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# Looking Beyond Traditional CRMs To Develop Your Relationship Intelligence



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*As CEO of [Affinity](#), Ray's goal is to bring relationship intelligence to the world because every opportunity begins with a relationship.*



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Customer relationship management platforms (CRMs) have been around for a long time, and for very good reason: They're a foundational and generative part of any company's tech stack.

Whatever your business, if you manage any kind of pipeline — sales, investments, portfolios, deals or opportunities — you need a log of all your interactions with your customers and prospects.

Every deal begins with a relationship. But CRMs don't usually tell you much about the *nature* of the relationships you have with your clients, prospects and the people you do business with — or the relationships they have with one another.

In addition, to be of any value, people must be diligent about entering data accurately into their CRMs. Like most user-oriented technology, the more it relies on manual intervention, the less likely it will be to remain up-to-date, accurate and useful.

## **Sales Vs. Relationships**

Traditional CRMs are well-suited for high-velocity sales or short-term, transactional relationships. They work well for a sales cycle that moves in a straight line down the funnel, from prospect to qualified lead to demo to sale, and then over to account management for customer service and upsells.

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Because I believe in the exponential power of relationships — where one plus one equals much more than two, and two times two equals an infinite number of possibilities — I like to think that all sales are ultimately relationship-driven. But some companies offer products

whose delivery is straightforward and don't require much facetime with customers. And for consumer brands, the consumer's relationship is really with the brand itself, not a specific person.

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However, there are numerous companies and industries whose relationships are collaborative, whose workflows are unstructured and whose needs are not met by traditional CRMs. Venture capital, private equity, investment banking, consulting and commercial real estate, for example, are all businesses that thrive in a relationship economy in which the most successful people build long-lasting relationships throughout their careers. And the length (and depth) of each relationship is what ultimately creates value.

## **Invest In People**

When you meet a business acquaintance for coffee or to play golf, you're making an investment in that relationship. It might turn out to be a one-off, or it might evolve into a casual friendship. Or it could add to your wider business network's orbit: a colleague and long-term asset who accrues value over time and becomes key to lucrative business down the road.

That's not part of a sales cycle, and it's hard to put your finger on whether or when the relationship will convert into a deal. But it's the kind of relationship that's important to follow if it's eventually to be capitalized. Surprisingly, this key currency of the relationship

economy is rarely well-tracked — and the ecosystem in which it exists isn't well-understood, either.

Even if a traditional CRM were able to manage a nonlinear way of doing business, it would still be maintained manually. And the more effort required to update a CRM — that is, the more data entry the CRM's users must do — the less likely its users will remain engaged with it.

## **Develop Your Relationship Intelligence**

How do you determine the best way to get introduced to someone you suspect will be helpful in moving your next deal or mandate forward? How do you gauge how well two people involved in a sprawling, multibillion-dollar deal might know each other? How do you find out who among the people you know would be best placed to introduce you to someone you want to do business with?

If you're like many people I know, you open up LinkedIn to look at their job histories and where they went to school. Maybe you log into your email and find your most recent correspondence to see what you last spoke about. You scroll through your texts with the colleague who first mentioned them to you. You check a few industry databases to find out more about their companies. You search the web for news articles about them. You scroll through their Twitter feed. Maybe you even cruise by their Facebook and Instagram pages to find out about their nonwork lives. And, of course, you log into your CRM.

But you still don't have the basis for a personal relationship with them. Instead, you've got a dozen tabs open in your browser because you're trying to establish a more organic connection on your first Zoom call.

People and relationships can't be described only by records in a CRM platform: They exist in a complex amalgam of their own experiences, interactions and relationships with peers, colleagues, friends and business associates. And parsing that complexity can be a key to success.

## **An Intelligent CRM**

The richest source of data about your business relationships is actually in data exhaust — data that's produced and spewed out by tools and platforms we use every day. These are communications streams everyone has access to but whose value is underestimated.

Now, what if all that information were captured automatically and available everywhere you need it to prepare for a meeting with a new prospect, client, investor or funder? Leveraging all of that information would give you much of the relationship intelligence you need to make the most of that conversation.

That information shouldn't be spread across a forest of separate browser tabs. It should be automatically entered into your CRM, enhanced with information from public and industry resources. It should be intertwined and interrelated to magnify its utility and show you opportunities within your own network that you didn't realize existed and, ideally, available in the interface of any app or platform you use to do business.

Easy access to that data, and the relationship intelligence it informs, can create a world where anyone can cultivate and fully harness the power and potential inherent — or hidden within — their business network. And because relationships are the most valuable asset that any company holds, that relationship intelligence can help any business succeed.

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