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**The Surge of CRM Management Software for Marketing Purposes During the
Pandemic**
Master's Thesis

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T.C.
ISTANBUL TICARET UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES MASTER'S PROGRAMME IN
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ABSTRACT

This research is aimed to bring to light the changes that had occurred in the digital marketing sector due to the coronavirus pandemic and specially the surge of customer relationship management (CRM) applications for marketing purposes during this period. This study will include definitions of CRM applications, the different types and companies that offer CRM services, the unification of company's communications with customers using CRM applications, information regarding the web 7.0, along with the changes in the consumer behavior during the pandemic and an analysis regarding the change of tool for a US IT company with a branch in Athens, Greece.

In the scope of this research, there will be included a series of scientific in-depth interviews with experts of the marketing industry from different parts of the world. These interviews will be directly focused on the changes that the pandemic has brought to the marketing industry and why companies have made serious investment in their CRM applications to run their business.

The method that will be used in this research is qualitative method as in-depth interview, now that there are going to be scientific interviews, and studies of the cultural phenomena; along with measurable data analysis of the increase of usage of CMR applications in companies.

This study will be framed in with the example of a series of international companies operating in Athens, Greece, and their usage of CMR applications to operate their business. The time frame that will be study corresponds to the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic, in 2020 until the present days, end of the 2021.

Key words: Customer relationship management (CRM), analytics tools, e-commerce, analytical CRM, inbound marketing.

ÖZET

Bu çalışma, koronavirüs pandemisi döneminde pazarlama amaçlı müşteri yönetimli ilişkiler (CRM) uygulamalarının artması nedeniyle dijital pazarlama sektöründe meydana gelen değişiklikleri gün ışığına çıkarmayı amaçlamaktadır.

Bu çalışmada, CRM uygulamalarının tanımları, CRM hizmeti sunan farklı tür ve firmalar, firmaların CRM uygulamaları kullanılarak müşterilerle olan iletişimlerinin birleştirilmesi, web 7.0 ile ilgili bilgiler, pandemi sürecinde tüketici davranışlarındaki değişiklikler ve Atina'da şubesi olan bir ABD bilişim şirketinin pandemi döneminde kullandığı CRM araçlarına ilişkin bilgiler derinlemesine görüşme yöntemiyle belirlenmeye çalışılmıştır.

Bu çalışmada kullanılacak yöntem niteldir. Bu araştırma kapsamında dünyanın farklı bölgelerinden pazarlama sektörünün uzmanlarıyla bir dizi bilimsel derinlemesine mülakata yer verilecektir. Bu derinlemesine görüşmeler, doğrudan pandeminin pazarlama endüstrisine getirdiği değişikliklere ve şirketlerin işlerini yürütmek için CRM uygulamalarına neden ciddi sayılabilecek yatırımlar yaptıklarına odaklanacaktır.

Bu çalışma, Atina, Yunanistan'da faaliyet gösteren bir dizi uluslararası şirket ve işlerini yürütmek için CRM uygulamalarını kullanma örneği ile çerçevelenecektir. İncelenecek olan zaman dilimi, koronavirüs pandemisinin başlangıcından, 2020'den günümüze, 2021'in sonuna kadar tekabül etmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Müşteri ilişkileri yönetimi (CRM), analitik araçlar, e-ticaret, analitik CRM, gelen pazarlama.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

COVER PAGE	I
TITLE PAGE	II
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	III
ABSTRACT	IV
ÖZET	V
TABLE OF CONTENTS	VI
LIST OF FIGURES	VIII
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	IX
LIST OF TABLES	X
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 1	2
LITERATURE REVIEW	2
1.1 DEFINITION OF CRM SOFTWARE IN THE MARKETING INDUSTRY	3
1.2 HOW DOES CRM APPLICATIONS WORK?	5
1.3 NAMES OF CRM SOFTWARE AND WHICH IS LEADING IN THE MARKET	6
1.4 INCORPORATION OF ANALYTIC TOOLS IN MODERN CRM SYSTEMS	7
1.4.1 Other types of CRM:.....	9
1.4.2 On-Premise CRM systems:.....	9
1.4.3 Cloud-based CRM systems:.....	10
1.4.4 Functionality based CRM systems and its types:	10
1.4.4.1.OPERATIONAL CRMS SYSTEMS.....	11
1.4.4.2.ANALYTICAL CRM SYSTEMS.....	12
1.4.4.2.1. Usage of the analytical CRM technologies.....	13
1.4.4.2.2. Descriptive analytical CRM.....	14
1.4.4.2.3. Diagnostic analytical CRM.....	14
1.4.4.2.4. Predictive analytical CRM.....	15
1.4.4.3. COLLABORATIVE CRM SYSTEMS.....	16
1.4.5 Channel Management	17
1.4.6 Different types of analytics tools:	18
1.4.7 Microsoft Power Bi.....	21
1.5 UNDERSTANDING BUSINESS INTELLIGENCE	22
1.6 CLOUD TECHNOLOGY AND ITS RELATION WITH THE CRM INDUSTRY.....	24
1.6.1 Why companies could be interested in CRM applications on the cloud	25
1.7 EMAIL MARKETING VIA CRM APPLICATIONS	26
1.7.1 The importance of video for marketing purposes in social media.....	28
CHAPTER 2	30

2. DEFINITION OF MARKETING	30
2.1 MARKETING MIX	31
2.1.1 Product	31
2.1.2 Price	31
2.1.3 Place.....	32
2.1.4 Promotion.....	32
2.2 MARKETING AND THE ITS RELATION WITH CRM TECHNOLOGIES.....	32
2.3 INBOUND VS OUTBOUND MARKETING STRATEGIES.....	33
2.4 THE IMPACT OF SEO IN MODERN MARKETING.....	35
2.5 A GRAY ZONE FOR CRM APPLICATIONS	36
2.6 CONSUMPTION PATTERNS DURING THE COVID-19 PERIOD	37
2.6.1. Remote work became the norm	38
2.7. THE PANDEMIC EFFECT IN GREECE	39
2.8. USAGE OF CRM APPLICATIONS DURING THE PANDEMIC	40
CHAPTER 3.....	43
3. RESEARCH FRAMEWORK	43
3.1. AIM OF THE STUDY.....	44
3.2. METHOD FOR THIS RESEARCH	44
3.2.1. Secondary data analysis	45
3.2.2. Primary research method	45
3.3. SAMPLING.....	45
3.3.1. Universe of this study	45
3.4. IN DEPTH INTERVIEW WITH MARKETING EXPERTS	46
QUESTIONARY:	47
3.4.1. First interview:	47
3.4.2. Second interview.....	49
3.4.3. Third interview.....	51
3.4.4. Fourth Interview.....	52
3.5. FINDINGS.....	54
3.5.1 FIRST SET OF FINDINGS.....	57
3.5.2 SECOND SET OF FINDINGS.....	58
3.5.3 THIRD SET OF FINDINGS	59
CONCLUSION	61
REFERENCES.....	64

List of figures

Figure 1 (Grand View Research , 2022)	4
Figure 2 (Google, 2022).....	20
Figure 3 (Microsoft docs , 2022)	22
Figure 4 (HubSpot , 2022)	27
Figure 5 CRM model (Hernandez Rodriguez) 2022.....	55
Figure 6 Better SEO rating (Hernandez Rodriguez) 2022.....	60

List of abbreviations

CRM = Customer Relationship Management

CMR = customer-managed relationship

SEO = Search Engine Optimization

BI = Business Intelligence

SaaS = Software as a service

ROI= Return on Investment

List of tables

1) Research Framework.....	43
2) Variable 1.....	55
3) Variable 2.....	56
4) Defining an analytics strategy in marketing.....	57
5) On predictive marketing.....	61

Introduction

The following research is an attempt to explain the surge of customer managed relations (CRM) platforms for marketing management purposes during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

These technological tools have gained renown during the past years due to its combination of services and applications that allow companies to centralize its communications with its customers. During the previous years, there has been an increasing interest in the data analytics industry and nowadays CRM platforms are merging other tools to provide better statistics and metrics to its users.

In the first parts of this research, there will be an explanation of the concept of CRM, the characteristics, usages and different types of it; along with a brief introduction on the companies that are leading the industry.

The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in the marketing industry are going to be explained briefly, along with its situation in Greece.

There will be an analysis and in-depth interview with part of an IT company from the United States, for security reasons, the name of the company and the team members are not disclosed in this research. Team members of the marketing department of this company will explain further their usage of the CRM technologies to excel its operations.

CHAPTER 1

Literature review

During this research, the work titled Challenges of Developing Effective Customer Relationship Management by Joseph E. Agwaye is going to be taken as a reference as it is a valuable source of recent information regarding the current state of the CRM industry.

The work titled Contributions of CRM Applications to Company Performance by Cem Duran and Yeliz Ekinici is also going to be part of this research due to its correlation with the topic and the relevant insights that this can provide.

Definitions and terms regarding the Customer Relationship Management industry are going to be partly taken from different works and sources. One of them is going to be detailed research made by Christopher Sirk in 2021 for the website CRM.org. This source will be a valuable asset in order to explain terminology, types of CRM platforms, its usage and what companies provide what services and which ones are leading the industry currently.

The research carried out by the Grand View Research during this year (2021), was also a part of this study due to its relevance in order to better

The information regarding the coronavirus pandemic and its situation in Europe is going to be taken from the work titled Fear and Employment During the COVID Pandemic: Evidence from Search Behavior in the EU by Wouter van der Wielen and Salvador Barrios. This work will be a great asset to correlate the pandemic crisis with the levels of fear and unemployment during the pandemic.

Different works on Search Engine Optimization (SEO) and inbound marketing and outbound marketing are going to be mentioned as well during this study, along with a series of in-depth interviews with experts of the marketing industry to give examples on how to better make use of CRM applications.

1.1 Definition of CRM software in the marketing industry

CRM is an acronym for Customer Relationship Management, this is a software and platform that centralizes customers interactions with a company in order to improve their business operations, their levels of retention, improve customer loyalty and service and lead to improve revenue and sale (Dalili & Beheshtifar, 2018).

This software is currently designed to assist a company in centralizing their communications with their customers, facilitate the interaction and improve the company's growth and earnings (Sirk, 2021). The types of CRM software are several and they come with different characteristic that are targeted to companies with different targets or goals. In the upcoming chapter the different types of Customer Relationship Management software is going to be thoroughly discuss but by now it is of good use to know that CRM nowadays come in different presentations and they vary according to a company's needs.

Aside from assisting a company in managing their communications with their customers, nowadays CRM software also provide channels for internal communications inside a company, vendors, partners of a company, investors and external collaborators (Agwaye, 2020). Other systems offer advance analytic tools, that help the company to predict consumer behavior, find trends, highlight problems in the pipeline and this, as a result, will translate into optimization of customer service, better interaction with the customers, retention and more sales and revenue.

Some CRM systems are specifically customized for marketing purposes, some others for sales and some others just on customer service. These platforms also help companies to organize their workflow, keep track of their business and customers, follow the transactions and modify their operations based on the customer needs (Sirk, 2021).

Based on a research that was conducted by the company Grand View Research during this year (2021), Customer Relationship Management (CRM) is the largest and fastest-growing software market today (Grand View Research , 2022). The global customer relationship management market size was valued at USD 43.7 billion in 2020 and is expected to reach USD 96.5 billion in

2028 following an annual growth rate (CAGR) of 10.6% from 2021 to 2028 (Report ID: GVR-1-68038-912-8, 2021).

In the following chart, displayed on the previously mention report, it can be seen the current market value of this kind of software along with the prediction of growth for the next seven years, the geographical area that was selected for the studies and the organizations studied in order to carry out this study. It is no wonder that big CRM companies like SugarCRM, Salesforce, Microsoft corporation and Oracle corporation were part of this studies.

