
Choosing an On-Demand Solution Should Make Sense for Biopharma Companies

Tips for Selecting the Right System from the Start

Ask any forward-looking biopharma company and they'll tell you that effective customer relationship management is one of their keys to success. Having the ability to systematically nurture relationships by gaining time to present their product differentiators is crucial to achieving sales objectives.

In the biopharma industry, the decision to implement a CRM system is commonplace. Intended to improve field effectiveness and ensure compliance with federal and state regulations, these solutions also extend management's ability to measure and coach sales teams to generate greater levels of productivity and top-line results.

Years ago, executing an industry-centric CRM system could be a challenging initiative. Unless an organization had a realistic roadmap and dedicated IT resources, achieving a CRM implementation that provided a rapid return on investment was tricky to attain. Today, the barrier to quickly implement an effective CRM solution has been lowered, with several biopharma CRM systems now available "on-demand." Since there are significant differences in what vendors offer, companies should take the time to understand the distinctions to ensure the right decision is made based on their specific needs.

Let's examine the difference between a traditional software license and the on-demand model. On-demand is a flexible, alternate means of deploying an enterprise application – such as CRM – as a highly scalable service. In contrast to the traditional "on-premise" model, which involves a license fee and ongoing maintenance, on-demand applications are usually priced on a monthly or annual subscription based on the number of users and other factors. Although on-demand – also known as "SaaS" – is often in the news positioned as the latest and greatest innovation, on-demand computing is a tried and true model that has been successfully used by numerous organizations for many years.

Measure Twice, Cut Once

Anyone who has worked in carpentry knows the old adage: measure twice, cut once. Once you've committed to putting your saw to wood, there's no turning back. The same level of planning needs to be applied to making a biopharma CRM selection.

On-demand CRM is a particularly attractive proposition because it accelerates time to value, delivers full functionality and possesses superior price-to-performance ratios. Plus, an on-demand solution may not require the purchase of a dedicated computing infrastructure and assignment of IT resources to support the solution, which can translate into an equally attractive financial proposition. Given the nature of the on-demand model, system implementation, product upgrades and regular maintenance can be achieved more quickly and seamlessly. In short, on-demand can change a biopharma CRM investment from a capital expenditure to an operating expense while delivering tangible results, quickly. Yet, as with any software application, especially one that will profoundly impact the productivity of revenue-generating workers, it's crucial to carefully assess options before the investment is made.

Selecting the right on-demand CRM solution for your biopharma organization starts with an evaluation of current business processes and systems. Although the on-demand solution is apt not to tax your existing IT infrastructure, it's important to understand what type of access your field force will need to the CRM system. Having the ability to access the solution both online and offline can be a great benefit to the field force. If your on-demand CRM solution doesn't provide access to the application while users are offline, you've immediately reduced the team's productivity. There are specific examples of instances where offline access is critical to a biopharma, such as signature capture for samples. Additionally, determine what your team's mobility requirements are and what existing hardware assets – such as smartphones and hand-held devices – are in place.

As well as providing the hosted CRM application, you should expect your on-demand vendor to provide "extreme data security." Asking how your customer data will be secured and safeguarded against disaster should be addressed in advance of signing on the dotted line. Will your on-demand CRM vendor use encrypted data transmissions and secure storage? Will they replicate your data to ensure it is available in different geographic locations in case the primary location experiences problems?

Speaking of your data, it's also important to evaluate the financial viability of your on-demand vendor. Industry researchers at Saugatuck predict that at least 30 percent of SaaS and open source start-up vendors that are relying on annual subscription revenue streams will fail. Knowing when and how you can have full access to your data will ensure that you are protected under any circumstances. Further assurances can be recognized by working with a well established vendor with a proven track record of success, versus vendors with less tenure and stability.

- What are you looking to achieve in terms of business objectives?
- Will your implementation be segmented by specialty sales force (e.g. Primary care, MSL, Managed Markets, etc.) or deployed enterprise-wide?
- In addition to delivering the software application on-demand, what is the scope of ongoing services that your vendor can provide?
- What are you looking to achieve in terms of the end user experience?
- If your vendor fails, how can you get your data and in what format?

Head in the Clouds

It can be somewhat daunting to sort through the myriad of terms such as SaaS, on-demand and cloud computing. The bottom line is that these computing options have helped create the paradigm shift from managing IT assets – such as routers and servers – to managing providers and service level agreements. Additionally, the business model for deploying enterprise applications has changed. Software licenses have gone from one time fees plus annual maintenance to predictable subscription models.

When considering SaaS and cloud computing solutions – in its most comprehensive state, the latter still in its infancy – the goal is to reduce risk as much as possible while still reaping the financial and productivity benefits of the on-demand model. Like all companies, biopharma organizations are faced with providing better IT services to internal and external customers, as well as retaining existing customers and growing top-line revenues. Weighing the attractiveness of being able to implement a robust biopharma CRM system in weeks rather than months and have the positive impact of its benefits versus a drawn-out, multi-year project make on-demand less of a gamble.

