The 21st Century Buying Experience: Say Farewell to the Sales Cycle* (July 2014), the sales performance results summarized in Figure 1 prove this

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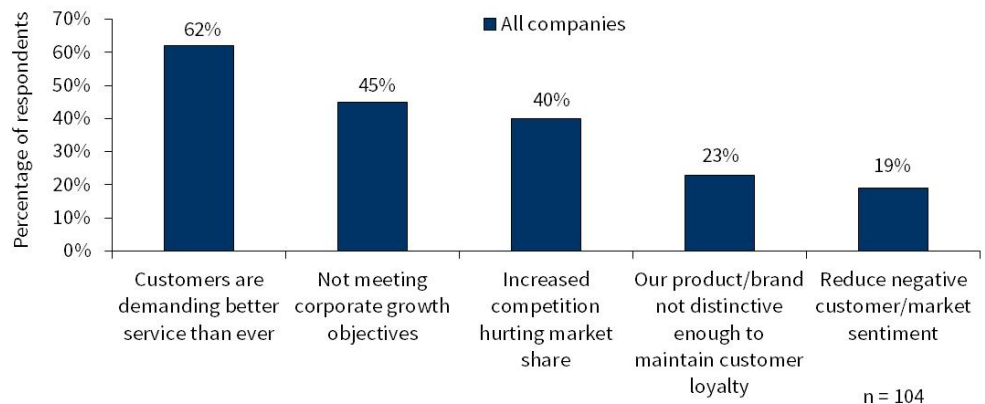
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point quite clearly. This data compares the average self-reported sales key performance indicators (KPIs) among survey respondents who do or do not rely on external SIs for CRM support. When it comes to both individual and group sales performance, as well as the all-important customer retention metric, the business results of SI-enabled sales teams make a strong baseline case for entering into such relationships. Now, let's take a look at the foundational issues that such service providers are invited to address.

Why Change in the First Place?

When the kind of results that non-SI-supported firms achieved in Figure 1 are reported by sales leaders, it typically creates a reverse chain of events that results in finger-pointing, CRM-bashing, and yes, in some cases, the hiring of independent consultants and integrators to help right the ship. The objective and holistic view that outsiders can bring to the discussion will often begin by identifying the root causes of performance gaps: macro-level issues that ultimately impact business results.

Figure 2: Business Pressures that SIs Help Mitigate



Source: Aberdeen Group, November 2014

Aberdeen's research, in Figure 2, highlights the top business pressures that sales leaders indicate are the concerns that keep

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them up at night. "Doing more with less" is an apt phrase that effectively summarizes the three most frequently nominated pressures shown in Figure 2. As research published in *Customer Engagement Analytics: How to Use Data to Create (and Keep) Happy Customers* (May 2014) showcases, today's enterprise business customers, much like contemporary consumers, are a highly informed and educated cohort whose needs and desires are ignored at a provider's extreme peril. Selling and servicing high-demand markets with insufficient CRM expertise provides a quick route to the lower customer retention rates that doom go-it-alone sales leaders to the shadows of their more nimble, SI-enabled competitors (Figure 1). Systems integrators have helped companies acquire and keep customers in dozens or hundreds of other situations; it's short-sighted to ignore this consultative expertise, particularly in the context of attempting to sell more, with fewer resources. SIs have access to and insight into multiple CRM products and, more importantly, best practices that support high-adoption, high-reliability CRM instances. This allows them to help, while being more independently tasked with resolving these business pressures and empowered to push back on embedded cultural norms, than the same-old internal sales operations team that operates the existing platform.

Learning from the Best-in-Class: What Are Your Competitors Doing?

Now that we have established the "why" of supporting the use of external providers to fine-tune CRM utilization, let's take a look at the "how." Aberdeen's research showcases a number of core competencies that Best-in-Class companies (sidebar) adopt more frequently than under-performing firms. Not coincidentally, SI-enabled sales teams also lead non-adopters in their deployment of these capabilities. Beginning with the process-oriented competencies shown in Figure 3, we note that

