

CUSTOMER MANAGEMENT

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RightNow Technologies Brings Social Into the Customer Experience

by Chris Fletcher

RightNow Technologies recently rolled out RightNow CX at its annual user summit in Colorado Springs. RightNow November '09 will tightly integrate social networking capabilities from **HiveLive** (acquired earlier this year) into the RightNow CX Platform, making it one of the few, if not the only, CRM application services with tightly integrated social networking capabilities. It will be offered via the cloud or as software as a service (SaaS). RightNow has more than 1,900 companies in B2C industries, including consumer goods, retail, high-tech, travel, public sector, and life sciences.

RightNow extends CRM's scope, invokes social

RightNow CX is equal parts market repositioning and new technology. With RightNow CX and the integration of HiveLive, the company is placing a big bet that Enterprise 2.0/Web 2.0, including communities, blogs, wikis, and social networking, will play a major role in redefining the customer experience. The company is also moving its market positioning away from general CRM (which, in fairness, was never a great description of its capabilities) and focusing its message on providing multi-channel and social-network-based customer support for consumer-centric industries. RightNow calls RightNow CX the customer experience product.

The technology includes RightNow Web Experience (web self-service, chat, e-mail management, and mobility), RightNow Social Experience (support and innovation communities based on wikis, blogs, social networking apps, and cloud monitoring), and RightNow Contact Center Experience (phone and multi-channel support, case management, agent scripting, and workflow). All of these "experience" capabilities are based on and tightly integrated with the RightNow CX Platform.

RightNow CX is unique in providing a single customer information and directory for all application services. A product inquiry made through a social community

can thus automatically be made part of that customer's transaction record and automatically forwarded to a call or chat center agent for resolution or action. A complaint or comment about a company's service (witness the YouTube phenomenon "United Breaks Guitars"—RightNow was kind enough to feature singer/guitar victim Dave Carroll singing his hallmark song at the summit's keynote) can be caught, addressed by an agent (or by a chat, e-mail, or Twitter response), and hopefully turned into a positive experience. It also provides a single knowledge base so a customer receives consistent answers on all the interaction channels.

Social networking can also change the way a company interacts with its customers—for example by encouraging customers to submit suggestions for future product features and enhancements. HiveLive reported that one of its high-tech customers gets more than 50% of its feature, function, and enhancement ideas from its customer-led Innovation Community. It's this type combination—traditional CRM and contact center functions with social networking and community capability—that makes RightNow CX unique.

Social: Redefining the scope of CRM

RightNow is making a big bet on social networking, using this rapidly growing phenomenon and the acquisition of HiveLive to rebrand itself on the customer

experience. Social networking has already changed the way customers interact with their providers and each other. If RightNow can deliver the announced capabilities for November '09 on schedule, it would be the only prominent CRM or customer experience vendor with a tightly integrated social networking platform.

