SalesLogix

Customer Relationship Management

Integration for a Customer-Centric View

How to successfully integrate front and back-office applications in your small or medium-sized business

January 2004

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Abstract

Today's small and medium-sized businesses understand the necessity of automation, from their front-office customer relationship management (CRM) tools to their back-office accounting and financial systems. The latest mission-critical process in business management within customer-centric organizations, however, is integrating these front and back-office applications to provide the organization with a complete view of their customer interactions and, in turn, the ability to make more insightful business decisions.

This white paper provides executive management, as well as IT decision makers and sales professionals, thought-provoking considerations when planning an integration project. The paper also addresses the latest developments in software technology that can impact your organization, a project overview of a typical integration initiative using Best Software products as an example, and a look at the capabilities, benefits, and return on investment that an integrated front and back-office solution can provide your organization.

Customer-Centric Integration Defined

Although CRM is intended to create a complete customer experience, there are functional dividing lines within business organizations that perform very different tasks. These collections of tasks have been conceptualized into the *front office* and *back office*.

Regardless of the *office*, customer-related activities are performed throughout the organization and historically the information is contained and not shared outside the walls of the conceptual office. Requesting or accessing the data may be time consuming and difficult.

Traditionally, the front and back offices use dissimilar tools and systems to perform the critical daily tasks required to make a business profitable. The front office uses customer-facing applications to manage contacts, schedule meetings, track sales opportunities and problems, and store detailed notes. The back office uses applications to manage customers and vendors, process orders, keep financial records and report sales.

Regardless of these so-called barriers, the goal in integrating the front and back office is to deliver native, best-of-breed product functionality to each conceptual *office*, as well as provide access to business information in other *offices*.

Defining the word *integration* is important because it has a variety of meanings to people. For clarification, integration, as discussed in this white paper, is defined as customer information sharing across internal organization boundaries with a focus on sales and customer-facing departments interfacing with the accounting and operations delivery departments.

In today's mid-market application space, no single application meets all of an organization's business needs, so it's critical that the applications you select are flexible enough to work together.

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The Situation at Hand

Silos of Information

Small and medium-sized businesses start out very small and find creative ways to keep the doors open. As a business grows, the organization's technology needs and sophistication levels increase and business software solutions are purchased on a department-by-department basis. Purchasing the best products, at a price point that makes sense, was and still is the prudent way to provide tools for success.

However, during growth cycles, businesses may hire additional personnel, acquire and implement new systems, and communications about the customer, which may have previously consisted of a quick conversation with the person next to you in support or sales, grow more difficult. When a small organization expands, it is faced with the need to implement systems and processes that will not only accommodate their growth, but also enable them to provide that same level of customer intimacy and knowledge they had as a small business.

An impediment to this, however, is that as the organization grows and attempts to implement departmental solutions to accommodate expansion, data silos of critical information develop. Information that was once freely shared across the organization is now contained in multiple business systems that do not communicate — causing the firm to farm the data using spreadsheets and other data gathering tools to construct a complete customer picture.

Evolution

As stated above, these organizational conditions and data silos have evolved over time. The organization that knew and retained its customer knowledge is now faced with the desire to provide the original small business customer intimacy and knowledge. Rather than starting over, companies are deciding they want to link up all the vital functions so the line between customer service and selling products and services can be blurred, creating a single view of the customer. If sales and service agents have a full understanding of a customer's needs, problems, and overall situation, it's easier to achieve high levels of customer satisfaction.

Economics

Small or medium-sized businesses are quite often challenged to do more with less, especially during the current economic climate. They are required to maximize previous investments in technology to boost performance. In addition, they must measure the return on investment of their CRM and ERP projects. What about the customers? While technology has advanced the way organizations do business, it has also elevated customer expectations. Customers expect organizations to offer, build, deliver, and in particular, service and support the products they sell, or they will look into alternative vendors.

In today's environment, organizations must structure their internal communication processes so that resulting customer interactions can make customers feel like they are the only and most important customers.

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Organizational Orientation and the Players

An interesting way to consider front and back-office organizations is to view them as a check-and-balance system. They have opposing views and needs. However, both functions are vital to the health of the organization. Depending upon an individual's departmental affiliation, opinions of each department's usefulness, worth, or capabilities can be less than stellar. This is an important phenomenon for organizations to recognize. Consider these viewpoints:

- If you're a back-office or accounting team member, you may view the sales and customer facing roles as tell-them-what-they-want-to-hear, smoke-and-mirrors magicians because you're the one who has to clean up the mess, right? The back-office view is that they are the team that enables the front-office sales professionals to do their jobs. They manage the score and keep everybody honest.
- If you are a front-office or sales organization team member, have you ever called the back-office team "Sales Prevention?" The front office's view is that sales are what sustain the company and if there are no sales, there is no company. Process just gets in the way of giving the customer what they want.

Are these viewpoints exaggerations, or have you heard similar views? The purpose of these examples is not to belittle either view but to point out the fact that poor and infrequent communication between these teams may cause customers to ultimately suffer.