The Best-in-Class Defined

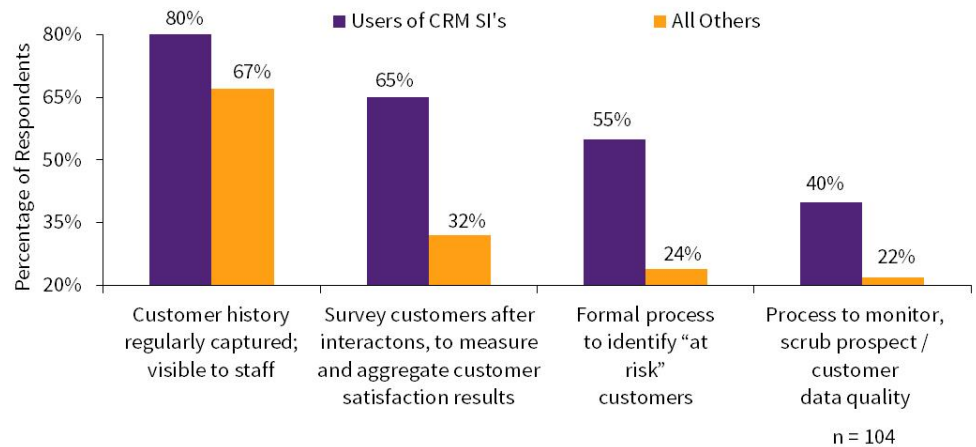
The performance metrics used to define the Best-in-Class (top 20%), Industry Average (middle 50%), and Laggard (bottom 30%) among these sales teams are:

- 94% customer retention rate vs. 81% among Industry Average and 19% for Laggard firms
- 13.2% average year-over-year increase in net client value vs. 1.0% for the Industry Average and a 1.9% decline among Laggard respondents
- 11.6% average year-over-year increase in overall team attainment of sales quota vs. a 0.3% increase for the Industry Average and a 0.7% decline among Laggard respondents

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all of the competences include the "C" word - Customer - that lies at the heart of CRM itself. This is a good thing, and yet, across the board, SI-absent organizations are significantly less likely to appreciate the value of - or perhaps cannot afford the resources behind - implementing such best practices. This speaks to one of the elemental reasons why external consultants add value to enterprise sales. Few practitioners would dispute the customer-centric value of the practices in Figure 3, but too many CRM owners are likely to admit that these competencies are "something we can't do with our current platform."

Figure 3: Best-in-Class Process Capabilities in Tune with SI CRM Support for What Matters...the Customer



Source: Aberdeen Group, November 2014

And this, readers, is the problem: if our **customer** relationship management system can't support the customer, no wonder adoption is low, complaints are rampant, and data insufficient -- it just doesn't work. An internal champion of a CRM purchase and deployment is, naturally, less likely to admit the same, whereas someone hired to fix a problem not only is immune to the political repercussions of failure, but is also more experienced at avoiding it.

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The next set of business competencies that Best-in-Class firms and SI-enabled sales leaders aggressively adopt, namely the performance management recommendations summarized in Figure 4, continue to support the argument for outside CRM expertise. Consider the lessons of [*Grab the Low-Hanging Fruit: How Best-in-Class Companies Leverage a 360-Degree Customer View*](#) (May 2014), flavored by a recent satellite TV company ad campaign:

- ➔ When customer data resides in multiple silos (CRM, marketing automation, help desk), the chances for multiple and inaccurate "versions of the truth" multiply.
- ➔ When conflicting identities of a customer force sellers using a self-installed CRM to spend valuable time figuring out which account or contact is the right one, they close less business.
- ➔ When reps close less business, their companies perform like Laggards and inappropriately blame the CRM.
- ➔ When the CRM is blamed, it loses credibility and no one uses it.
- ➔ When no one uses the CRM, your customers leave. Don't be the company whose customers leave.

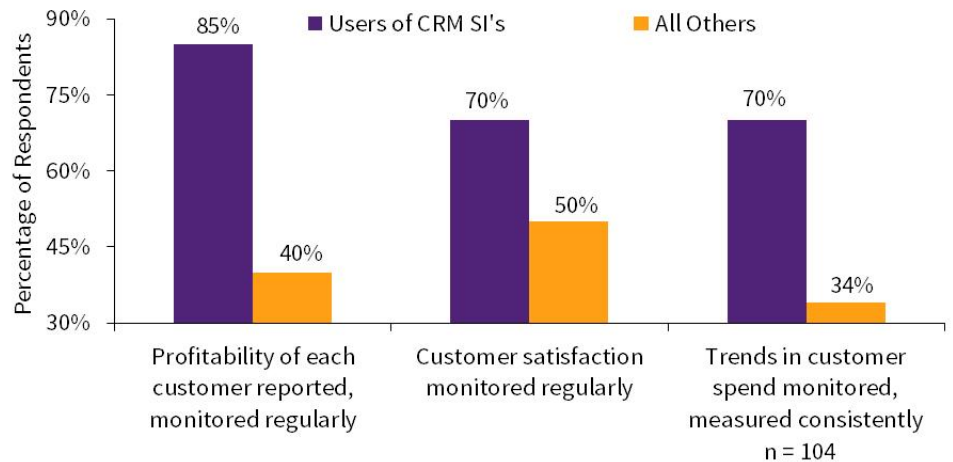
Cultural references aside, this is a very plausible scenario in a sales leadership function left to its own devices. If sales are hurting, and the CRM is not functioning as originally intended, how can we expect the creators of a bad situation to suddenly smarten up and make it better? External SIs recognize that the lessons of Figure 4 are bigger than the sales organization; they are enterprise-wide data challenges that require impartial refereeing among various line-of-business leaders - the same owners of all the disparate customer databases that created the

