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The 2024 CRM Buyer's Guide

Get a clear picture of your customer and reach new levels of performance and predictability with the right CRM solution.

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Making CRM Selection an Effortless Experience

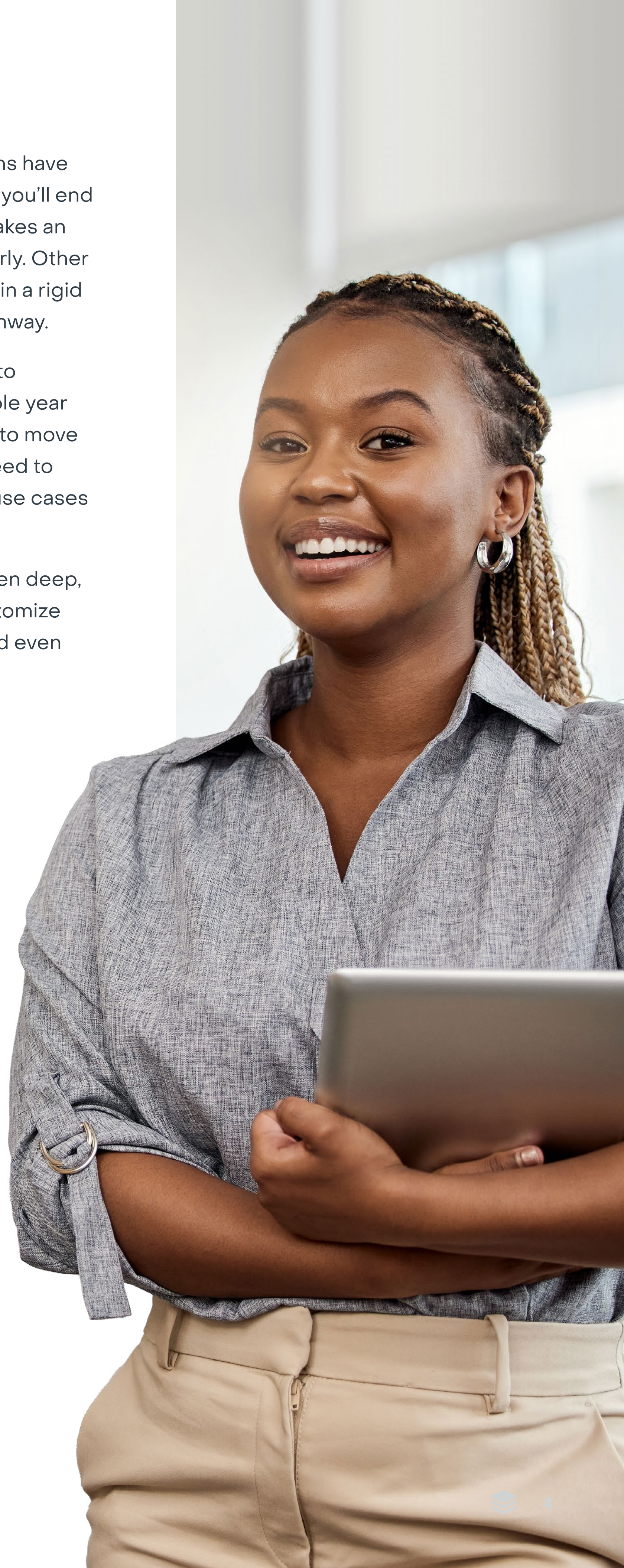
Choosing a CRM system is a big decision for any organization, whether you're starting your first implementation, switching out point solutions, or performing a cross-departmental replacement. But the process doesn't have to be a daunting challenge that keeps you up at night. Several key tenets can guide a wise decision-making process and help you rethink your age-old workflows.

Out-of-box CRM features are great, but the key is knowing how to add real value to your existing competencies and styles of doing business. Most CRM systems will get you 80% of the way there, but the remaining 20% makes the implementation special. Your specific selection process and deployment should reflect the core DNA of your company's brand and competitive differentiators so you can supercharge your customer experience.

There are many options out there. Some CRM systems have broad functionality and address most use cases, but you'll end up paying the price in complexity. In these cases, it takes an army, not just a village, to get it up and running properly. Other CRM systems are easier to deploy, but you're locked in a rigid configuration. In these cases, it's their way or the highway.