So when sorting through what all these terms mean to you, remember this: cloud computing encompasses the infrastructure, platform and the software. The term cloud is a metaphor for the Internet, which now nearly 40 years old, is already playing a critical role in your business. If you're chartered with making a CRM buying decision, focus on the functionality of the software when delivered via the software-as-a-service aspect and what it can do for your business.

- Is your vendor maintaining a data center or creating additional layers by outsourcing to yet another vendor?
- What certifications does your on-demand CRM vendor possess?
- Ask your vendor if their on-demand CRM product is identical to their on-premise solution. Sometimes vendors push scaled down functionality to their unsuspecting on-demand customers.
- Think beyond the immediate. Does the on-demand subscription model make sense for your biopharma company? In some instances, depending on your IT infrastructure and resources, a traditional on-premise license model might be more cost effective in the long run.
- Does your company have a policy that business critical applications such as CRM have to be deployed “behind the firewall”? If so, on-demand is not the right choice for you.

Never Underestimate the Value of Industry Expertise

There are exceptional success factors to be considered in biopharma CRM. Unlike other industries, compliance issues abound. The ability to effectively track and manage relevant data in a meaningful, actionable manner is critical. Prospects or - in the case of biopharma - targets are much different than other “buyers” in the sales continuum as they might range from physicians to hospitals to healthcare facilities. Even with the on-demand model, biopharma CRM is never entirely turn-key. That's why the most effective CRM implementations are those that involve a stable, trusted vendor with substantial biopharma industry expertise.

When making your CRM buying decision, make sure to partner with a vendor that has developed its solutions to address the complexities of the biopharma market. While the on-demand model will help lower total cost of ownership, there are no financial gains if your CRM solution is so generic that you have to make significant customization expenditures just to align it with your business processes.

The exceptional needs of your specialty sales force also require the support of industry experts. Rather than relying on a vendor that has built a specialty solution on top of another vendor's product, it's more effective to leverage a single-point of accountability approach. Work with a vendor that has a long-standing foothold in your market. Not only will you be assured that the software will more readily evolve with your business needs, the depth and breadth of support available from a vendor that is firmly entrenched in your field will be unsurpassed.

- Was the CRM solution developed by your company from the ground up?
Are you merely customizing another vendor's software?
- Can we review your customer list to validate your degree of biopharma experience?
- Is there a dedicated support team in place or are support calls outsourced to a generic call center?

Before Making Your Decision

Across all businesses, the call for innovative, flexible CRM solutions has been raised. In the case of the biopharma market, companies are already burdened with high cost of sales and extreme competitive pressures. That's why biopharma companies are seeking choices, especially choices that result in quick implementations, lower operating costs and increased reliability. Having the ability to choose on-demand or on-premise means more biopharma companies can readily garner the business benefits of CRM.

At first glance, on-demand looks like the more attractive financial arrangement. However, as with any software expenditure, the place to start is with a full financial and business process needs analysis. Selecting a CRM solution that is embraced by the field and management generates immediate returns. The degree to which your users adopt the system influences the resulting quality of the analytics, its usefulness as a knowledgebase and the standardization of business processes.

Lastly, when making your on-demand CRM buying decision, select a vendor with a proven track record, an in-house support and service team, and a diverse list of product lines. Challenging economic conditions have created a new category of on-demand vendors with inadequate funding and scant resources. Seek to partner with a biopharma CRM vendor that will minimize risk and allow you to maximize the value of your on-demand solution.

About StayinFront

StayinFront, Inc. is a leading global provider of enterprise-wide customer relationship management (CRM) applications, decision support tools, data services and eBusiness systems. StayinFront offers rapidly configured and implemented solutions and services to manage and integrate all points of customer interaction including sales, marketing and customer support.

StayinFront has been chosen globally as a strategic CRM partner by many of the world's top life sciences, consumer goods, financial services and business-to-business companies, and StayinFront solutions have been implemented in over 40 countries in 12 languages.

StayinFront's flexible product architecture, object-oriented data modeling and range of deployment options provide an "exact fit" solution to help drive business processes, better manage the administrative functions of the system and lower ongoing costs of ownership.

StayinFront also offers a range of support services including, StayinFront Data Quality Services, to improve, standardize, augment and further leverage the informational assets contained in proprietary databases.

StayinFront's core products are developed and supported by StayinFront's Telarc-certified (ISO 9001:2000) Technology Group using the StayinFront Quality System. This ensures StayinFront's compliance with GMP (Good Manufacturing Practice) and GAMP 5 (Good Automated Manufacturing Practice Guide for Validation of Automated Systems, ISPE) standards.

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