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problem in the first place. A consultant, especially one blessed with the free-speech authority to make organization-wide recommendations, can connect the dots between sales, finance, operations, and customer care functions more effectively, precisely because of their independent status.

Figure 4: Performance Management Best Practices: Looking at the Big Picture



Source: Aberdeen Group, November 2014

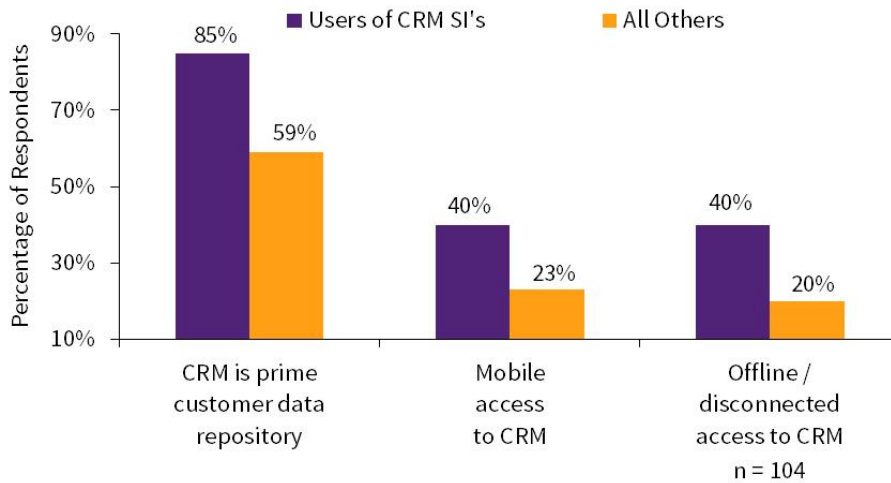
Another key business capability studied by Aberdeen refers to knowledge management; with the elements in Figure 5 standing out most significantly in adoption differentials between SI-enabled CRM deployments and non-users. In addition to the compelling lessons of the *360° View* research that promotes CRM as the most effective customer data repository, data collected for *Mobile Sales Enablement: Fulfilling the Promise of Untethered Selling* (February 2014) dives into the best mobility practices of successful sales teams. For example, Best-in-Class sales organizations lead All Others by 38%, 100%, and 22% respectively in adopting the three key elements of Figure 5, which shows 44%, 74%, and 100% deltas when comparing SI-supported CRM users and non-adopters. These in turn boil down to one basic, non-negotiable rule for sales effectiveness: data

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regarding your prospects, customers, accounts, deals, and orders needs to reside on the CRM platform, with 24/7 availability to your front-line sellers and account managers. These staffers can't manage their territories, support their accounts, enter required activity data, and, in general, get business done if they have to wait until day's end to engage with the system, when they are done with appointments in the field. Actually, they *won't*, because the consumerization of business applications has taught them that instant gratification is a right, not a privilege.

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Figure 5: Customer Data Availability: Anywhere, Any Time, Any Device



Source: Aberdeen Group, November 2014

Companies launching or refreshing their own CRM are typically doing so at the level of sales leadership, potentially dooming such initiatives to repeat historical mistakes because gaining the cooperation from the IT team - required for these essential mobility needs - carries limited weight. An external systems integrator, however, will generally be engaged with C-suite support, and is more empowered to deliver a holistic solution that promises both sellers and technical team members a happy