Another consideration is your ability to react quickly to market conditions. Most companies don't have a whole year to implement and adopt a CRM system, so you need to move quickly to reach an acceptable time to value. You'll need to experiment to see what features work best for your use cases and make updates quickly and efficiently.

It all comes down to striking the right balance between deep, complete technical capabilities—easy to deploy, customize and derive organizational value—while preserving and even amplifying your brand and style of doing business.



> **"SugarCRM has a four-part vision of what a successful SFA solution must encompass. Together, these components—its high-definition customer experience, no-touch information management, continuous innovation, and lifelong commitment to customers—lay the groundwork for transformational growth and distinguish SugarCRM in a crowded field of respected contenders."**
>
> —**JEANINE S.,** INDUSTRY DIRECTOR, FROST & SULLIVAN

Amplifying Your Customer Experience

In this era of increasing customer-centricity, your customers care only about their experience with your products and services, not your internal challenges and organizational complexities. They expect a seamless cross-functional experience from the moment they first visit your website, to when they consume your demand generation content and nurture campaigns, to buying, to communicating service requests, to becoming customers for life.

When customers have a seamless journey across sales, marketing, service, and every other critical touchpoint, they enjoy a high-definition customer experience (HD-CX) —one that shapes their sentiment with your company on a fundamental and personal level. Remember, you're buying CRM for your customers and their experience. It reflects your organization's brand and tech-savviness and shows empathy for their needs.

With the right CRM at your fingertips, you can:

- Evaluate and personalize all customer journey touchpoints
- Determine how to optimize your customer's experience—from first touch to contract
- Create a consistent cadence of sales, marketing, and service activities
- Provide a singular, 360-degree view to all customer-facing and go-to-market teams
- Anticipate and address customer needs before they arise with AI-powered predictions
- Create seamless omnichannel experiences

With the right CRM, you can turn every stakeholder into a customer expert, armed with insights and information often before they even ask for it. A high-definition customer experience driven by your CRM platform just makes the hard things easier.

> **"Our customers got confused battling with inconsistent journeys. The new CRM has given people a better toolset but it's also enabled a cultural change, so our vision for customer experience is now a reality."**
>
> **—ERIK F.,** CIO, P&N BANK

AI-Powered CRM

When AI is purpose-built into the infrastructure of your CRM, you gain unprecedented predictive insights and automated intelligence to drive business efficiency and results. Pre-packaged, embedded analytics link insights to action and make it easy for end users to master without any data science or AI expertise. AI-powered CRM enables a wide range of use cases, including:

- Engagement-driven lead scoring and likelihood to convert through the marketing funnel
- Sales opportunity scoring on the likelihood to close and next-best action
- Sales playbooks and prescribed communications throughout an opportunity
- AI-assisted forecasting, customer churn prediction, and upsell/cross-sell optimization
- Time intelligence to capture changes in sales stages and assign ownership and action
- Experience-led support and service optimization to identify critical behavioral signals
- Conversational AI to enable chatbot interaction and customer dialogue analysis
- Generative AI to assist users with email creation, call scripting, etc.

> **"Sugar is honored to be recognized as a Technology Innovator in the Gartner Tech Innovators for Intelligent CRM Applications report. The transformative powers of AI are broad and far-reaching, but the time to value is vital. Just as our customers expect the classic functionality of CRM to 'just work,' Sugar makes AI just work for customers – putting the power of AI in the hands of every business, no matter the size, business maturity, or technical sophistication.**
>
> **—RICH G.,** CHIEF TECHNOLOGY OFFICER, SUGARCRM

Gartner

Easy, Intuitive, and Accessible: Will Your Users Actually Use It?

Like any technology, users must see its value to use it. If you make the interaction approachable, easily accessible, and practical, your teams will step up and adopt it because they want to. They'll see all the data they need at a glance, guiding them along each next step to optimize every action they take. A "one tab to success" view replaces multiple open tabs (a messy, unwieldy approach) to make it more intuitive and contextual.

Don't think about CRM in terms of 'configuration.' It shouldn't be that complex. Instead, think of it in terms of accessibility—giving the people using it total control over how they use it, update it, and expand it.

No matter how much you invest in CRM to make your sales teams' day-to-day more productive, you'll never realize its immense benefits if no one buys into your vision and actually uses it to its fullest potential. That's why it's so critical that your CRM be easy to set up, easy to configure, and easy to use. According to recent SugarCRM research, sales, marketing, service, and IT leaders are in agreement that the top terms to describe the SugarCRM platform were customizable (56%) and easy to use (46%).