Customer Relationship Management Market Report Scope

Report Attribute	Details
Market size value in 2021	USD 47.6 billion
Revenue forecast in 2028	USD 96.5 billion
Growth Rate	CAGR of 10.6% from 2021 to 2028
Base year for estimation	2020
Historical data	2016 - 2019
Forecast period	2021 - 2028
Quantitative units	Revenue in USD million/billion and CAGR from 2021 to 2028
Report coverage	Revenue forecast, company market share, competitive landscape, growth factors, and trends
Segments covered	Solution, deployment, enterprise size, end-use, region
Regional scope	North America; Europe; Asia Pacific; South America; MEA
Country scope	U.S.; Canada; Germany; U.K.; France; Spain; China; India; Japan; Australia; New Zealand; Brazil
Key companies profiled	Salesforce.com, Inc.; Microsoft Corporation; SAP SE; Oracle Corporation; ADOBE INC.; SugarCRM Inc.; Zoho Corporation Pvt. Ltd; Copper CRM, Inc.; Insightly, Inc.; Creatio

Figure 1 (Grand View Research , 2022)

1.2 How does CRM applications work?

The Customer Relationship Management (CRM) tools are the most powerful and effective tools that the marketing department of all types of companies can use to make the company grow and it has become a pillar of any digital marketing team to excel in their operations by using this kind of software. It has become an integrate part of the communications of a company and nowadays it is possible to send newsletters, generate analytic charts and stablish even direct sales via de CRM software.

Aside from this, it provides with tools to improve team communications internally and offers a platform to direct campaigns to customers, customers, vendors and partners of the company.

These tools provide the companies with different strategies and means that they can follow and use with the use of the internet and the capabilities of different software options. These strategies and means aim to assist companies interact with potential and current customers. The purposes is to attract new customers and maintain a good relationship with the current ones. (Nahar & Dhaka, 2014)

A Customer Relationship Management (CRM) tool helps a company get in touch with people from other companies or freelancers, retrieve data and use them in favor of the company. Information such as e-mail addresses and telephone numbers of people who work for different companies, needs of the individuals that work for a company or of the whole company. All these information can be used to offer to potential customers what they need.

In addition, a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system can give to the company a clear overview of its customers. Through a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) tool the company can see everything in one place — a customer's previous history with the company, the status of their orders, any outstanding customer service issues, and more. Also, the company can even choose to include information from their public social media activity — their likes and dislikes, what they are saying and sharing about the company or its competitors. In this way, the company can keep having its customer satisfied and / or cover new needs that may be created.

In conclusion, a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system gives everyone — from sales, customer service, business development, recruiting, marketing, or any other line of business — a better way to manage the external interactions and relationships that drive success. A Customer Relationship Management (CRM) tool can ensure that customer needs are at the forefront of business process and innovation cycles. Also, better understanding of the pipeline of sales or prospects coming in, making forecasting simpler and more accurate. Manage and optimize campaigns and lead journeys with a data-driven approach. With visibility and easy access to data, it's easier to collaborate, increase productivity and the company's income.

1.3 Names of CRM software and which is leading in the market

The past decade has seen a rapid growth in Customer Relationship Management applications because of the vast advances in technologies and the information technology industry (IT). Also, factors like the global economy and globalization -with the spread of mass consumption- have led to a widespread use of CRM applications (Agwaye, 2020).

Also, CRM applications have become a major tool in the marketing industry as it works as a database that makes emphasis on advertisement aspects that a company wants to promote and, in many cases, increase the sales of a product. (Kampani & Jhamb, 2020).

CRM systems are divided into open-source CRM applications, that offer a higher level of customizability and coding -for example companies like Oro CRM and Sugar CRM- and ready to use CRM platforms that offer a wide variety of templates, analytics and predesign options that doesn't necessarily require coding, some examples of this type of CRM applications include HubSpot, Salesforce, Sage CRM, and others.

Nowadays this type of applications is also called E-CRM systems as they are dealing directly with the management process of customer's relations online. This name also includes all the technologies that are involved in the characteristics of a CRM application, exe their capability of analytics and recording a lead's interaction with the companies' communications (Kampani & Jhamb, 2020).

According to a study made by the IT research company Info-Tech research group, the three most widely used CRM systems by the time are Zoho CRM, Pipedrive CRM and Sugar CRM. Oracle CRM is also another system widely used by companies worldwide along with Microsoft Dynamics, Salesforce Sales Cloud, HubSpot and Sage CRM (Info-Tech research group, 2019).

The study carried out by Info-Tech gives a valuable inside on who is leading in the CRM marketplace. According to the official website of Zoho CRM, the company has a network of over 250.000 companies in 180 countries, making it the leader in the Customer Relationship Management system (Zoho CRM , 2021).

Companies are relying on their CRM applications to unify their channels of communication with their customers and these systems are evolving into a consolidate platform that combines all the marketing communications of a company with the direct customers and, in some cases, also effectuate the sales of a company's product directly through the CRM application.

As the industry continues evolving, and big data is becoming a source widely used by companies to obtain their leads, data mining is becoming a standardized process due to the adaptability of customized and ready to use CRM platforms.

1.4 Incorporation of analytic tools in modern CRM systems

In order to board this topic, it is necessary to clarify what are analytics tools. These tools work along with key performance indicators (KPI) these indicators are a series of metrics used by managers at a certain organization to determine whether the way a business is going is according to the expectations of the leaders of the company or the opposite (Marr, 2012), in other words, these are metrics to determine if businesses are going well or bad.

Authors have developed in the past a series of formulas to calculate different KPI's and the topic is widely cover in other sources but for the purpose of this research is just relevant to understand that some of the most important KPI's are net profit, revenue growth, customer retention, customer satisfaction, etc.

Different industries and sectors have different KPI's depending their business goals. KPI's are relevant because analytics tools are registering these metrics, and business administrators are going to be taking into consideration that data in order to take their decisions in terms of where to add or reduce investment.

The Web Analytics Association published in 2017 a series of definitions regarding the most common terms use in web analytics. In this document, the association gave a description to the metrics that are being evaluate by web analytic tools like: page views, visits, unique visitors, new visitors, conversions etc. (Burby & Brown, 2007).

Analytics tools refer specifically to an engine capable to measure, acquire, analyze and report data gathered across the web (Bekavac, 2015) these tools are combined in an effort to improve the user web experience and analyze the different KPI's that an organization may have.

The measurement process may vary according to the used tool but most of modern analytic tools are focused on performance indicators and the results are expressed with graphics and figures.

Bekavac explains that web analytics tools use two main ways of data gathering, this includes log files that are uploaded to a server and tags on a website.

Analytics are not just mere tools for measuring data on the web but they work as a process to evaluate and optimize operations by analyzing costs, customer behavior, and the goals of the organization or entity making use of them. In order to make use of these tools effectively, the user needs to take into consideration a couple of steps like determining their objectives, define their KPI's (they can vary for every enterprise) gather the data, analyze it and, after getting the results, implement the necessary changes in the organization (Bekavac, 2015).

1.4.1 Other types of CRM:

CRM systems can be also be differentiated into two other categories and subcategories, these are:

- Based on their installation
- Based on their functionality

These two categories have the following subdivisions: for CRM systems based on their installation we have On-Premise CRMs and Cloud Based CRMs. On the other hand, CRM systems that are based on their functionality are divided into operational CRMs, Analytical CRMs and Collaborative CRMs (Deshpande, 2021).

1.4.2 On-Premise CRM systems:

This kind of CRM its preferred for companies that handle sensitive information, like financial companies, companies that work in the health industry and insurance companies (Deshpande, 2021), this is kind of CRM is preferred because the system is hosted directly on the companies server and not directly on the cloud, *quod* it is not hosted online (Bitrix 24, 2021).

As it is a “self-hosted” CRM system, the companies can have full control over their data and costumer’s persona information. Many times, this kind of system is open source and, as explained before, this means that the CRM can be codified in a personalized way, something that cannot be done if it was a cloud-based system (Bitrix 24, 2021).

An example of an On-Premise CRM system is Microsoft Dynamics CRM. Normally big companies prefer this system because of its elevated cost so small business wouldn’t be interested on acquiring this kind of CRM.

1.4.3 Cloud-based CRM systems:

This kind of CRM systems are online based and normally the companies that use this kind of application have to pay monthly or annual fees for its usage. Companies may prefer to host on the cloud their CRM because of the customized and easy to edit capabilities it has, aside from the possibility to store the information online rather than in a physical server of the company, giving a possibility to back-up and access the information easily (Deshpande, 2021).

One of the latest developments in terms of CRM management has been the integration of communications of the company with the customers and the sales; nowadays companies like HubSpot or Salesforce are integrating their services and giving the possibility to their customers to communicate directly and to close transactions with a customer directly over the CRM platform, without redirecting a company's customer to another system.

There is a wide variety of CRM systems that are cloud based, these are just a few examples of the companies leading the cloud:

- Agile CRM
- Cooper CRM
- Sugar CRM
- EngageBay CRM
- Salesflare CRM
- HubSpot CRM
- Salesforce CRM
- Zoho CRM

The list of cloud CRM companies can be quite large but the previously mentioned companies are the ones leading the industry at the moment.

1.4.4 Functionality based CRM systems and its types:

As it was mentioned previously, this kind of CRM system is divided into *operational CRMs*, *analytical CRMs* and *collaborative CRMs*.

1.4.4.1. Operational CRMs systems

This kind of systems are mainly focused on the sales managing, marketing and customers engaging with a company, this helps the company to track their leads and supports the customers service (Deshpande, 2021).

As this type of operational CRM system offers the capability of service automation, it makes the process of handling tasks more efficient. This type of Customers Relationship Management system is generally cloud based (Al-Homery, Asharai, & Ahmad, 2019).

What makes operational CRM so distinctive from the other two main types (analytical CRMs and collaborative CRM) is that this kind of system centralizes most of the features of other systems and offers its features to the costumer. It centralizes the sales, interactions, the communications and the marketing process in one system, making it a widely preferred by all sorts of companies regardless of their size (Sirk, 2021).

Some examples of this kind of CRM can be the following:

HubSpot CRM:

This system is one of the most used operational CRM systems worldwide due to its affordable price, and its easy to customize platform, it offers the possibility to do inbound marketing, project management, sales and also it includes tools to improve the internal work of companies (HubSpot , 2022). It has several advantages, like the fact that it offers a free version of its system, yet limited, and many companies opt for a paid version in order to be able to use all the features that the system has.

Zoho CRM:

This system is generally used by small business and the main reason for this might be that Zoho CRM offers the possibility to connect easily the social media channels of the company to the platform (Zoho CRM , 2021).

Really Simple Systems CRM:

The main feature about this CRM system is its simplicity, that allows its customers to communicate effectively and connects all the communication channels on the platform, to establish connections between the vendors, customers, suppliers and leads easily (Sirk, 2021).

Accelo CRM:

This system's particularity is that it is targeted for sales mainly and the tools that it offers are designed to accelerate a company's business projects, sales and collaborate with the service operation software (Bekavac, 2015).

Pipedrive CRM:

This system is focused mainly on the pipe-line process (the first contact of a customer with a company and its first sale or post purchase) and offers tools specifically for this purpose (Agwaye, 2020).

1.4.4.2. Analytical CRM Systems

Analytical CRM refers to systems that have specific tools to track and register the interaction between the company and its customers. As a sale or a transaction is recorded, this process generates data and an analytical CRM comes to help the company to display this information in order to be used for marketing purposes, to track sales data and the customer service performance via stats (Al-Homery, Asharai, & Ahmad, 2019).

This kind of CRM are preferred by companies who want to record in an intelligible way their customers data in order to use this information for customer retention, that means, to keep the customer coming back to the business (Sirk, 2021).

This kind of CRM is mainly focused on analyzing data of the customers so that companies can make their decisions based on these stats (Deshpande, 2021). For example, this sort of systems

might include the information of a customer reach, the emails they open, their clicks on a company's newsletter and posts etc.

Some cloud CRM systems have features of analytics in their predesign settings, for example the CRM company HubSpot has a section dedicated to the analytics for the business that have a paid subscription.

This kind of system is in charge of storing a customer and companies' information in a safe manner, process it and deliver data that can be useful for the improvement of the company's operations (Sirk, 2021).

1.4.4.2.1. Usage of the analytical CRM technologies

This kind of CRM can be used by companies for several purposes, for example to discover patterns or trends in the customer's behavior, to forecast future sale opportunities, to predict a customer's next move via algorithms and to track a customer's interaction with the company (Bezhovski, 2015).