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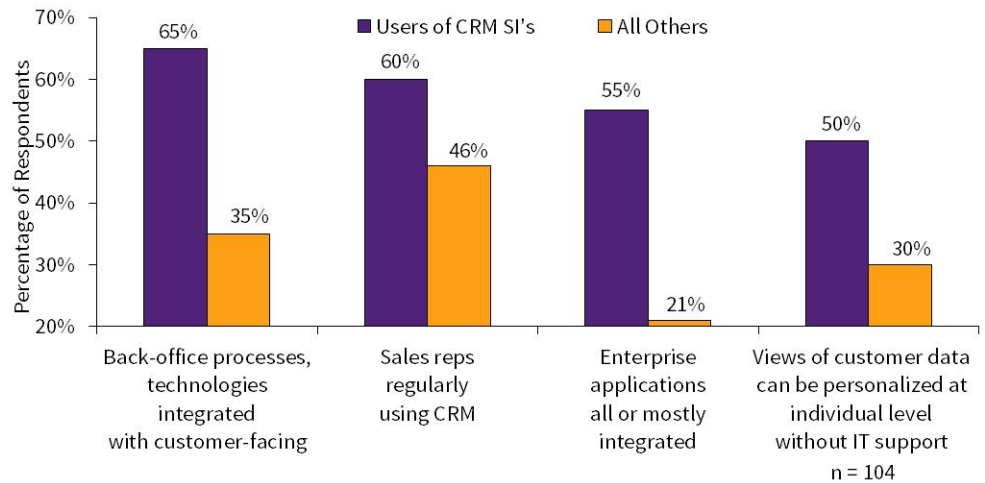
The ROI that companies expect from paying external consultants, certainly one that senior leadership studies with a microscope to watch their SI investment, will reveal itself in higher revenues and stronger margins for the enterprise as a whole.

result based on stronger cooperation. And ultimately, the ROI that companies expect from paying external consultants, certainly one that senior leadership studies with a microscope to watch their SI investment, will reveal itself in higher revenues and stronger margins for the enterprise as a whole.

What's the Pay-Off?

In addition to growing the top and bottom lines more efficiently, a number of additional Best-in-Class practices are deployed by, and add value to, companies utilizing systems integrators for their CRM deployments: Figure 6.

Figure 6: SI Benefits Accrue Throughout the Enterprise



Source: Aberdeen Group, November 2014

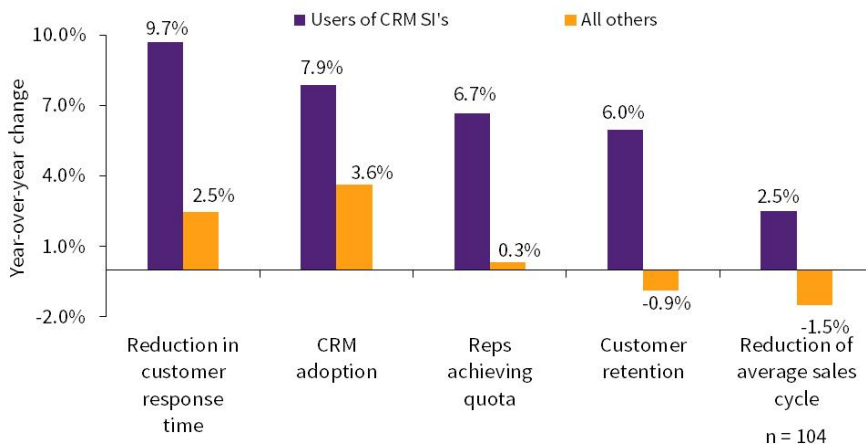
Here we see a series of common-sense elements that are not only adopted more frequently by top performers and CRM SI-enabled firms, but for which Aberdeen data comparing users-versus-non-users shows better business results, across the board. For example, consider the first item in Figure 6. Companies that integrate back-office systems with customer-facing platforms report 54% stronger customer retention (81% vs. 52%) and 24% more sales reps achieving quota (44% vs. 35%) than those not doing so. Even a Senior VP of Sales Operations

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revamping her CRM deployment is unlikely to easily connect these complex systems, whereas an SI is more experienced at doing so and more likely has an executive-level blessing to, bluntly stated, force all the kids to play together nicely in the sandbox.

The additional elements in Figure 6 continue to ratify this point: external consultants are typically brought in to find efficiencies in a business, so that sales can grow while expenses grow more slowly. Aberdeen research on [CRM adoption, application integration](#), and [self-service](#) also ratify why SIs are beneficial, and Figure 7 closes the case with annualized performance results that would delight any sales leader or C-suite executive.

Figure 7: Year-over-Year Performance Value of CRM Systems Integration Outsourcing



Source: Aberdeen Group, November 2014

Conclusion and Recommendations: Where Do I Go from Here?