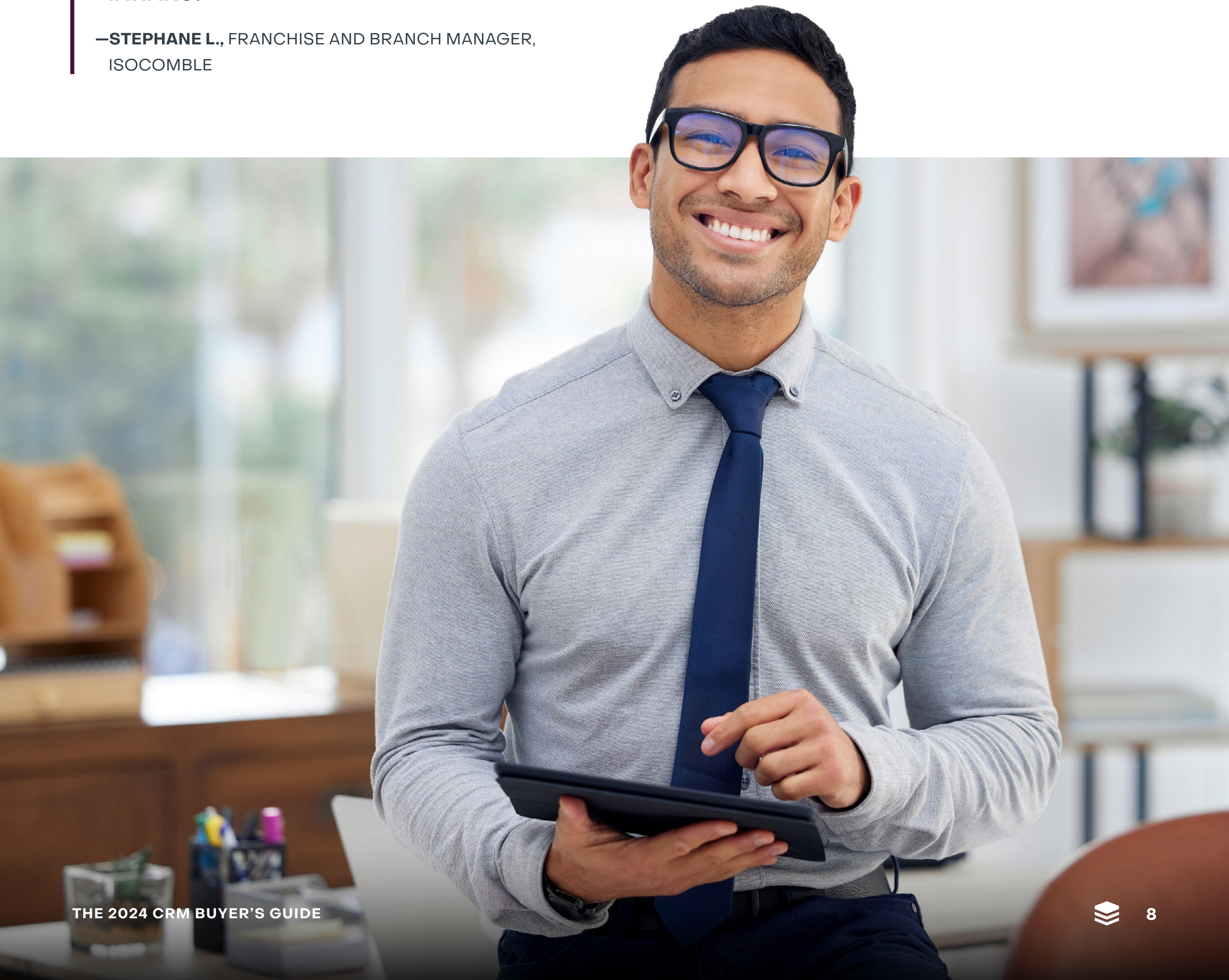
> **"SugarCRM has the highest user adoption in the marketplace because it keeps it very simple for the end users."**
>
> —**GARRETT H.,** VICE PRESIDENT OF CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE, BRAINSELL (PARTNERING WITH SUGARCRM CUSTOMER TETLEY HARRIS ON TRANSITION)

You shouldn't need a team of consultants building out functionality. A small team of admins should build and customize views and effectively run the entire system. A configurable and accessible CRM solution makes it effortless to create user roles with unique characteristics, easily defined, and adaptable to change over time.

