ToutApp wants Microsoft Dynamics CRM customers to refocus on sales productivity

by Jason Gumpert, Editor   published March 13, 2015

Sales productivity startup ToutApp, which recently closed a new $15 million round of series B funding, has its eye on the productivity of sales reps that use Microsoft Dynamics CRM.

The company is part of an emerging software category that aims to re-focus companies on maximizing the productivity of sales people and improving CRM adoption at the same time. The trick is giving sales people an optimized interface that captures the right data and integrates to CRM but focuses exclusively on the activities that make sales most productive.

Microsoft has for years hung its hat on the popularity of its Outlook integration to Dynamics CRM. In reality, the Outlook integration advantage of Dynamics CRM has been thinning for a few years. The topic came up almost three years ago at WPC 2012 as the Dynamics CRM team arrived at a crossroads in the product's evolution. The team chose a path forward that included a reimagined user interface with a greater focus on building an experience that guided users - including sales reps - through business processes more intuitively. Since then, Dynamics CRM has overhauled much of its approach to sales, starting in earnest with the CRM 2013 release and continuing with CRM 2015. Business process flows and a streamlined interface now offer user something completely different from the world of CRM 2011 and earlier. It is an approach that would support the concept of improved productivity for sales and other users.

But the email-centric needs of sales people never went away. Dynamics CRM's improvements in process, marketing automation, customer service, and reporting only serve to highlight the growing complexity of the world in which sales teams operate. For better or worse, a sales-driven organizations needs more CRM involvement

from sales than ever before. What they don't want is sales reps spending more dealing with CRM tasks.

Outlook remains the application where many sales people spend their work day. For ToutApp CEO Tawheed Kader, the real goal is keeping sales people in Outlook (the do have other interfaces but Outlook is the most popular) focused on selling rather than dealing explicitly with CRM. Kader points to research that puts the actual selling time of sales reps at 33 percent. Companies that maximize their sales people's time are the ones that will grow revenue fastest.

"For longest time, CRM was the end all be all for sales software," says Kader. "More companies are starting to realize that CRM is for sales management primarily. [It enforces] good practices, data, forecasting, and it's how CRM has been built."

Kader says ToutApp's value comes from its combination of a sales-optimized experience for communicating with leads and its integration back to CRM (or, in some cases, a marketing automation system). The result is better data flowing back to CRM for sales managers. The product sees success in organizations - over 300 now use it - due to its quick uptake by sales people, says Kader. They often get a foothold in a sales organization via a single sales person or small team of reps who sign up, install the tool, and begin finding value from features like reusable email templates, tracking information, scheduling meetings, and other getting engagement information.

Beyond that, Kader says the company does plan on working with reseller partners in top down sales as well.

Expect to see more from ToutApp in the Dynamics CRM space in the next six months in terms of both partnerships in the Dynamics CRM ecosystem and in improving the integration. And as a software segment, watch for more vendors, both veteran and new to the Dynamics CRM space, offering up their own take on CRM sales productivity solutions to augment the core product.

Kader believes the time is right to sell CRM customers on focusing on their sales reps once again. He believes his company's traction in the market so far and its new round of funding will grow their strength in the space.

"There have always been tools, but not enough investment and interest to make it a real category," he says. "Customers tell us - we don't want to buy eight tools, we want one [sales] solution. And we want to deliver that."