The system also allows to measure the levels of customer's satisfaction, follow the company's growth, follow a customer's life cycle, -the first interaction, sale, retention- and, by doing so, a business can improve its customer service and this would lead to customers' loyalty and retention (Sirk, 2021).

The marketing campaigns of a company can be optimized by having more control over the data generated and this could lead ultimately to an improvement in quality of the future campaigns.

It is important to mention that analytical CRM systems can be divided into four different types (Zoho CRM , 2021), these are:

1. Descriptive analytical CRM
2. Diagnostic analytical CRM

3. Predictive analytical CRM
4. Prescriptive analytical CRM

1.4.4.2.2. Descriptive analytical CRM

This kind of CRM is focused on analyzing existing data of previous customers activities in order to give metrics and statistics regarding the current status of a business. Normally this kind of CRM system is used to analyze sales campaigns, profits and losses (Bezhovski, 2015).

Descriptive analytical CRM examples are as follows;

As it was mentioned previously, descriptive analytical CRM tools are focused on revising previous data of a company to establish the current status of a business (Sirk, 2021). Here are some examples of descriptive analytical CRM providers:

- HubSpot: This CRM tool has been mentioned before in different categories and that is because it is a platform that combines the characteristics of several other types of CRM systems. For that reason, it is one of the most used platforms nowadays.
- Creatio: This CRM tool can be included both in the descriptive analytical category and the prescriptive analytical category.
- Alteryx CRM: this CRM system is capable of integrate with Microsoft Dynamics 360, making it a versatile tool for companies.

1.4.4.2.3. Diagnostic analytical CRM

This kind of system analyzes previous data but at the same time registers problems during the execution process of marketing campaign, in terms of levels of reach, sales etc. A diagnostic analytical CRM tool mostly focuses on finding errors, patterns and irregularities with the marketing campaigns (Al-Homery, Asharai, & Ahmad, 2019)

As it was mentioned previously, this kind of CRM systems are focused on finding errors or problems in the marketing campaign of a customer via the platform. Here are a couple of examples of this type of CRM tool.

1. Zoho CRM: this tool has a characteristic of irregularity detection. It is included in other categories too as it is a tool with different capabilities.
2. Tableau: This system has the characteristic of using a sales funnel. It is also included in other types of analytical CRM systems as it is mostly focused on that market.
3. Sisense CRM: this tool offers the possibility to connect the irregularity detection pattern and the pattern recognition characteristic. Sisense is a more analytics center CRM platform that intends to bring reporting and analytics to all parts of the workstream (Sisense, 2022).

1.4.4.2.4. Predictive analytical CRM

This type of CRM combines the features of the descriptive analytical systems and the diagnostic systems in order to create predictions about the future. Most of time, this type of analytical system is used to predict the level of revenue (sales) that a company might have after a marketing campaign (Agwaye, 2020).

This kind of system is focused mainly in giving recommendations to a company in terms of their marketing strategy and gives an outlook of how future campaigns might go if certain paths are taken (Sirk, 2021).

Here are some examples of CRM analytical systems and the ones leading the market:

- Creatio is an example of a Descriptive Analytical CRM system; along with other platforms like HubSpot.
- Tableau is an example of a diagnostic analytical CRM system, along with other platforms like Zoho CRM.

- Salesforce is an example of a predictive CRM analytical system; along with templates like SAP Analytics.
- Sugar CRM is an example of a prescriptive CRM analytical system along with IBM Prescriptive Analytics.

1.4.4.3. Collaborative CRM systems

This kind of systems allow the company to share among its departments (internally) a customer's data and also offers the possibility to improve the customer experience by facilitating the communication with third parties like vendors or other partner companies (Deshpande, 2021).

A collaborative CRM system is focused mainly in improving the user experience, also known as UX. This is a useful tool for companies that have a remote workflow as it allows business to have all the communication channels connected, or linked, so the data is centralized. This information is shared among all the parts of the company members, making the operations easier and allows all the members to know the status of all the relevant projects (Agwaye, 2020).

This type of CRM offers the integration of different communication technologies in order to provide better interaction among the users and the customers. This tool merges social media applications, email accounts from both the company and the customers of a business, in order to improve the levels of productivity (Al-Homery, Asharai, & Ahmad, 2019).

Collaborative CRM tools have two components, or parts, these are interaction management and channel management (Sirk, 2021).

There are as well tools that are focused on managing the interaction with the customers. These platforms are called Interaction Management CRM. In this sort of applications, there is a synchronization of the customer's data inside the platform. This facilitates the process of sharing valuable information along the segments of the company and allows the team members to interact among themselves and with customers, vendors and partners of the company (Al-Homery, Asharai, & Ahmad, 2019).

1.4.5 Channel Management

This part of Collaborative CRM systems incorporates all the previous tools in order to guarantee customer satisfaction across all the channels of the company, sales, marketing, social media and more. This process is achieved by the usage of analytics tools, customers data and prediction analysis; as nowadays CRM systems combine analytics tools, it is easier to identify the levels of customer satisfaction across the platform (Kampani & Jhamb, 2020).

There are several benefits of collaborative CRM systems, to mention a few, these platforms help the team to work better, optimize customer retention, facilitate the process of data sharing among the members of the company and help to improve the levels of customer service (Contreras, 2016).

Here are some examples of CRM collaborative systems and the ones leading the market:

SAP Business One

This system allows the company to follow the sales pipeline, interactions with customers, follow up on their data and help to coordinate marketing strategies. (Al-Homery, Asharai, & Ahmad, 2019).

Sugar CRM

This CRM system has been mentioned previously for its different features. As it is one of the most versatile CRM tools, it is no surprise that many companies prefer Sugar CRM for their business.

Microsoft Dynamics 360

Microsoft Dynamics is one of the CRM tools that is leading the market in terms of collaborative systems. This platform allows its users to combine the Microsoft Azure cloud systems, being one of the most used cloud services, it is, often times, one of the preferred options of companies on the cloud that want to make use of CRM tools.

Microsoft Dynamics 360 has developed different apps that can be mixed or removed from its CRM in order to optimize certain aspect of the company's interest. This platform has developed a separate set of modules for each specific need; one for marketing, one for sales another for project service etc. (Deshpande, 2021). This characteristic makes it one of the leading collaborative systems.

Copper CRM

Copper CRM is a tool focused on tracking the movements of the customers or customers in order to close sales. This tool also helps the team members to connect via the CRM, making the operations easier (Bezhovski, 2015).

As it was mentioned before, there are several kinds of CRM systems and this might vary according to a company's needs. Some systems and applications are more suitable for some companies and there is an increasing trend into merging the types of CRMs to offer some of the characteristics of other systems at the same time, this has happened mostly with already customized and template base systems.

This has been a change in the paradigm of CRM systems, as they are progressively evolving into a wholesome entity that combine most of the tools that a company might need to communicate and make transactions with its customers. Part of this change has come due to the surge of the web 7.0, a phenomenon that will be discuss in the following chapter.

1.4.6 Different types of analytics tools:

There are several types of analytics tools in the market nowadays. Some authors divide these tools into two categories according to its tools. One being web log tools and the other being by page tagging tools (Bekavac, 2015).

In the first category we can find tools like Google Analytics, Webtrends Analytics, FireStats, AWStats, Webalizer and Mint. To this list it is possible to add a service provide by Microsoft that has been leading currently in the analytics sphere, Power Bi by Microsoft.

Of the previously mentioned tools, the ones that are currently used the most in the marketing industry are Google Analytics and Power Bi. The advantages of the use of these tools are the following:

Google analytics is a platform that started its operations in 2005, as they state on their official site, it is a “a solution to get complete understanding of your marketing efforts and enhance performance” (Google, 2022).

They revolutionized the web analytics industry by shifting the focus and the power of analytics tools to people, and removed from the minds of the marketers that analytics were an expensive task that required lots of investment and expertise (Cutroni, 2010).

It is important to mention what web analytics are; for this matter, it is possible to mention one of the several definitions of this topic. Web analytics works as a way to analyze qualitative and quantitative data from a website in order to improve the user experience of your customers or possible prospects, leading to the acquisition of the expected goals (Kaushik, 2007).

It offers different advantages like the possibility to customize the dashboard, export the data into several formats, easy visualization of the data via stats and graphics, life visualization of the data and so on (Clifton, 2012).

For web analytics purposes, it would be recommendable for marketing teams to focus on visitor metrics in order to stablish the levels of traffic that a site is getting. This would make easier to visualize the number of visitors the site is having on a certain period, and, perhaps most importantly, will give a clear overview to the conversion rates of a page. That means how many people are registering to your events, filling your forms, download your assets, and the levels of sales.

In the following figure, it is possible to see an example of the Google Analytics interface. In this example, it can be seen a series of graphics and stats. Its user friendly and clear visualization makes it one of the most, if not the most, widely used platform for web analytics.

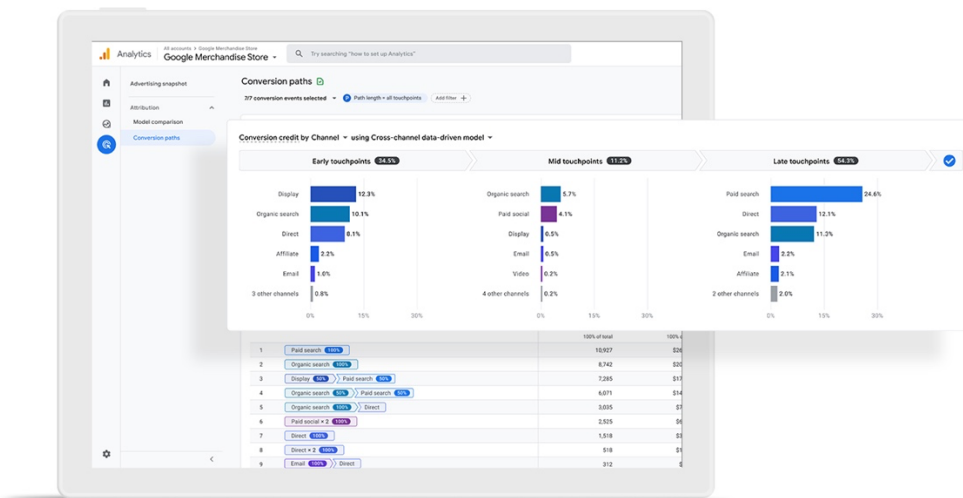


Figure 2 (Google, 2022)

The advantages of the usage of Google Analytics are based also on the combination of tools offered by the company for marketing purposes like Google Ads, Search ads 360, Google Cloud and their search engines; all this combined make it one of the most practical choices for small marketing units.

For companies, to be able to track their web traffic metrics is crucial for their business development, it is necessary for the study of the user experience in the online environment and works as a type of thermometer of the website (Clifton, 2012).

This thermometer allows the marketing team to decide on which areas to pay more attention, to track which platforms are giving more results and to decide the next steps in any campaign.

In general, the goal of using analytics tools is to reach the desired marketing goals of every enterprise via measuring, analyzing and changing patterns that are not working (Cutroni, 2010).

If companies implement that basic model and make use of a joint workflow of Google analytics (or other analytics tool) along with the CRM analytic tools, any medium to big size enterprise will be able to reach up to date data that could drive positive changes in the company and lastly facilitate reaching the desired positioning of the business.

1.4.7 Microsoft Power Bi

Power Bi is a software developed by Microsoft and launched to the market in 2014, even though it has been in the market less time than Google Analytics, this tool has managed to gather adepts and nowadays is one of the predilect platforms of marketers and IT directors in companies to visualize their data and present it a coherent and easy way.

Power Bi is not necessarily an analytics tool like Google Analytics, it differs in several aspects. According to Microsoft's official website, it is a series of tools, services and applications that connects unrelated data sources and converts their data into easy to understand, coherent data presentations (Microsoft docs , 2022).

This application is compounded of three parts, one desktop application (Power Bi Desktop), a second which is an online service (SaaS, acronym for software as a service) and a mobile application called Power Bi Mobile.

The following figure is an example of the interface of Power Bi in its different modalities and parts.