> **"SugarCRM is powerful, scalable and evolving. That's what we enjoy the most about it. If I have a new activity or need tomorrow, I know that I will be able to set it up with a tool or feature. Sugar's evolution is almost infinite."**
>
> —**STEPHANE L.,** FRANCHISE AND BRANCH MANAGER, ISOCOMBLE

The right CRM system lets you own the UI, creating and changing it without technical expertise. It should offer:

- Drag-and-drop configuration of the interface, even for mobile
- Easy stylization of the UI by admins to match your brand
- No training required—user has full control over the UX, dashboards, and reporting
- Simple configuration and adaptability of mobile capabilities for sales and field teams



Connecting Key Processes and Stakeholders

With the CRM foundation in place, the day-to-day of your connected workflows can bring your CRM to life. It starts at the top, with a pre-defined strategy to align KPIs upfront and establish an agreed-upon set of definitions across departments. By building a shared "dictionary" of common terminologies, each team understands what success looks like, such as what a qualified lead is, when an issue is resolved, and what constitutes a satisfied customer.

Moreover, the internal handoff process must be clearly documented to ensure a seamless transition from marketing to sales, service, finance, and other key customer-facing groups. The more each team knows upfront about their handoff requirements, the better-aligned teams will be and the more coordinated the customer experience will look.

> **"Sugar has become our core resource for customer information and employee experience has improved across the board. It is heavily utilized by the sales team, and with the ability to automate and allocate tasks, Sugar has quickly become an essential tool within Delv. Driving adoption isn't a concern, as it's simply a must-have tool for all our team members."**
>
> **—DELV**

Core CRM Use Cases

Consider these key use cases and how the information flows throughout each process:

PIPELINE INSPECTION

Account managers determine what is likely to close each quarter, prove how likely the close will be, and keep the most accurate amounts up to date. Enhanced capabilities help inspect pipeline forecasts and make the analysis clear at every stage of approvals and rollups, from AMs to the Sales VP, CFO, CEO, and Board of Directors.

REVENUE FORECASTING

Sales teams are called upon to perform an analysis and make a call on how much upside will come in for each potential opportunity, and with the right CRM system, this can be done quicker and more efficiently. Enhanced intelligence helps determine what the appropriate commit numbers are at each approval level and what the upside might be. Forecasts can be easily aggregated up the approval chain, and estimates can be revised as circumstances change across a quarter, for example.

Self-service Engagement

Forward-thinking businesses recognize the benefits of reliable and intuitive self-service portals for improving overall customer service since they allow companies to create better customer experiences in the moments that matter. User-friendly solutions help you to engage with customers on their terms, empower your employees with real-time insights, deliver on promises with operational excellence, and listen more closely to the voice of your customers.

Marketing and Sales

Marketing and sales are better when they work together. Marketing teams with a complete view of customer accounts have better context to engage more effectively and have a higher success with passing the baton to sales at the right time. Leads need context: for example, which campaigns they've responded to, which content each person has downloaded, webinars they've attended, and which promotions they've engaged with. Accounts can easily be scored to determine the type of engagement most relevant for each and how to handoff to sales to empower a more targeted outreach and communication. Better qualification of leads will invariably drive stronger alignment and trust between sales and marketing teams.

> **"Being able to analyze email campaign results allowed our sales team to formulate direct and concise follow up—and generate activity that would have been forgone."**
>
> —**LARON W.,** SALES MANAGER, NEENAH PAPER

Recurring Revenue

Many companies rely on a strong recurring revenue stream based on subscriptions and renewals. Having out-of-the-box capabilities to manage and simplify the process is a core CRM competency. Smart solutions make it easier to create automatic service renewal at the expiration of the initial contract, add or adjust service levels, amend and prorate subs and pricing based on approvals, create a full history of each transaction, and track ongoing service, subscriptions, and adjustments.