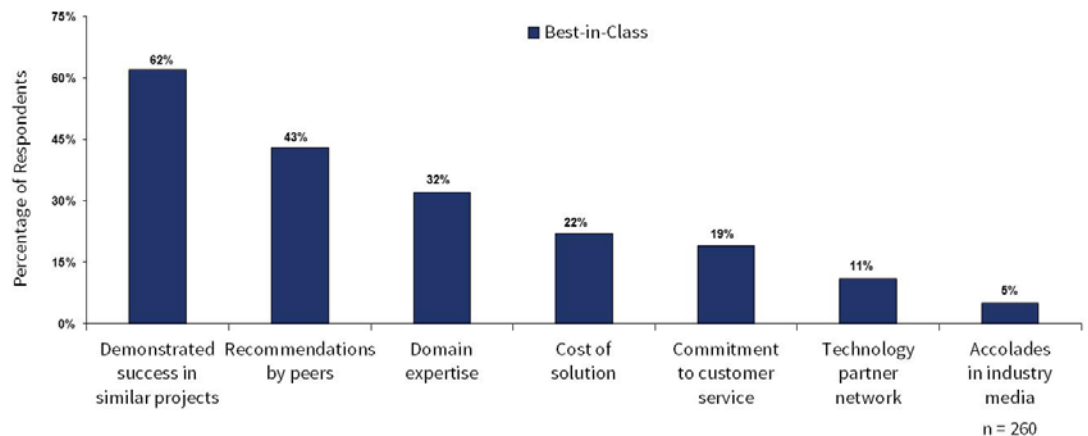
The argument is now well-established for the use of SIs in repairing or replacing CRM deployments – even if such issues are not the root cause of sales under-performance – so end-users are then faced with selecting a vendor to assist with such a

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significant transformation initiative. Aberdeen regularly asks survey respondents which attributes are most important when they select sales effectiveness vendors. How Best-in-Class performers respond, summarized in Figure 8, reveals an important divergence between the various kinds of marketing content, and even the type of third-party data presented in this very report, that are often flung at companies seeking potential business relationships with external providers.

Figure 8: Best-in-Class Sales Organizations Know that “Facts Tell, but Stories Sell”



Source: Aberdeen Group, November 2014

What Figure 8 teaches us is that that sellers and marketers of technology solutions need to be taken with a grain of salt when convincing us that their applications and services are awesome. When they parade endorsements from industry prognosticators, often presented in the form of stack-ranked lists, remember that 95% of top-performing enterprises do not consider this a top-three vendor attribute. Where these providers have helped others in your shoes, however – supported by validated customer case studies and the kind of democratic, crowd-sourced content created by Aberdeen – provides the strongest path toward selecting a partner who brings expertise and results

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to the table. Sales leadership should select and rely on an SI to get the solution up and running and ensure that it's the right fit, while the sales team continues to focus on selling and not the project.

For more information on this or other research topics, please visit www.aberdeen.com.

Related Research

[*Sheldon Cooper, Sales Whisperer: Applying the Science of Data to the Art of Selling*](#); September 2014

[*Customer Engagement Has Evolved. Can Your Sales Team Keep Up?*](#); September 2014

[*Sales Acceleration for Winners: Best-in-Class Practices for Sales Contracting and Quoting*](#); September 2014

[*Configure / Price / Quote: Better, Faster Sales Deals Enabled*](#); September 2014

[*Would You Buy from a 20th-Century Sales Rep?*](#); August 2014

[*Mobile Sales Engagement: The End of "I'll Get Back to You"*](#); August 2014

[*Price Optimization: How Best-in-Class Performers Add to Both the Top and Bottom Lines*](#); August 2014

[*Would You Fire a High-Performing Sales Jerk?*](#); July 2014

[*The 21st Century Buying Experience: Say Farewell to the Sales Cycle*](#); July 2014

[*It's a Marathon, Not a Sprint: Best-in-Class B2B Sales Training for an Ever-Changing Market*](#); June 2014

[*Gamification in B2B Sales: Is it Time?*](#); April 2014
[*You Win Some, You Lose Some: How Best-in-Class Sales Leaders Learn as They Go*](#); April 2014

[*Incenting Success: Best-In-Class Sales Management*](#); April 2014

[*Sales and Marketing Alignment: A Primer on Successful Collaboration*](#); March 2014

[*Big Data for Sales: Are We Ready?*](#); March 2014

[*Sales Enablement Technologies: Some Things Old, Some Things New*](#); March 2014

[*No More Spaghetti against the Wall: How Best-in-Class Sellers Use Social Relationships to Build a Better Pipeline*](#); February 2014

[*Enterprise Social Collaboration: Best Practices for the Connected Sales Team*](#); January 2014

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