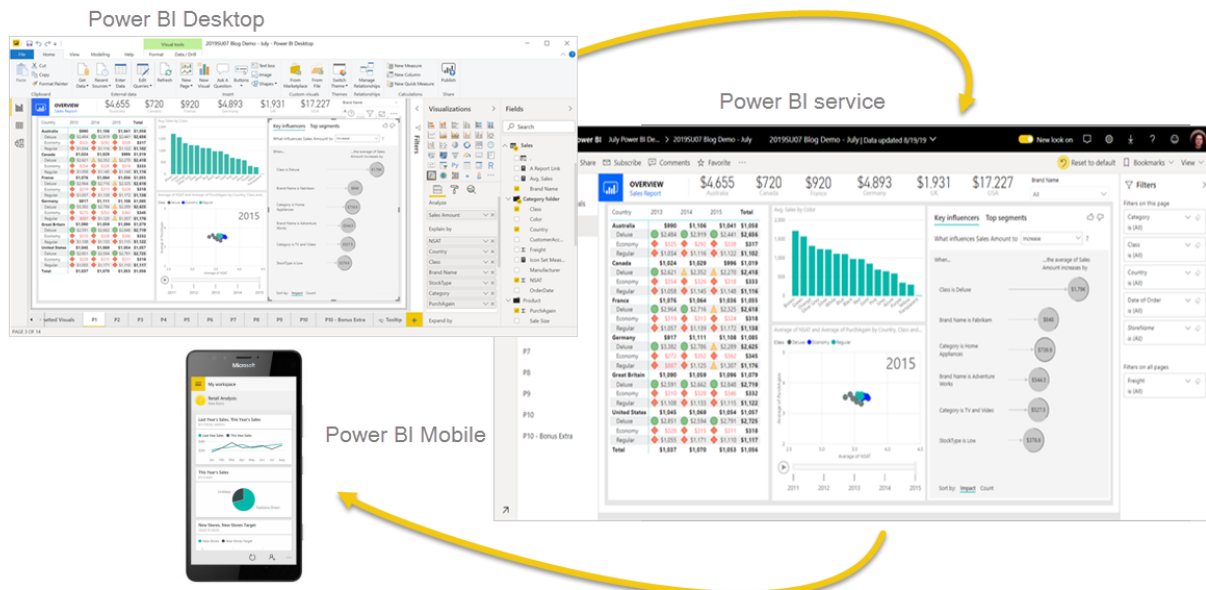


Figure 3 (Microsoft docs , 2022)

1.5 Understanding Business Intelligence

These previously mentioned tools are part of what nowadays is called Business Intelligence (BI) this concept is the process of using technical architecture to gather and collect data, store it and analyzing it (Frankenfield, 2022).

Business intelligence has been in the industry since the beginning of the century and it has been popularized by the generation of spreadsheets by Microsoft Excel in 1994. Since then, companies have been looking to incorporate.

These kinds of platforms evolved from one major need and that was the necessity to understand large amounts of data and represent them into a user-friendly interface. The possibility to represent tabular tables gave the possibility to visualize the data into a set of dashboards, this new form of visualizing the data was later incorporated by most of modern analytics tools and nowadays when you want to visualize your statistics, you will find with a series of dashboards with the different metrics and KPI's your organization is working with (Edge, Larson, & White, 2018).

Another important factor to mention is that modern Bi platforms are integrating their systems with the cloud technology; the further chapter will go into more detail regarding the surge of cloud technologies in analytics and its correlation with the marketing industry.

In the case of Microsoft Bi, this platform combines its features of data visualization with some of the tools available in the applications that run with the Microsoft Azure Cloud platform (Edge, Larson, & White, 2018), here we see a parallel with other companies like Google, that merges their analytics platforms with some of the tools they have available in their Google Cloud environment.

CRM companies are flocking to cloud services due to its benefits regarding hosting of servers. Nowadays it is more common for companies to host their CRM applications on the cloud environment that store them in physical servers. The reason for that change is the elevated costs of maintaining and running an inhouse server.

The US technological research organization Gartner, Inc. published a list of the best rated Bi applications of the market, according to their list these are the 10 best Bi applications nowadays:

- 1) Microsoft Bi
- 2) Tableau Desktop
- 3) Tableau Server
- 4) Qlik Sense
- 5) SAP BI Suite
- 6) QlikView
- 7) Sisense analytics
- 8) Microstrategy
- 9) Tableau Online
- 10) SQL by Microsoft

The whole report can be seen in the references section, (Gartner, Inc. , 2022).

1.6 Cloud technology and its relation with the CRM industry

In order to understand the way modern CRM applications, operate, it is important to analyze the process in which these applications work on the cloud environment. Through the past years, this technology has evolved into a series of different platforms and offers multitude of alternatives of services to all kinds of industries.

The cloud technology concept has been developed by many authors during the previous years but in this research the definition given in the work titled “Cloud computing — The business perspective” is going to be taken as the main definition.

In the mentioned title, the concept of cloud computing is defined as a model of IT services that are offered to customers regardless of the location of the server or terminal. (Marston, Li, Bandyopadhyay, Zhang, & Ghalsasi, 2011) Generally, these services offered are charged per level of usage and represent a cost reduction in IT infrastructure for the end users, giving this a financial incentive for companies.

The most common model is called Software as a Service (SaaS), in cloud computing this often times translates into Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) applications, which is a kind of software that companies make use of for running their day to day activities, like their financial operations, project management, internal communications, accounting and general operations, as this kind of software is also a CRM system, cloud environments need to be acknowledged (Němeček & Vaňková, 2011).

Nevertheless, as ERP applications are not necessarily focused on external marketing purposes, this study will not dive into details in these sorts of applications but it is necessary to understand that these are also CRM applications that, in many cases, have a cloud-based work mechanism.

1.6.1 Why companies could be interested in CRM applications on the cloud

There are several reasons why a company would prefer to use a CRM application on the cloud, a few of these include the fact that the company won't need to make any sort of software maintenance, the level of investment for entry level of usage is lower than if the interested user would store their own infrastructure, the application is part of a central solution, which makes the workflow user-friendly and the system works in a pay per usage way (Němeček & Vaňková, 2011).

To exemplify the previous benefits, it is possible to compare between a company that decides to store their CRM applications in their own servers and one that decides to just make use of a cloud environment; in the case of the company that decides to host their own CRM applications, they would need to buy or rent a physical space to store their data centers and maintain a series of applications running 24/7 which comes at a high expense, and, even if they are not making use of their maximum capacity, they have to pay for all the cost of maintenance, whereas the company that makes use of the cloud alternative doesn't need to think about the physical storage of a data center or paying for maximum capacity when they don't make use of it.

Many companies across the web make use of cloud base infrastructures to run their business, like YouTube for hosting their videos, social media platforms like Facebook (nowadays called Meta) and all their related platforms like Instagram, WhatsApp; Google with an array of cloud-based applications starting with Google Cloud; (Němeček & Vaňková, 2011) to name just a few examples.

Digital Marketing tools allow companies to identify their levels of demand and traffic, hence this allows them to meet customers' expectations thanks to an online environment. (Ivanov, 2019) as cloud environments have an easier and immediate form of tracking consumer behavior, this environment is nowadays one of the most used.

Security comes to play an important role in this sort of environments, as if a company is storing physically their data centers and their servers for their applications, this can represent for some a

more secure environment. That is still one of the reasons that some companies prefer to have control over their data storing centers, due to security concerns.

Nevertheless, cloud environments are stepping forward in the security matter and they are creating more secure environments that are less susceptible to external attacks from different sources, preventing hackers and malware to affect their online data storing centers.

1.7 Email marketing via CRM applications

It is important to mention the relevance of email marketing nowadays. The first emails were sent in 1970 and since then, this tool has been used as well in order to promote business and reach to different audiences effectively.

Email marketing works as a way of direct marketing which is a concept that represents that the prospect is contacted directly in order to convert their communications into work opportunities. By using email campaigns via CRM applications, companies can obtain better results in their sales and marketing projects (Bruner, 2000).

By 2020 there are at least 3 billion email users in the world, according to a report carry out by (HubSpot , 2022). This exemplifies the universe and market of possibilities in the email marketing area and why now email campaigns on CRM applications are one of the most utilized tools in these applications.

Email campaigns via CRM applications allow business to measure effectively their ROI (Bruner, 2000) as nowadays these applications include analytics tools that allow the users to visualize their opening rate, clicks per email and actions taken by the recipient of the email.

In email marketing it is important to take a close look on the type of marketing the interested business is looking for, whereas it is inbound marketing or outbound marketing, the email strategy of the company will vary.

For inbound marketing campaigns, it is important to establish an email marketing strategy that is according to the type of business and their expected goals. If the purpose is to send one singular message to as many people as possible, the company should look for an outbound email marketing strategy.

If, on the other hand, the company is interested in following an inbound email marketing strategy, there are a series of steps they need to take into consideration. According to an online course on Email Marketing by the HubSpot Academy (which is listed in the resources section), it is necessary to consider firstly the segmentation of the email, the personalization of email itself and its design and their post analysis based on data sources or analytics (HubSpot , 2022).

CRM applications nowadays include interfaces for designing email campaigns and they have merged services that were, in the past, services of specialized companies on e-newsletters and email campaigns like MailChimp.

The following figure is an example of the marketing email interface of a CRM platform:

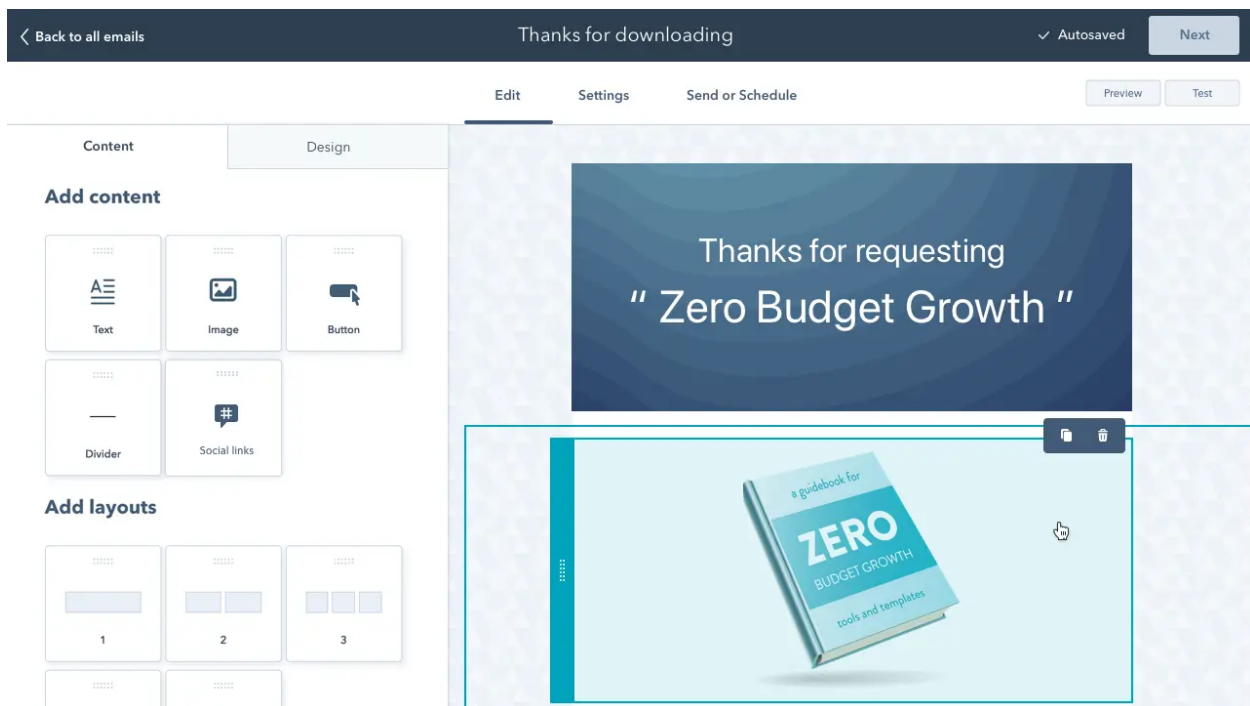


Figure 4 (HubSpot , 2022)

The previous example, by the platform HubSpot, shows the email interface of the CRM. These email blasts are one of the main sources of data for the companies to analyze and, in some cases, companies dedicate most of their marketing efforts on email marketing.