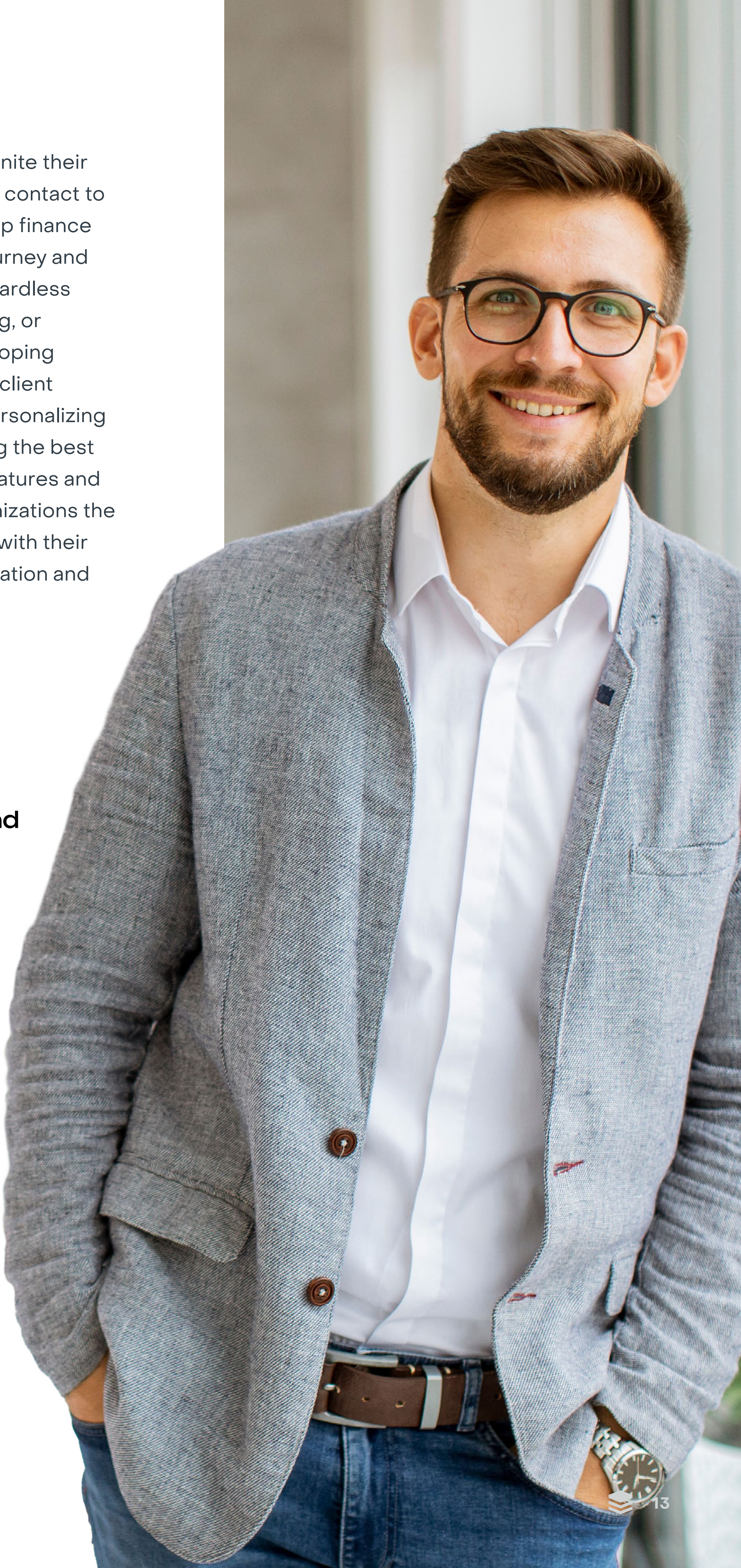
Intelligent Service Workflow

Coordinated sales and service alignment ensures that every service case is dealt with in the most informed manner to boost the customer experience. Workflows automatically trigger next-step interactions for service teams, and service calls can be routed easily to the right subject matter expert to provide the most impactful solution. In cases where SLA thresholds are not met or exceeded, alerts can be automatically generated and intelligently routed to guide the service resolution lifecycle. CRM-enabled customer support ensures better post-sales delivery, installation, and other add-on services.