Front Office - Sales Perspective	***Back Office - Operational Perspective***
The sales vice president is usually the key sponsor of a CRM front-office initiative. The pains that drive CRM purchase decisions are typically the need for sales processes and pipeline management. Typical application requirements include ease of use, plus flexibility and customization capabilities to support a firm's unique way of doing business and evolving processes. In addition, it must support the field sales organization with the data they need in a disconnected, un-tethered fashion.	Accountants and other back-office staff (e.g. shipping managers) are accustomed to software that is designed to be a system of record. While it may be easy to use, accuracy in recording the state of the business is the primary requirement. Accountants often view CRM as a way of streamlining the collection of sales transactions and are wary about allowing any access to, or creation of, data that will jeopardize system integrity.
• Highly customizable application with almost no rules • Support for disconnected laptops, for use in the field • Easy-to-understand user experience, because sales people are voluntary users • Pipeline forecasting tools, for better sales management visibility • Sales order capture, so that sales people can enter orders themselves without learning a different system • Visibility of customer and inventory-related information through the CRM system • Designed to be a productivity tool	• Rules-based solution • No disconnected model • Users are required to use products and the user interface (UI) can be imposed upon them • Concerns about sales accessing or changing data in the accounting system, including adding new customers to the accounting system and setting or changing credit limits • Concerns about how orders will get into the back-office system • Concerns about who *wins* if an order is priced out incorrectly by sales

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Cultures Are Shifting

Internet-age financial officers are beginning to take advantage of technology to help better manage their businesses. They report on information such as pending sales and orders, inventory levels, and customer history. Unless the systems are integrated, the value of this fragmented information is minimal because it is not easily available.

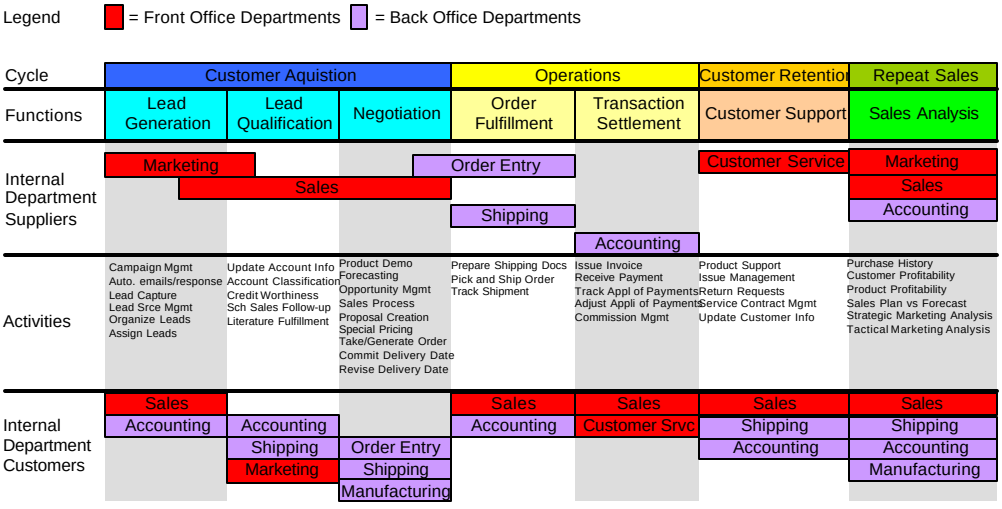
There is a culture shift. Did you know that some companies have been sending their team members to business school to get a better grasp of technology utilization? The truth is that a correctly integrated front to back-office system can solve this problem more quickly than any degree. And when considering costs, there are industry studies that state it costs seven to 10 times more to win a new customer than to keep an existing one. To that end, an integrated front to back-office system can help generate revenue, improve customer satisfaction, and reduce operating costs, which can create a value center and not just a cost center.

Streamlined Workflow Increases Productivity

Those familiar with manufacturing processes are acquainted with quality control methods such as the Japanese *kanban* (a moving container/bin that houses the parts on an assembly line) or big C (external customers) little c (internal customers). In the software world, the integration process has a similar feel. The underlying concepts of these methods are to understand the input and output of a department's function and understand how other departments (little c) need the information or product they create. Further, the information is available from a single source (or bin) and is taken and replaced as needed to complete the product or, in the case of customer centricity, acquire, retain, and up-sell customers.

The image below is a simplified study of an organization's functional roles. It is a map of the departments that supply the information, some activities that could be performed, and the internal customers of their work or output. There is a realization that not all small or medium-sized businesses conform to this departmental structure; however, most of these functions exist in an operational business.

Table 1: The Customer Chain



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Integrating the front and back-office systems helps streamline workflow and communication. Information is entered into the system once, eliminating double entry, and increasing productivity, but not circumventing checks and balances.

How often do sales or support people get asked for shipment status information? Or, what if they take an order only to find out the customer is on credit hold and the order cannot be fulfilled? Through integration, employees have the ability to analyze data, make more informed business decisions, and provide higher levels of customer service.