Companies that make use of interactive email marketing tools, like videos, hyperlinks with forms and downloadable assets are able to collect and gather more data from their prospects and this will give the marketing team a better picture on how their customer personas behave and, ultimately, this will translate into better campaigns, more reach ratios and more sales and interactions (Bruner, 2000).

It is also relevant to mention that if a company is carrying out B2B marketing, which means Business to Business marketing campaigns, the approach will be different to when an enterprise is trying to reach any sort of leads and buyers.

1.7.1 The importance of video for marketing purposes in social media

As social media gathers close to 3 billion users globally, these platforms have become the preferred channel for many companies to reach their prospects initially, to engage and to retain them. At least 80% of internet traffic was in the form of video by 2019. If a customer watches a branded video, they are up to 74% more probable to buy or engage in a business (Gilbert , 2019). This shows the huge value of using video in marketing online campaigns.

Video in marketing and in email marketing campaigns give an 80% higher chance of opening rates, (HubSpot , 2022) this is a clear indication that nowadays marketing teams need to take big consideration into video making in order to position their brands in the online arena and use it to target audiences.

Modern CRM platforms are integrating video tools into their interfaces and offer a series of analytic tools that can trace easily whether a contact has watched or not a determined branded video and its percentage.

This is relevant in the sense that marketing teams can decide to approach a lead based on its interactions with the branded videos that the company is promoting.

Sales teams are one of the main benefactors of using video for their interactions with prospects, a new tendency is sending personalized video messages to their prospects via email campaigns, sent via CRM applications, in order to obtain online or physical meetings.

Most of people nowadays read their messages on mobile devices and 55% of them prefer video as the way to consume their information over other forms of content like blogs, articles, images, podcasts etc. (Gilbert , 2019).

CHAPTER 2

2. Definition of Marketing

Before getting deeper into the present research, it is important to clarify a couple of terms and topics that are centric for the development of this study; the concept of marketing needs to be clarified.

It is relevant to mention renowned authors of the marketing area like Philip Kotler, his understanding on what is marketing has been replicated across different studies and he is considered as one of the most relevant authors in history for this subject.

His definition on marketing goes as to explain that marketing is the process to adjust what kind of goods or services will be of interest to the customers (Kotler, 1999).

There are multiple interpretations of what it is marketing, and it is relevant to mention that many authors state that the definitions need to be expanded aside from the traditional explanations.

One of these explanations comes from a work titled “What is Marketing? A Study on Marketing Managers’ Perception of the Definition of Marketing” by Frank Lozada Contreras, in this work, Contreras provides the following definition of marketing:

“It is everything about a company. It’s the management and development of a product or service; it’s the analysis of the competition; the evaluation of culture; public acceptance; without leaving aside the development of the concept of advertising; communication strategy, media planning and advertising tools (direct marketing, traditional media, nontraditional media, events, promotions, internet). And the work with the Finance Department for the viability of a business” (Contreras, 2016).

This is a more elaborate marketing concept that goes beyond the traditional definitions and it is the one that is taken into consideration for the writing process of this study.

2.1 Marketing mix

In the year 1960, the academic E Jerome McCarthy developed a series of marketing interpretations and revolutionized the newly born field of marketing. McCarthy, an American professor and economist that gave lectures in different renowned institutions like Harvard, the Notre Dame University, and the Michigan State University, provided with a new approach and system to the way marketing works.

This model, would be the fundament for the marketing processes to come and it has been developed by other authors in the previous years. According to McCarthy, marketing was composed of four main components, Product, Price, Place and Promotion.

This theory appears in the book titled Basic Marketing by E Jerome McCarthy and William D. Perreault in 1960.

Aside from McCarthy's approach on this topic, Kotler also gave his perspective on the 4 Ps of marketing.

These 4 Ps work as a set of variables that organizations can make use of to influence the actions of the customers towards the expected goals of the company (Kotler, 1999).

2.1.1 Product

This is a self-explanatory concept. It is the main item that a company, individual or enterprise offers to the consumers as a good in exchange of a price (McCarthy & Perreault , 1960).

It is also the set of services that a company may be offer in exchange of a determined price (Kotler, 1999).

2.1.2 Price

This is the economical retribution from a customer to the company or individual who is offering the product. This is the part of the marketing mix related to the direct revenue for the company (McCarthy & Perreault , 1960).

2.1.3 Place

This segment of the mix relates to all the areas of the marketing process that corelate with the placement of a product, its channel and all related to the place convenience for the consumer (McCarthy & Perreault , 1960).

In this segment, (Kotler, 1999) adds an extra value to the term Place and indicates that in this stage also takes place the distribution process, which is when and how companies decide to distribute their goods or services via a certain medium.

2.1.4 Promotion

This segment of the mix is related to the communication processes that are part of the consumer cycle, the advertisement part, the sales promotion that a company elaborates to reach to their ideal customers and close sales (McCarthy & Perreault , 1960).

2.2 Marketing and the its relation with CRM technologies

Taking into consideration the extra values of the Marketing Mix theory developed over the past years, it is relevant to recall that the place of distribution of goods what (Kotler, 1999) also named as the distribution process and then the promotion stages are closely related to CRM applications as these tools are used for promoting and communicating with the customers.

As the previous segments explained, and taking into consideration that marketing encircles a wide variety of stages like practices it isn't hard to come to the conclusion that there is a direct relation between the marketing field and the CRM applications as these deal with the communications, advertisement, sales and promotion of the product itself.

CRM applications are a tool that are now an intrinsic component of many marketing teams globally and without these kinds of platforms, many sales departments would be struggling to contact effectively with their leads.

During the past decade a new type of marketing came started to flourish, in part because of the surge of new tools of interaction and communication between the company and the customers, this kind of marketing came to be called Relationship Marketing, and focuses on the interactions and holistic communications between a company and their customers (Bezhovski, 2015).

CRM applications work as a tunnel interconnecting two major branches of marketing, the first, customer marketing, CRM being in the middle in order to reach to the third final stage of marketing which is relationship marketing, the stage in which the marketing management team combines techniques of customers interactions like campaign management, email marketing, customer care services and so on in order to reach to the desired data (Payne & Frow, Pennie, 2017).

2.3 Inbound vs Outbound Marketing strategies

Before moving forward, it is necessary to stop to analyze one of the main differences in terms of the current marketing strategies. Nowadays, the way companies perform their marketing strategies can be divided into two categories, Inbound marketing and Outbound marketing. To explain further these terms, it is necessary to look at the state of art.

Inbound marketing focuses on the idea of attracting customers only by offering them content that is helpful or beneficial for the recipient; it uses tactics that attract the prospect customer with useful content to earn his interest instead of showing him advertising content directly (Bezhovski, 2015).

The academic Brian Halligan was the first one to use the term ‘inbound marketing’ in 2005. (Halligan & Shah , 2009) in his book, Halligan mentions that the technique came along with the communications revolution and the changes in online shopping.

The most relevant part of inbound marketing is that the content that is generated from the marketers will always be useful for the final user. As an example of useful content, it is possible to mention user guides, manuals, eBooks, datasheets and so on. These kinds of materials are beneficial for the end users; hence, the process of lead acquisition is more organic.

By organic it means that leads redirect themselves to the companies' websites, social media channels or contact possibilities by themselves without paid pushing or intensive and direct advertising.

This is a relative new approach in the digital marketing industry as before the emphasis wasn't centered on the type of content companies were using to attract their customers. In the past, an outbound tendency was followed, this is the kind of marketing that tries to reach as many new leads as possible or to reach as many as possible without necessarily providing the user material that will be beneficial for him/her (Dakoua, Anabir, & Benabdelouahed, 2019).

An example of outbound marketing is when a customer, user, person, has to stop abruptly their activities due to the marketing asset that is being pushed to them. In these cases, the user has to deal with the message and decide how to proceed. For example, when a person is watching a video on YouTube and the video is interrupted by a video ad, this is outbound marketing, as the user is forced to either watch a couple of seconds of the ad, or leave the video.

It is possible to divide the kinds of channels or areas in which inbound and outbound marketing differ.

As it was previously mentioned, outbound marketing relies on intrusive ads, direct mail, call centers (outbound only), television or radio ads, printed ads and so on. Meanwhile inbound marketing relies on content marketing, like blogs, eBooks, guides, social media marketing, Search Engine Optimization (SEO), podcasts, webinars etc. (Dakoua, Anabir, & Benabdelouahed, 2019).

As Bezhovski mentions in his work titled *Inbound Marketing a New Concept in Digital Business*, there is a new marketing technique called Push and Pull; in this, the Pull technique is used to create

demand for a certain business or product, whereas the Push technique is used to sell the available product existence.

Previously it was mentioned the concept of SEO, this is one of the key features of inbound marketing in current times. The following segment will cover the relevance of Search Engine Optimization for inbound marketing proposes and its relevance with the current topic.

2.4 The impact of SEO in modern marketing

Firstly, it is mandatory to clarify what is SEO, this term, nowadays quite popular in the marketing industry stands for Search Engine Optimization. SEO is a kind of application or software that is in charge of gathering information from different sources, via URL from websites and their keywords (Yalçın & Köse, 2010).

The information gathered by the SEO is stored in a database, this becomes a kind of index for the web and when a user makes a search online, the application shows the most relevant information to the user according to the algorithm and the database.

The SEO process is carried out via crawling bots, programs that explore the web for changes and updates in their containing data. These programs can take several names like Spiders, Fish, Robots or Warm, these terms refer to the capacity of the software to gather new information of thousands of websites in a few seconds (Bezhovski, 2015).

The crawler also provides data on sites that are not visited; (Chakrabarti, 2003) the higher the number of sites or pages in a website, the further the site will appear on searches, lowering the appearance of the site overall.

For the previous reason, it is recommended to give extra care to the designing process of a new site or landing page as this can play a crucial role in the general results of the SEO of a site.

Search Engine Optimization can be carried out by developers of the websites by putting into practice a set of tactics to bring a certain site appear in the first five pages of a search engine.

According to Yalçın & Köse, the users generally don't go past the five pages, hence the main task of the developer will be to bring the site to appear in these first pages by altering the tags, hyperlinks and relevant keywords.

If we take into consideration that SEO is, then, the process of bringing a website to pop up, or appear in the main pages of a search engine, it is possible to realize that without this feature, a company or business might not be successful in promoting their message online, affecting their overall results.

For the previous reasons, nowadays companies are targeting SEO as one of their most relevant tasks for their developers. The marketing teams also work along and play a role in this task as the keywords used in any digital asset can bring to the top a certain website or landing page and improve the SEO appearance of a business.

A recommendation given by the experts on SEO implementation is that PNG files for images are the recommended type, as they are smaller file sizes and can carry high resolution graphics.

Adding videos to the website can improve the level of trust of the viewers of the pages, hence it is an item recommended to be added to the sites.

2.5 A gray zone for CRM applications

As it was discussed previously marketing practices can be divided into two categories, inbound and outbound, the gray zone for CRM applications appears as these applications can be both be used for inbound and outbound marketing strategies. The preference on the type of content that a marketer wants to promote and how will determine the way the application is going to be used.

It seems to exist a gray zone in which both kinds of marketing collide, like email marketing (heavily used via CRM applications nowadays), search engines advertisement content, social media and kinds of display marketing (Volpe, 2015).

If it is not permission-based Volpe arguments that this kind of marketing cannot be considered as inbound marketing, so even when a lead provides his data information via downloading a beneficial asset (inbound technique) if a member of a marketing team contacts that lead (when not requested by the lead) this can count as a gray zone marketing technique; as it can enter in both categories.

Different kinds of CRM applications might be suitable for either of these two strategies. During the coronavirus pandemic, nevertheless continued with both strategies, connect the topic to the pandemic.

2.6 Consumption patterns during the COVID-19 period

The coronavirus pandemic, that by the time of the writing process of this paper has taken more than 5,1 million lives globally (Worldometers, 2021), has been the latest challenge that humanity has had to face that affected not only the public health but also all the way of life, communication systems, ways of work, ways of socialization, level of governmental control over its population and, in general, all the modus vivendi of the inhabitants of the globe.