Finance

Financial service firms lean on CRMs to unite their front, middle, and back offices. From first contact to the final solution approval, a CRM can help finance teams streamline the entire customer journey and turn it into a hassle-free experience. Regardless of whether you're in the banking, investing, or insurance sector, you can focus on developing deeper client relationships, streamlining client management, maximizing client value, personalizing financial planning services, and delivering the best customer service. With its specialized features and functionalities, financial CRM gives organizations the ability to build long-lasting relationships with their clients by consolidating customer information and facilitating seamless communication.

> **"When we saw the tight integration Sugar Market and Sugar Sell had, transitioning to Sugar Market was a no-brainer for us."**
>
> —**JULIE F.,** DIRECT MARKETING MANAGER, CIRESON



The Power of the CRM Platform

Today's high-performing CRM platforms are built for flexibility, with the ability to fit into any infrastructure, technology, or process environment. It starts with the simplicity of coding, which is open and developed with standard common programming languages (not proprietary). Coding options make it easier to optimize user interfaces, lower operational complexity and evolve capabilities to match business growth. Three common coding models supported include:

NO-CODE
Process automation is all run in the background in response to changes to user data. Business processes are more easily orchestrated across departments, and each user can configure screens with simple customization.

LOW-CODE
In this model, it's easy to pull in data from external data sources (such as LinkedIn contact data) and integrate and validate with other systems.

FULL-CODE
Many companies want to build something unique for users and show off their brand's 'secret sauce'. This model builds in functionality seamlessly to display their real differentiators.

> "What I like about Sugar is how much room we have to grow and become more efficient over time. With Sugar, we feel the scale is unlimited."
>
> —**NICK C.**, CO-FOUNDER, COMMUNITY TAX

CRM is also built to be designable. Systems should be easily configurable to behave any way a user wants, with the flexibility to plug right into each distinct process. Workflow rules, conditional automation, triggers, and SLA functionality can be orchestrated without hitting the technology wall. The system should optimize:

- Cloud and on-premises options, hosting files in the vendor cloud or your AWS cloud or datacenter
- Mobile capabilities, where every process can be configured and accessed via mobile
- Easy integration to external solutions such as LinkedIn for browsing a customer's circle of contacts and apps that scour media sources to surface news activity for an account
- AI-powered capabilities, including pre-built predictive models to help you make decisions, navigate massive amounts of data, and discover relevant insights
- Natural language processing (NLP) combining structured with unstructured data (such as social, email, and call center recordings) to assess urgency, prioritize cases and create better automated responses
- Easy integration with ERP and MRP systems, with unlimited API calls

> **"All you need is a vision of where you want to go, and then you can adapt Sugar to meet your needs."**
>
> —**SHEILA J.,** EVP OF OPERATIONS, STAR2STAR COMMUNICATIONS

The Importance of Connected Customer Data and Insights

Imagine trying to create a great customer experience when every stakeholder, from sales and marketing to service, IT, and finance, works from a different playbook. Everything you do revolves around your ability to act on customer data and requirements and orchestrate coordinated action. First and foremost is your ability to offer every team the same comprehensive view of each customer interaction. By creating a shared data platform across all CRM activities, where data flows seamlessly across the organization, you set the stage to provide a consistent experience that allows teams to:

AUTOMATE ANYTHING

Help your sales teams avoid having to manually enter endless details by investing in a platform that automatically captures data and presents it in context with everyone who needs it. Then, and only then, can sales reps focus their efforts on the most promising prospects and customers and spend more time selling.

ACCELERATE EVERYTHING

Focus on the right leads and opportunities, engage customers anywhere, manage pipeline and forecast, and quote and close deals when you let the platform do the work. Smart guides and playbooks help accelerate sales cycles and time to close while improving conversion rates.

ANTICIPATE WHAT'S NEXT

Gain unprecedented sales insights with predictive forecasting. Understand past performance to make accurate predictions from a historical perspective. This allows teams to proactively track extensive metrics, identify issues and opportunities with root cause analysis, and leverage data from every point in time to enable more informed decisions.

NUCLEUS RESEARCH

NUCLEUS RESEARCH

SugarCRM named a Leader in the 2023 CRM Technology Value Matrix

NUCLEUS RESEARCH

NUCLEUS RESEARCH: ANATOMY OF A DECISION – SUGARCRM | 2022

45% time reduction on data entries and 15% increase in lead generation reported amongst Sugar customer

From a functional standpoint, that means providing:

- Current, fresh data in real-time that offers a 360-degree view of every customer.
- Contextual dashboards and reports that immediately display the exact information you need and make it easy to drill into the accounts for more detail.
- Insights into what's at stake in each account and opportunity, arming you with a deeper picture to take proactive or corrective action, even before a potential problem arises.
- Visualization of the data to help users conceptualize information, determine the next best action, and act decisively.