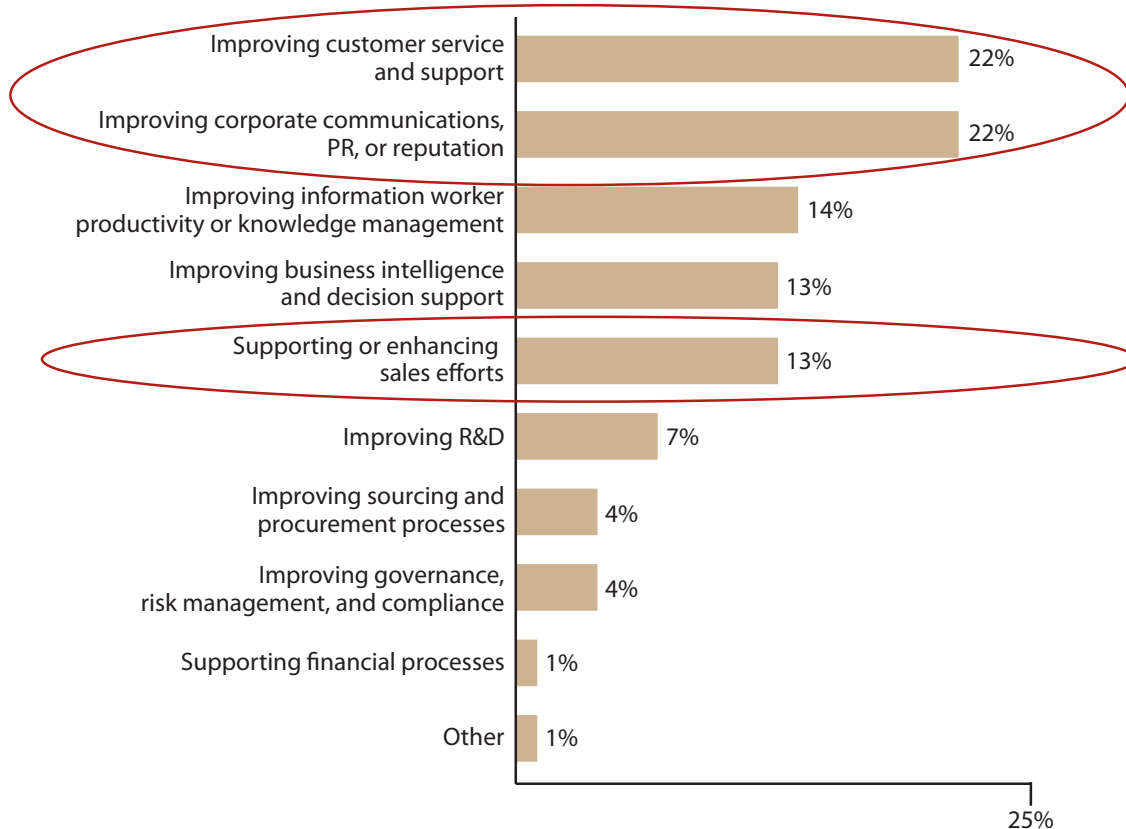
And it's a good bet that the customer experience will mesh with social computing and Enterprise 2.0 efforts. When asked about the business issues driving their companies' use of Enterprise 2.0, 57% of respondents to an AMR Research survey conducted last year cited customer-facing objectives, including improving customer service and support, supporting sales efforts, or improving corporate PR and communications.

Meanwhile, the social networking marketplace comprises more than 100 providers, ranging from

Enterprise 2.0 platforms like **Atlassian**, **Jive Software**, **Lithium**, and **Socialtext**, to open source products like TWiki, to 2.0 enhanced collaboration and content management platforms from the likes of **Microsoft**, **IBM Lotus**, **Open Text**, **Google**, and **Oracle**, to external services like Facebook and Twitter. But none of them are intended specifically to provide CRM functionality.

While several CRM vendors (Microsoft, **NetSuite**, Oracle, **SAP**, and **salesforce.com**, for example) have announced integration with third-party social networking tools, deep integration at a foundational directory level is mostly lacking, at least without custom development and integration. This limits a company's ability to build a central customer data repository, provide agents and support employees with a single source of customer

Figure 1: Business issues driving use of Enterprise 2.0



Q: Which of the following business issues is driving your company most toward the adoption of Enterprise 2.0 tools and technologies?

Percentage of responses, total respondents—n=200

Source: AMR Research, 2009

transactions, deliver complete and accurate analytics, and make social-network-based interactions involving the company or its products an integral part of the customer support and service experience.

On the other hand, with the plethora of Enterprise 2.0 and social networking products, platforms, and tools, which are all too readily and freely available to users already, many IT groups are concerned about out-of-control proliferation. Should marketing, sales, and service have their own dedicated platform for social CRM, while the rest of the organization standardizes on a platform like SharePoint from Microsoft or Connections from IBM for general-purpose knowledge management and collaboration?

The social customer experience warrants a specialized system for now, but one that's based on standards and is open to integration with adjacent systems. Social CRM has a dedicated purpose and requires tight integration with business applications and data, so the business case for a focused customer experience suite versus general-purpose social platforms is compelling.

The bottom line

It's important to understand the potential of social networking and the customer experience as well as how these technologies can be harnessed to deliver on corporate objectives. B2C companies in consumer goods, retail, life science, healthcare, and high tech, in particular, must treat social networking as more than a short-term phenomenon and develop plans to integrate this new channel into its CRM—or, if you prefer, customer experience—strategy.

Because success in CRM, customer experience, and social networking is heavily dependent on alignment with company business objectives (something RightNow founder Greg Gianforte has stressed for years), it's imperative this strategy involves more than just a technology rollout. A complete customer experience strategy must also include input from stakeholders in customer support and service, product development and product planning, as well as sales, marketing, and PR. They'll all feel the impact.