As most of the countries imposed a set of regulations to its population that started from lockdowns, social distancing, travel restrictions and vaccination mandates, the global economy suffered a major impact never seen since the Second World War (Kathimerini journal , 2022).

(Wielen & Barrios, 2020) states that the pandemic has caused a general economic anxiety over the European Union's population, causing great impact on the economies of the EU and rising the levels of unemployment. Different countries had to offer incentives to their populations in order to keep the economy circulating. Many lost their jobs and the investors lost their levels of trust in the market.

Countries in the EU that relied heavily on tourism, like in the case of this study Greece, are still suffering the impact of the travel restrictions from the rest of the member states of the EU in the

beginning of the pandemic and a sector of its population rejected the mandatory vaccination regulations imposed in order to allow individuals to go back to their working places.

Meanwhile the campaigns of mass vaccination were successful in European countries with relatively small population like Portugal, that has about 10,3 million inhabitants, and Malta, with a population of around 526 thousand. The vaccination campaigns were not completely spread to all the member states of the EU; countries like Bulgaria registered low vaccination rates because of the spread of conspiracy theories.

2.6.1. Remote work became the norm

Since the COVID-19 pandemic hit in 2019, the world needed to find in a short period of time of new ways to work effectively, the initial call to action became remote work as a way to continue with the workflow in progress in the pre pandemic times.

All the world economies were heavily hit but the US, as one of the leading IT technologies hubs, needed to adjust its work operations in a great scale quickly. The IT industry globally is still highly depended on the US as many companies have their headquarters in the United States but have several branches all across the globe.

During the 2020 at least 24% of none remote workers lost their jobs due to the pandemic (Angelucci, Angrisani, M. Bennett, & Arie , 2020), many companies that were never used to work in remote environments had to implement for the first-time applications that allowed them to work remotely effectively.

Companies like Zoom for video calling grew exponentially and CRM applications became a new tool for many businesses; the new way of work had to prevail, remote work.

The pandemic made remote work mainstream and all across the globe workers learn to carry their work duties in the online environment. Nevertheless, remote work doesn't represent necessarily better stress levels and better work life balance. Studies carry out in Latin-American shown that

remote work increased in a way the levels of stress and reduce work-life satisfaction (Sandoval-Reyes, Idrovo-Carlier, & Duque-Oliva, 2021).

Now companies need to establish new ways of carrying out remote work reducing stress levels in their workforce and allowing them to have a better sense of balance between their life and work.

2.7. The pandemic effect in Greece

Before the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, Greece was overcoming a period of austerity caused by the economic crisis of 2008, this crisis left the country with a weakened health infrastructure. When the pandemic first hit at the end of the 2019 and mostly at the beginning of 2020 the Hellenic government had to take one of the strictest measures of the European Union (UE) in order to control the outbreak of the virus and to avoid saturation of the already weakened health sector (Kathimerini journal , 2022)

The decade from 2010 to 2020 was a period that the governments, both from the left wing and right wing, imposed austerity measures in most of the public sector, like the educational systems, the social welfare, education and the health system; this was a plan of the government to reduce the external debt but even after the economic measures implemented, the external debt of the Greek government was at the 200% by the end of 2019 (Markantonatou, 2021).

The Greek government wasn't able to borrow from international banks during the austerity period due to lack of trust of the financial entities and the fear of the default risk of the Hellenic government (Kathimerini journal , 2022). This was reverted during 2020, and partly the pandemic helped, as international banks started to issue again loans to Greece.

In 2013, the unemployment rate in Greece was of about 27% due to the economic crisis of 2008 and thanks to the austerity measures, the unemployment rate was reduced to a 15.5% in 2020 (Parlapani, Holeva, Voitsidis, & Blekas, 2020). The pandemic reversed part of the progress of the Greek government in its efforts to improve the economy and many businesses had to close their doors due to the impact of the strict lockdown measures imposed and the massive impact of the travel and tourism industry, which is one of the pillars of the Greek economy.

The prevention measures against the pandemic in Greece were one of the hardest in the EU, with bans of activities in exteriors and lockdowns that lasted even longer than in other countries of the bloc. Along with this, it became mandatory to be vaccinated to work in the public sector and the government has open the possibility to the residents to receive a booster shot of the vaccine against the COVID-19.

With all this, many of the companies in the country switched to remote work or hybrid, some of them completely modified their working areas and some companies relocated their business or outsource them.

Teleworking or remote work, was not a wide spread way of working in Greece in the pre-pandemic period. According to local figures, only the 1.1% of the workers in Greece were working remotely before the COVID-19 pandemic (Parlapani, Holeva, Voitsidis, & Blekas, 2020).

The coronavirus pandemic modified greatly the way of work of most of the companies operating in Greek territory and most of the companies came up with a way of teleworking if not total, at least partial.

Local Greek media reported that most of the IT companies will remain their hybrid modes of teleworking until the pandemic has been put under control.

2.8. Usage of CRM applications during the pandemic

During the coronavirus pandemic there has been a drop in consumption worldwide in most of the economy sectors. The drops in sales have produced massive loses for a great number of companies and many medium and large companies had taken the CRM systems as a tool to increase their sales (Pratiwi & Arsyah, The Effectiveness of the Concept of CRM Application for SMEs during the COVID-19 Pandemic, 2021).

Pratiwi and Arsyah mention that the stages used by companies during the pandemic periods to impulse sales has been the following: as companies have records of their customers purchases,

they use CRM systems to use that data, and convert that data into better customer service, drive sales and create revenue for the company using online mechanisms.

The first stages, companies are using their CRM applications to acquire customers, gain more customers and keep the ones they have managed to acquire; in the second stage, they use their CRMs to gain the loyalty of the customer and acquire more prospects (Agwaye, 2020).

In the finance sector, CRM applications help banks to carry out their operations and these kinds of platforms were used in different areas of the banking industry. In some cases, some banks focused their CRM usage on classification and solution of problems, in others they focused on improving loyalty and in other scenarios, they focused on accelerating business operations (Hartono, Sarjono, Wijaya, & Samsic, 2021).

Not the majority of banks or financial institutions make use of CRM applications due to one main reason, the sensitive information would pass through a third party (the CRM provider) and the servers wouldn't be in the control of the application user. If the platform is hosted online, it also represents privacy concerns for institutions that handle sensitive information.

For the previous reason, some financial institutions make use of inhouse servers that host their own CRM applications to guarantee the privacy and security of their data.

Another factor that is relevant for the usage of CRM applications during the pandemic is that most of the companies that started to make use of this sort of technologies were small and medium size companies.

According to the European Commission, small and medium enterprises (SME) are up to the 99% of the companies that exist in the European Union (European Commission official website, 2022). This is a relevant market as the CRM industry targets this niche of companies.

Most companies that make use of these tools are in the range of small and medium size organizations, and these are the majority in the market. Hence it is appropriate to mention that

most of companies in the EU probably make use of some sort of CRM application nowadays to excel their business operations.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, this sector was precisely the most affected by the measures taken by the governments worldwide and there it is when the usage of CRM applications recorded a peak in customers acquired; the purpose was to increase sales and increase operations but this time in an online format.

The usage of CRM applications proved in different countries to help SMEs to promote their business and even gain new customers during the pandemic online. (Pratiwi & Arsyah, The Effectiveness of the Concept of CRM Application for SMEs during the COVID-19 Pandemic, 2021). The possibility to reach new audiences directly and track their contacts with the company across different platforms, allowed small and medium companies to keep the business afloat during the peak times of the pandemic.

CHAPTER 3

3. Research framework

The following table is destined to explain the steps that are going to take place into this research in order to reach to a set of findings and marketing scheme proposals for marketing teams that make use of CRM applications and are looking to improve their business operations.

Literature review
Data analysis
Clarification of terminology
In-depth interviews with marketing experts
Schemes proposal for marketing teams
Results and discussion

Table 1, Research framework

3.1. Aim of the study

The main aim of this study is to further explain the series of changes in the marketing area and specially the digital marketing sector thanks to the usage of customer relationship management applications and its surge of this platforms during the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19).

Aside from this major aim, there are secondary aims, nevertheless of great importance, like the formulation of schemes or graphical strategies for marketing teams that are interested in implementing effectively CRM applications in their business. The previous secondary aim will be reach by using a combination of methods that will be explained further on.

This study aims to help marketing teams and, in general, those interested in the field to better understand the way CRM applications function and how these planforms can benefit the workflow of any enterprise, even during times of health crisis or perhaps how to make use of this applications when political and health turmoil force companies to look for alternatives in the communications processes with their prospects.

The effect of the COVID-19 pandemic in the marketing industry and whether this has impacted the way people make use of CRM tools will be also evaluated. The educational aim of this research is one of the main goals of this study.

3.2. Method for this research

This study is based on the qualitative research methodology, and it is divided into two major sections; one being the literature review taking in consideration the works of previous authors on the marketing industry and the CRM technologies and a series of in-depth interviews with marketing experts.

3.2.1. Secondary data analysis

The data gathering method comprises both secondary and primary data sources. For reaching the secondary data, a thorough literature review technique is carried out initially. In this stage the concepts of CRM, its types and its relation with the marketing field are taken explained taking into consideration the state of the art and the works of renowned authors like Philip Kotler and Jerome McCarthy and a series of actual works regarding the usage of CRM applications during the pandemic period.

3.2.2. Primary research method

In order to gather the primary data, the in-depth interview method is used with marketing experts on CRM applications, the way they use it for their business and also the steps they follow to make better use of these kind of platforms for their enterprises.

The data gathered out of these interviews will be the main source of information in the developing of marketing schemes that will give a set of steps on how to use this technology in order to excel business operations. The steps will be taken out of the experts digital marketing plans and presented in an easy-to-follow graphics in the findings section.

The qualitative data gathered out of the in-depth interviews will validate the hypothesis suggested by the author of this work.

3.3. Sampling

As the primary data gathering mechanism will be the in-depth interview method, a series of marketing experts related to the CRM application usage was required for this purpose.

3.3.1. Universe of this study

The universe of this study is divided into two categories, the marketing team at an IT company from the US and with a branch in Greece composed of two individuals working for the marketing area, A interviewee and B interviewee.

Reasons of the selection of the universe:

This company was selected for the in-depth interview's session due to their operations in different countries, the United States, Greece and India, and because they make use of CRM platforms to run part of their communications.

Their answers during the interview provided great value that was condensed into graphics for those interested in using CRM applications for several purposes.

As the marketing team of the company was reduced to two people, the in-depth interviews were supported by two additional experts' testimonies in the marketing area and the usage of CRM, one of the interviews was carried out with interviewee C, an MA in international and intercultural negotiations expert from the Aix- Marseille University (France). His input to this research gave a valuable case study and supported hypothesis of this thesis.

Another interview was carried out with an Azerbaijani marketing expert based in Baku, Azerbaijan, with an MA in Public Relations and Promotion from Istanbul University in Turkey, interviewee D her input to this research was mostly in the chain supply usage and CRM applications.

All of these interviews were carried out via Zoom and Teams video applications and there is a record of it. Due to confidentiality rights, only the written part of this interviews are showcased in this research.

3.4. In depth interview with marketing experts

In order to explain the way an international IT company makes use of a CRM platform for their marketing department; this research made use of an in-depth interview to clarify the steps taken in the highest level of marketing management.

How were these questions formed?

These questions were thought to clarify the way an IT company makes use of CRM applications to attract prospects, convert them into leads and finally turn them into customers. The first part of the questions are created in order to clarify the demographics of the universe selected, there are questions related to the identification of the CRM of use at the selected company. Some of the questions are intended to identify the patterns of usage of a CRM application by a company in order to form a scheme on how to make use effectively of these tools. The last questions are focused on their perception weather the pandemic has affected the usage of the CRM tools or not; this in order to validate weather there has been a bigger usage of this kind of tools in the past years.

