



CRM Meets HANA: SAP Launches its Customer Experience Platform

With so much chatter around the customer experience, have SAP and Oracle gone soft on us? In a CRM flip-flop, both enterprise giants are talking more about winning customer hearts, than customer wallets. Differentiating on customer needs and end-user touch points seems odd when so much revenue rests between massive volumes of operational data and traditional CRM applications.

However, manufacturers working on slim margins may like the softer approach adopted by both companies. Turns out, a customer-focused strategy can lead to more orders and richer returns.

Oracle's Play

Using tour stops and evangelism, Oracle has stayed busy this year pushing its Customer Experience portfolio and solutions strategy designed to exceed customer expectations throughout the entire customer lifecycle, building trust, loyalty and repeat business along the way. Cobbled together from organic capabilities and recent acquisitions, Oracle's Customer Experience suite forges online and in-store channels with both social and mobile.

SAP Counters in Madrid

SAP just responded with its own kindler, gentler approach to managing gobs of data along a CRM platform. Against the backdrop of Sapphire Now 2012 Madrid, SAP co-CEO Bill McDermott introduced SAP 360 Customer, a solution tying SAP's HANA in-memory database to its CRM offering, salted with additional applications for delivering "transaction, text and analytics processing on one platform," according to SAP technology chief Vishal Sikka.

In Madrid, SAP's Tobias Hoppe-Boeken demonstrated how to pull and display a customer's buying power and profitability in an instant using something called "customer value intelligence." Hoppe-Boeken called it "an easy way to get onto 8 billion records and analyze your whole portfolio in a second." Or an easy way to determine a customer is spending a lot, but not bringing home a lot of margin. Armed with real-time intelligence, an on-site sales professional would then pivot and pitch something more profitable on the fly.

SAP lauds 360 Customer as a breakthrough for combining transactional data with social, then pushed to iPad-type devices for actionable insight. A HANA support pack will round out the package providing "integrated application services, key enterprise capabilities for high availability, disaster recovery and integrated text analytics, as well as key OLTP optimizations." Altogether, migrating SAP CRM customers to an integrated HANA platform.

How does this impact a manufacturer? Making smarter decisions around the customer builds both speed and intelligence into the supply chain. From interactive selling to

showroom space, high-powered CRM tools yield more profitable partnerships.

In practice, here's how 360 Customer benefits both current and future SAP users:

Real-time insight: Get a 360-degree customer view based on front-office interactions, back-office transactions and social network data. Really, proprietary customer insights fused with predictive analysis.

Real-time Interactions: Create personalized offerings reflecting customer needs and wants. Leverage instant data across multiple channels to resolve issues and introduce new products and services.

Real-time execution: Build better brands through differentiated customer experiences. Transform and empower front-line staff with powerful tools for engaging customers across marketing, sales and service functions.

Customer Experience or Elegant Power?

Keeping with the industry-wide theme, SAP brass preached in Madrid more engagement, value and loyalty than 360 Customer's ability to ride HANA's in-memory superpowers to data glory throughout a customer-facing organization. "It will enable organizations to create a superior customer experience while driving operational excellence by empowering the mobile workforce, fostering collaboration, executing transactions faster and providing better response times," said SAP in a statement. Regardless of angle, 360 Customer nudges HANA forward as a technological weapon of choice.

Analysts aren't buying this sudden concern for the plight of the customer, from either SAP or Oracle. But few offer anything to suggest 360 Customer isn't a worthy competitor to Oracle's integrated CRM solution. We'll see if the customer experience mantra truly has legs – or if anybody cares. Right now? We like the real-time data and the higher margins that come with it.