Think of it as behavioral science—seeing vital historical activity across sales, pricing, marketing, service issues, and even customer conversations that will shape every ongoing interaction.

NUCLEUS RESEARCH

95%

Sugar accelerates campaign creation by 95%

50%

Reduce marketing teams' workloads by 50%

15%

Sugar increases sales agent productivity by 15% on average

Success Metrics Checklist

Checklists are essential to ensure you're not missing anything in the selection process. Here's a sample guide and best practices:

SUCCESS METRICS: A CHECKLIST

- ☐ **Customer Relationship Management:** Track whether sales, marketing and service teams have a clear picture of the customer or prospect activity to identify new opportunities and deliver an exceptional customer experience.
- ☐ **Conversion Rates:** Track current conversion rates across all defined sales stages to establish baselines to benchmark success. Include sales, upsells, and cross-sells in tracking.
- ☐ **New Business Growth:** Track new customer accounts and net recurring revenue.
- ☐ **Sales Performance:** Get as granular as possible with your team's performance, such as average sales cycle, deal size, opportunity win rate, lead response times, and time management.
- ☐ **SLA Compliance:** Manage performance and compliance with service level agreements with your customers (and among internal teams)
- ☐ **Customer Advocacy:** Look at customer sentiment indicators and combine them with peer review sites, social media, and Net Promoter Score (NPS).

SUCCESS METRICS: A CHECKLIST

- [ ] **Customer Retention:** Gather key data points that may alert you to potential churn risk and put programs to become proactive instead of reactive to customer needs.
- [ ] **CRM Adoption:** A CRM system is only as good as its users. Set adoption and usage goals for each department, including taking advantage of certifications, training courses, and product experience software.
- [ ] **Employee Productivity:** Help employees identify ways to streamline their work by simple changes or access to better data, and socialize those improvements as CRM-related success.
- [ ] **Lead Quality:** Leverage AI-powered features to predict which leads are most likely to convert and close and keep an eye on lead to opportunity conversation rates.
- [ ] **Automated Outreach:** Compare response rates and outcomes of automated programs versus manual efforts to show success. Use personalization whenever possible.
- [ ] **Engagement and Communication:** CRM should help keep customer relationships fresh.
- [ ] **Speed of Response:** Track time to resolution for customer service representatives with incremental improvements to workflow and an integrated service platform.
- [ ] **Fulfillment and Onboarding:** Measure whether the CRM is helping you complete post-sales operations faster.
- [ ] **TCO:** Set a budget for CRM implementation, maintenance, and growth, and measure against it. Target cost savings related to the CRM deployment and measure for improvements.

How You Can Follow the CRM Buyer's Roadmap

Whether you're starting from scratch with a single process or replacing an unwieldy, complex CRM system, it takes planning and alignment to make it all go smoothly.

The need often starts with just one department, such as marketing needing better campaign management or sales needing better customer visibility. But you don't want point solutions to solve individual needs when you can integrate so much more. Fully analyzing the scale of your implementation requirements will help you set the stage for better results.

Do your due diligence and determine how to link one-off needs into one comprehensive solution. Get the right stakeholders involved across all departments (your A-team), and define your workflows, engagement parameters, common measurements, and inter-departmental needs. That's when you'll discover the gaps and bottlenecks and how your unique deployment can overcome the business challenges. Finally, remember that a CRM platform isn't just a starting and ending point. It should put you on a continuous improvement and innovation path to align your teams and provide a high-definition customer experience.

Revolutionize Your CRM and Business

Learn what SugarCRM can unlock within your organization.
A better solution is just a click away.

GET DEMO

About SugarCRM

SugarCRM is a CRM software that helps marketing, sales, and service teams reach peak efficiency through better automation, data, and intelligence so they can achieve a real-time, reliable view of each customer. Sugar's platform provides leading technology in the sales automation, marketing automation, and customer service fields with one goal in mind: to make the hard things easier. Thousands of companies in over 120 countries rely on Sugar by letting the platform do the work. Headquartered in the San Francisco Bay Area, Sugar is backed by Accel-KKR.

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