Questionary:

1. Name and surname:
2. Position at the company:
3. Does your company make use of a CRM tool? If so what kind of CRM do you use.
4. What was the criteria for selecting this CRM tool among so many others?
5. What is the purpose of the company by using this CRM?
6. Could you explain me what are the steps that the company uses on the CRM platform to transform communications with customers into sales?
7. What are the most important tools that your company makes use on your CRM platform?
8. Do you make use of the sales tool of the CRM that you utilize?
9. Have you consider changing your CRM to another one? If so, why?
10. Have your company made more usage of the CRM tool for communications during the pandemic?
11. How has the pandemic impacted the usage levels of your CRM?
12. Do you consider that the CRM technologies have become more relevant during this pandemic than they were before?

3.4.1. First interview:

The first interview was carried out with A participant, the director of marketing at the IT company used for this research.

The main emphasis of the interview with participant A focused on the fifth question:

Could you explain what are the steps that the company uses on the CRM platform to transform communications with customers into sales?

Participant A replied that the company she works for makes use of the CRM HubSpot and another legacy application. The marketing team of the organization focuses part of their communication efforts on promoting the companies work via landing pages that contain valuable information assets to be used for those interested in the offered services (cloud modernization and other services).

Her response gives a clear example of a case study and offers a marketing strategy applicable for different SME's looking to have a simple business strategy while making use of CRM applications.

What are the most important tools that your company makes use on your CRM platform?

Participant A explained that the approach used is mainly the inbound marketing method. A set of leads are attracted to their sites (including landing pages) making use of SEO, an easy UX (user experience) and downloadable assets with valuable information.

These assets are included and presented to the site visitors in the shape of forms. According to participant A, this is the feature (the forms feature on HubSpot) that the company makes use the most. The forms are filled by the interested lead in order to download an asset and in this stage, he will add his personal information and company contact and that will be recorded in the lead database of the marketing team for further use.

Aside from landing pages and email marketing via HubSpot, the company uses paid ads that contain links to landing pages that were prepared with the CRM application, these contain the same forms to store the leads data.

After the company has evaluate the possibilities with the prospect leads, a certain number is contacted by a group of experts that will present a set of possibilities to collaborate to the interested part. If the lead is interested, the arrange a meeting (in person or online) and following that initial contact, the sales team will get in touch with the interested prospect to convert the interested part in to a business opportunity. All of this process takes place initially via the CRM.

Do you make use of the sales tool of the CRM that you utilize?

Participant A explained that the marketing team usually contacts the interesting leads via HubSpot via email and arranged meetings, and makes sure to track the customers movement in the company's website (a tool that the CRM provides) and according to this, and the result of previous contacts, the collaboration proposal is planned.

Aside from the forms feature, the marketing director explained that the company makes active use of the analytics tools to manage and gather the information that they need in order to evaluate the growth possibilities for the company.

3.4.2. Second interview

The second interview was carried out with participant B, a marketing expert from the United States and currently working as the Digital Marketing Manager at the IT company used for this research.

What is the purpose of the company by using this CRM?

Participant B stated that the company makes use of HubSpot as their preferred CRM application but in the near future they may implement Salesforce as this platform has more tools and is more detail oriented regarding sales procedures and has better reporting features.

Via the CRM application, sellers and marketing, when they properly populate the information into HubSpot, it allows them to have a single customer view that tracks their association with their relevant company, their activity, their correspondence, the list, membership and engagement. So you are able to see their website activity or email activity when they open up the email.

Participant B explained that many companies, in the absence of CRM applications, use Excel Spreadsheets to store valuable data and run part of their business and this method is inefficient and outdated.

In order to carry out proper marketing strategies by using the CRM application, a company should follow three basic steps according to participant B.

Could you explain me what are the steps that the company uses on the CRM platform to transform communications with customers into sales?

“Number one would be to generate the brand awareness. So make your potential customers aware of your products and services through different marketing channels like social media and our events blog post, anything that brings brand awareness” stated participant B.

“Number two, we would acquire the leads. So after we introduce our brand to the potential customer, the second step is to generate the leads. So the sales and marketing team or both engage with our target audience via communications channels” stated participant B.

In this stage, the marketing team could use the sign-up form on our website to encourage visitors to subscribe to the newsletters.

The third is convert the leads into the customers. And once you have captured attention and interest of your prospect, the next step is to convert them into paying customers. And that's done through, you know, a combination of content marketing.

As the benefits of using a CRM application, participant B pointed out that one of the most important advantages is to be able to see the overview of the entire sales pipeline as well as the status and progress of each individual stage in the sales funnel. And lastly, “reporting and analytics, that tool that we get routine summary reports of sales figures or sales rep performance”.

3.4.3. Third interview

The third interview was carried out with participant C, an MA in international and intercultural negotiations expert from the Aix- Marseille University and currently working in an IT company in Paris, France. Due to data protection policies, the name of the company in which participant C works is not going to be mentioned in this segment.

Does your company make use of a CRM tool? If so, what kind of CRM do you use.

Participant C works at a German based IT logistic company in the shipping industry for container traders, they use the CRM Pipedrive and they will start using Salesforce in the near future.

The change to Salesforce for the company in which participant C works is based on the level of tools that this CRM offers for the sales department; its user-friendly interface and “if you want to grow. If you want to scale, Salesforce is the right CRM for a large company”.

In his experience, “they use Salesforce in order to have everything in one place, it is a 360 degrees application and it can organize the workflow of the members of the company, makes work-life easier and more productive”.

What are the most important tools that your company makes use on your CRM platform?

Participant C makes use mostly Pipedrive as and spreadsheet to get the information he needs from prospects so he can contact them directly via email or video calling directly via the CRM. This tool allows him as well to make notes on the prospects and leads he touches base with to make better decisions and convert communications into sales.

Do you consider that the CRM technologies have become more relevant during this pandemic than they were before?

During the pandemic period, the usage of the CRM applications grew exponentially as most of the employees of many companies in different sectors had to work remotely and a CRM is necessary in many cases to optimize remote labor for different teams like HR departments, Marketing and Sales departments.

The CRM technologies have grown exponentially due to the remote working flow that nowadays modern companies have. “I used to go to the office and we use to have one server and one physical data center that you can only access when you are physically in the company. But with the CRM migrated to the cloud, everybody could easily access to the platform to make use of that”.

This way of work was pre-pandemic work style. Even though many companies have still this workflow, the tendency is progressively changing towards the implementation of cloud-based applications.

3.4.4. Fourth Interview

The fourth interview was carried out with participant D an Azerbaijani marketing expert based in Baku, Azerbaijan. She has dedicated her career to marketing and public relations for different companies in Turkey and in Azerbaijan.

Nowadays participant D is working as the Marketing Communications Manager at the Marriott Hotel in Baku. In the past, participant D worked with a supermarket chain that had more than one thousand locations in Azerbaijan (for data protection policies the name of this company won't be mentioned in this segment), in that company they used the CRM Soho in order to monitor their business operations and coordinate their internal and external communications.

Could you explain me what are the steps that the company uses on the CRM platform to transform communications with customers into sales?

The CRM for that supermarket chain was a way to receive their quality control notifications and they used to receive up to 1,000 daily inquiries via Soho. This platform allowed them to communicate directly to their customers, assist their needs and manage quality of service.

The participant D case is an example of how is possible to use a CRM as a communications manager in which it is possible to combine requests, messages, calls and implementing including a CRM team that combined a call center with all their procedures.

By combining a call center with a cloud-based CRM application like Soho, participant D experienced a changed in the volume of requests, inquiries and data was easily recorded, stored and used for further decision making.

This case represents a clear example of how making use of CRM applications for a company's communications, surveys, inquires and daily operations can bring quantifiable data in amounts that allow to marketing teams to evaluate possible business outcomes, predict customer behavior and improve business in several areas like customer satisfaction, improve the levels of ROI and ultimately generate more income for the enterprise.

How has the pandemic impacted the usage levels of your CRM?

The usage of CRM applications in participant D case, helped them to generate their public relations strategy for the company based on the reviews, complaints and requests that were recorded on Soho. When they were about to launch a campaign or new product in their market chain, they were firstly consulting the CRM application in order to analyze the customer perception to evaluate whether they should or not release the campaign or product.

Based on the feedback recorded on the CRM, they were able where to focus their marketing campaigns and what product should or should not be advertised in a certain way, reducing the effort of the communications team to evaluate where to focus their efforts.

Based on the participant's D experience using CRM applications for improvement of customer satisfaction, it is possible to deduce that marketing teams could benefit of analyzing first their market perception prior launching campaigns or products, this would reduce costs and effort on unsuccessful advertisement.

3.5.Findings

In the following graphic, a step-by-step model will be proposed in order to exemplify the process that an IT company uses in order to use a CRM application to excel their possibilities to convert leads into sales or collaboration opportunities.

A similar model was published previously by the author of this research but the version presented below is a more detailed one.

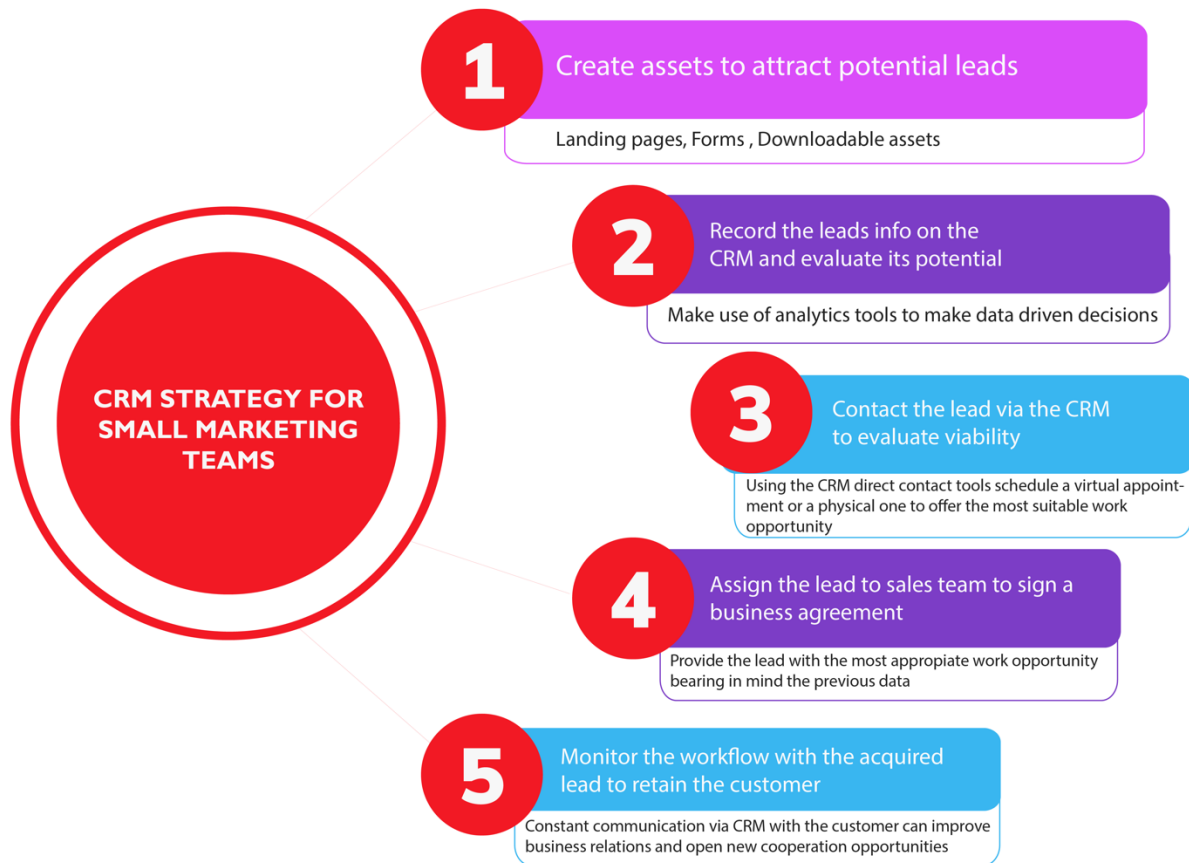


Figure 5 CRM model, The Writer Own, 2022

The previous analysis allows us to generate the following variable:

1.1.1. Variable 1, The Writer Own, 2022

If SEO is not carried out	The website won't appear on the first pages of a search engine
If the website won't appear on the first pages of a search engine	A marketing campaign (no matter its quality) might not reach the target audience.

