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Plugging in to DealerSocket

U.S.-based CRM company sets its sights on Canadian dealerships with an 'all-encompassing' program

BY JACKSON HAYES

Some argue the only way to truly understand a problem is to live with it.

Taking that philosophy to the extreme, software consultants Brad Perry and Jonathan Ord spent a year working in a California new-car dealership exploring every possible issue facing CRM software.

For free.

"To develop that full-service approach, you have to really understand the business," co-founder Ord explained. "We thought it would make for a better application and drive more value to the dealer long-term if we really understood all those processes."

What became of their 52 weeks of guerilla research was the successful CRM solution DealerSocket. The program, launched in 2002, was what Ord calls the first "all-encompassing CRM platform" allowing for full customization and communication between all departments in the dealership.

Six years and over 1,000 dealerships in several countries later and DealerSocket has made the jump across the border and is slowly replacing CRM programs in Canadian stores.

"This was the first product in the marketplace that had an all-in-one solution," said Sam Rizek, executive sales manager for Canada. "It didn't matter if you were looking for a CSI solution, if you wanted to do a full

service DRM push and pull between the DMS, or full front-end desking tool."

Rizek said that while the multitude of CRM offerings perform individual tasks – like tracking phone calls, advertising and Internet traffic, maintaining service information, offer call blasts, etc. Often times they are programs from competing companies so there is no communication between, for example, the service department program and the business office software.

DealerSocket, he said, offers a customizable solution for all that enables communication amongst the different departments in your store.

"Last year we did 360 installs in 365 days," he says of the growth. "It's been remarkable."

"Most of the people that develop software applications for dealers do it in a piecemeal fashion – a service guy does it for the service department, but it didn't have a lot of information about what the general manager looks at on daily basis or the business office or on the CSI side," Ord explained.

He said the holistic approach of DealerSocket could actually save dealers money by doing away with all the separate CRM programs in operation.

In terms of Canadian competition, DealerSocket says it is the only company offering a total solution for every department. While there is some solid CRM portals in place now, Rizek conceded, DealerSocket works across the board in every department.

"When a customer comes in and they are logged into the system, it will show every penny they have ever spent in that dealership. In any department – no matter if they have bought a part or had some service, it will show the entire history," he said.

It's a customer centric system and not transaction-based.

Ord, who says his goal is to "dominate" the Canadian market, said he could realistically foresee about 100 Canadian stores running his software in a year's time. He said there has not been a solution like this before because it's less complicated to proceed with a narrow focus.

It is just plain easier to develop, support, maintain single department solutions, he continued, and not offer a program for adoption across the board.

"Our goal is not to create a flash in the pan, build the company up and sell it to ADP in five years," he said. "That's what most of them have done."

"We really tried to take a holistic approach and say 'what does this dealer need and how do you use this information across every single function area?' and really drive the value across the whole enterprise."

And though it is more challenging to get there, he said the reward is well worth it.

For more information on Canadian operations, contact Sam Rizek at 949-900-0300 or visit www.dealersocket.com.