There are many factors that can affect the SEO of a company, starting with the web design of it, not necessarily because of its visual aspects (even though this counts as well) but because of

technical processes like the kind of plugins the site is using like flash animations or static pictures (Yalçin & Köse, 2010).

Even the kind of files that the images are uploaded to the website in (PNG, JPEG, etc.) can affect the speed of loading of the page, and, as it was seen in the previous segment, this is as well a parameter that plays a role in the rating of the SEO of a company.

A second variable can be deducted from variable one:

1.1.2. Variable 2 The Writer Own, 2022

If a campaign doesn't reach its audience, due to poor search engine optimization work.	The target marketing goal won't be reached and the campaign will fail regardless of its quality
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The third interview validates the work of (Bekavac, 2015), thanks to this, it is possible to combine both explanations and present the following scheme of work structure to marketing teams at the time of making use of analytics tools to improve their operations:

Table 4: Defining an analytics strategy in marketing, The Writers Own 2022.

1) Define and objective	2) Define your KPI'S and company goals	3) Gather data via Bi applications	4) Convert data into stats	5) Implement strategies based on the data
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As the previous scheme shows, in order to generate an analytics strategy that can provide the expected results, it is necessary to follow a set of steps to guarantee that the analytics tools are being thoroughly implemented.

In the first stage it is necessary to define the goals of the marketing team regarding a specific campaign, is it bringing more customers, getting new leads, views or sales? The specific goals should be first drafted.

Secondly it is necessary to establish what are the Key Performance Indicators of the company and the marketing campaign in order to better know what are the targets and marks that the analytics should focus on.

Thirdly, it is necessary to gather all the necessary information and data via the Business Intelligence application of preference and visualize it in easy-to-read graphs and stats.

The fourth step is to convert that data into graphics, analyze this data and lastly implement all the necessary marketing strategies based solely on the information shown and gathered on the CRM application.

If the previous steps are followed during the implementation of analytic tools, any marketing team will be able to achieve the level of data understanding that is required to make data driven decisions and ultimately achieve tangible marks and goals.

The following set of findings come as a result of the secondary data analysis combined with the in-depth interviews with marketing experts. These are separated into four sets of findings for a better understanding of the outcomes of the present study.

3.5.1. First set of findings

One of the most relevant findings of this research is the level of global relevance that CRM applications have gained during the past decade, a clear example of that was given in the first pages

by Grand View Research during his annual report of 2021 in which stated that these sorts of applications will increase their profits and become more valuable in the stock markets.

There was indeed a surge in the usage of CRM applications during the coronavirus pandemic, the participants of the in-depth interview confirmed using more these applications during lockdown periods and the statistics shown by Grand View Research and (Worldometers, 2021) confirm it.

The new tendency to make use of CRM applications on cloud-based infrastructures was highlighted during this research and was shown to be a viable alternative for small, medium and big enterprises due to its flexibility and viability in terms of Search Engine Optimization, analytics and tracking options.

3.5.2. Second set of findings

CRM strategies are necessary in order to achieve the ideal business goals of any company making use of these technologies.

The following diagram, Figure number 6, is an example of the process that SME's could implement in order to obtain better SEO rating and how can they make use of CRM applications to improve these ratings, this set of findings are backed up by the work of (Yalçın & Köse, 2010) and the first in-depth interview recorded in this study.

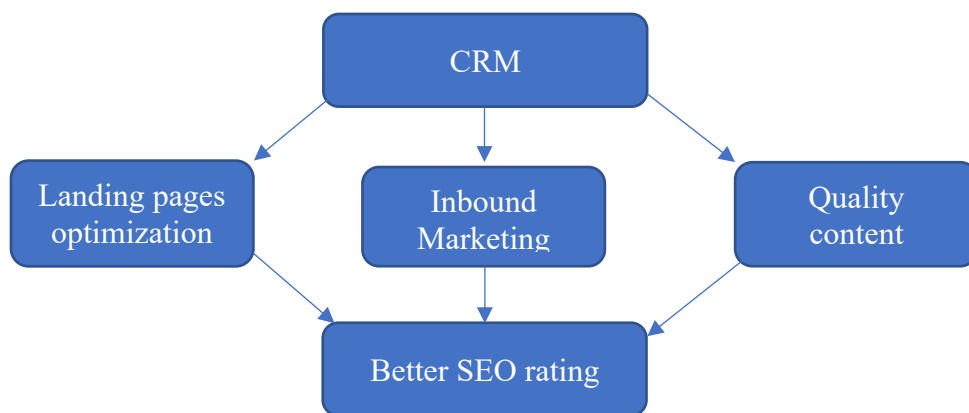


Figure 6 Better SEO rating, The Writer Own, 2022

The interview with participant D reveals that having even a group of people dedicated to manage the CRM communications of a company can benefit the communication activities of the enterprise and that this kind of software can be a way to track easily customer's satisfaction levels.

The interview with participant C confirms that remote sales working requires a CRM application that can have the necessary tools for this department and showed that Salesforce is gaining presence in the area of sales due to its interface. Also, this interview confirm that physical stored data centers and servers are outdated and can cost companies lots of economical loses in the long term.

3.5.3. Third set of findings

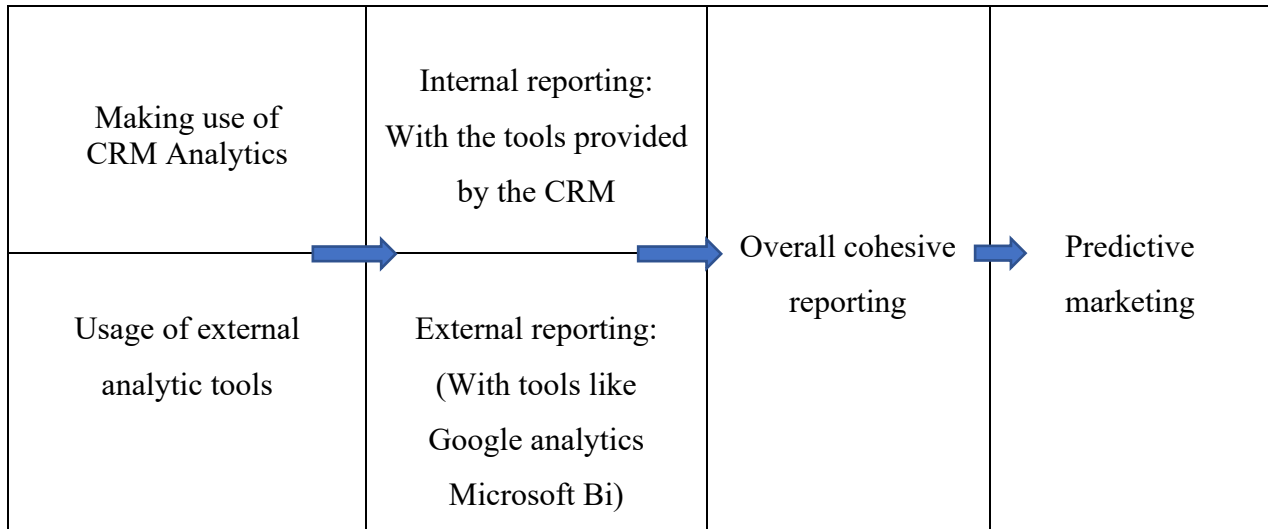
Analytics tools are necessary compound for any marketing team and they may need to be incorporated with the CRM in order to reach better reporting and visualization of digital data.

Business Intelligence tools are nowadays partly incorporated into CRM applications and they need to be of active use of marketing teams in order to achieve better analytic reports and interactive analytics that will drive better business decisions.

SEO is the new norm for marketing teams in order to better positioning their brands on search engines. CRM applications are not enough to provide all the necessary tools that a marketing team may need to position their brand, like video storing platforms and SEO optimization tools, nevertheless, these sorts of tools need to be integrated in parallel externally to better marketing practices.

The following table, showcases how making use of analytics tools can lead to better reporting and overall better predictive marketing. This table, comes as a result of the interview with participant B and C.

Table 5: On predictive marketing. (Writers own table)



The pandemic brought to the world a change in the paradigm of work and nowadays remote work is not only a modality reserved for a certain industry or field but it is a modality that can be applicable to most of the business in the creative sector; this makes CRM applications a valuable asset for any company interested in customer satisfaction, sales conversion and promotion.

Video marketing is a tool that can give up to 80% advantages to marketing teams in their retention of customer levels as the data confirm that this is a component that makes customers trust the product that a company is offering.

This study also provides a table with an easy to implement analytics strategy in table 1 and the recommended steps to be followed when implementing SEO strategies and what to avoid for them not to fail.

CONCLUSION

Several outcomes could be drawn out of this research, the first would be that CRM applications have become without doubt a tool that has gained relevance during the past decade and proved to be efficient during the pandemic period due to its benefits in the remote work environment that thrived during the lockdowns across the globe.

CRM applications are no longer used in a singular segment or industry but they can be used in mostly all sectors of a company, from the human resources departments to production, communications, marketing and sales can benefit greatly of the new tools that day by day are being incorporated in these sorts of applications.

The literature research consulted in this study can give a clear guideline to those starting in the CRM applications implementation or in the marketing planning stage as the main stages of establishing a marketing plan with a CRM application were discussed.

The series of interviews with the experts can give a thorough understanding of the different levels of usage of CRM applications and can give an example of how can a company benefit of using these sorts of platforms in other to improve their business by analyzing the data that these applications can provide and by integrating different areas of the company into the same application.

The figure proposed in the first interview is a clear scheme on how to use CRM applications for sales purposes and can be easily escalate and be implemented by any medium size to big size marketing team that is starting to use any cloud-based CRM system to improve their business.

Remote work is now a modality of work that will prevail in the future and CRM applications have proven to be the way to combine different sectors of a company to improve communications both in the internal and the external way.

SEO is necessary for companies that want to improve their online presence on searchers as this will impact directly on the amount of traffic their websites will have and this will translate into more leads, prospects and ultimately, sales and business opportunities.

The implementation of Bi, in some cases included in the CRM of usage, should be implemented in order to achieve a better understanding of the processes of the company, the results of marketing campaigns and overall achieve better analytics that will drive better decision making for enterprises.

The believe that small companies cannot benefit from CRM applications or that they do not need to make use these kind of applications is not necessarily accurate, as there can be several benefits of small to medium size enterprises in making use of these kind of software and even during the pandemic or at least in nowadays the recovery process of the pandemic, these applications can excel any business by bringing better understanding of the operations of the company and by having better communications both internally and externally.

Video and graphics are a necessary component to be added in marketing campaigns as they can provide better opening opportunities and give better levels of customer loyalty and trust as the data displayed in this study shows, adding video to email marketing campaigns can give up to 80% better opening ratings (HubSpot , 2022) and this is an opportunity many companies are missing.

No other study and research project has boarded the topic of CRM applications during the pandemic and make use of this research methodology to achieve a series of user-friendly schemes for marketing teams to apply in their daily activities.

This research didn't aim to simply give a state of the art of the CRM technologies but also to give a thorough understanding of these sorts of applications, their benefits and give a scheme to be used by small to medium size marketing teams when they are starting to make use of these platforms to excel their operations.

The experts consulted have a broad marketing experience and their case studies share to the reader during this research can give a better understanding on how to use the CRM in the interested company.

Those new in the CRM technologies area can benefit from this study as it can work as well as an easy-to-read guide for these sorts of applications and gives guidance in the usage in the marketing area.

As limitations, there were geographical limitations with some of the participants of this research and the interviews were carried out online. Due to the pandemic restrictions, some of the research centers were not physically accessible during part of this research. As this study was carried out mostly under the literature research method most of the data gathered was based on literature.

During the time of this research, the author was based in Greece and some of the sources and interviewees were in the United States, Azerbaijan and France hence, the geographical factor was one tangible limitation.

For further studies, the writer of this research recommends to the academia to try the quantitative model for investigating the surge of CRM applications during the past two years as it is possible to gather statistically and measurable data out of the topic of this research.

For those interested in going further in detail into online CRM applications the writer of this research recommends taking this study into reference when implementing one of these platforms.

Companies who are not making use of CRM applications should consider implementing one of these platforms as this can change dramatically the return of investment and the key performance indicators of any enterprise.

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