So how do you enable business processes, data and employees to cross your organizational boundaries?

Set Your Mind and Execute

To accomplish integration for a customer-centric view, organizations should set their corporate priorities and be very clear about what they want — a single, central, combined and accurate view of each customer.

Execute a Plan

If the organization vision is set and executive buy-in has occurred, what's next? The next step is to build and execute an implementation plan that encompasses both the multiple constituencies, discussed above, and the systems that are either already in place or planned for implementation.

The integration project is not as much about technology as it is about the people, processes, structure and information that are involved. To encourage a cultural shift in thinking and doing business, change management, personnel involvement, and clear and frequent communications are the key. It is important to manage any potential fear about how changes will affect employees' day-to-day duties. If the vision is set and people are involved early, it's possible to minimize this.

During the planning process, consider contracting with a systems integration company that understands both your company's operations and your systems, and one that is locally available to implement and support your organization through the process. Working with integration experts is an excellent way to fast track the execution of your front to back-office integration project.

The first order of business is to identify a project owner within the firm that can be held accountable for project completion. This person will need to be the project *champion* and invoke consensus across the various project constituents. Once this person is identified, there are many technical and process steps to be considered. Expect the integration project to be dynamic because business drivers change, as do the needs and desires of the organization. Pictured below is a sequence of events designed to create a sense of overall project considerations and a timeline regarding the factors that influence system implementation of front to back-office systems. Each visually defined project area is briefly explained after the image.

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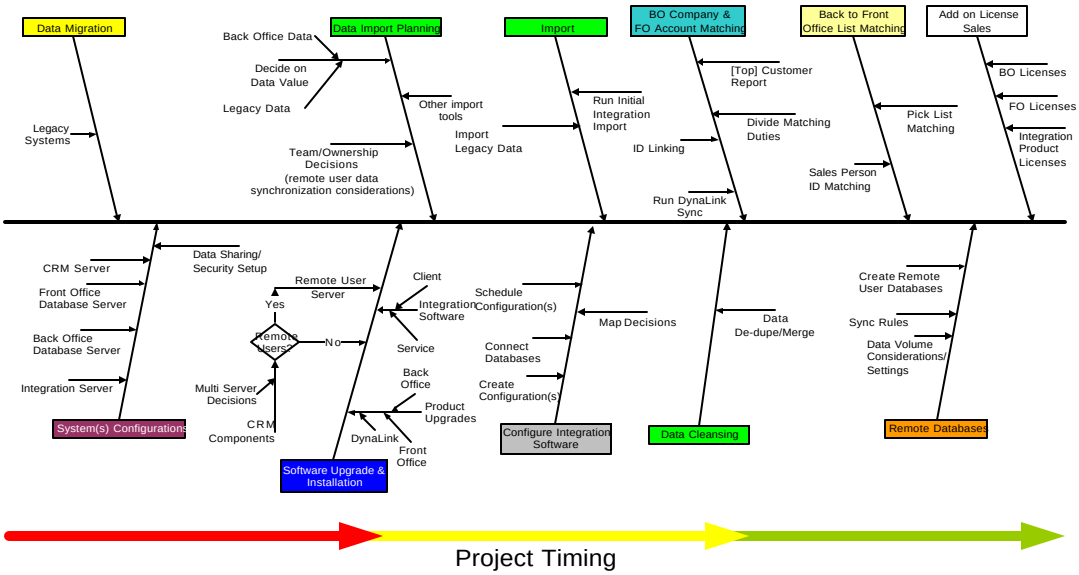
Table 2 – Project Timeline



Data Migration

As in any new or existing software implementation, handling pre-existing systems information can provide challenges. The specific points to consider when adjoining the front and back-office information systems is the value of the data and how much work will be required to cleanse and merge the information together with the newly implemented systems. It is important to consider the existing data early in the project and compare the information for reliability and accuracy. Evaluating this information early will provide clear insight to decisions needed during the actual data import steps.

System Configurations

System sizing and server configurations are difficult to calculate due to the myriad of factors that contribute to the combination of possibilities. As a general rule, it is suggested that the integration service be installed on a computer that meets the recommended requirements and is separate from the front and back-office database servers, as well as separate from the CRM remote user synchronization servers.

Software Upgrade and Installation

The existing software systems upgrade process is very important to the overall success of the front to back-office implementation, as it is dependent on existing installed products meeting the minimum version requirements.

If new software is being installed, this is one of the easiest tasks of the front to back-office implementation process. Once the system configuration decisions are made, the necessary tactical steps must be performed to get the software running.

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Data Import Planning

The purpose of the data import planning stage is to prepare for successful data importation and consider the sequence of events. As the front to back-office implementation process continues, the dependency of previous steps becomes important to the success and profitability of the project. When actually preparing for data importation into the front or back-office systems, more decisions and a subset of steps are required.

Step 1: Review the pre-existing systems data decisions as discussed in the Data Migration section.

Step 2: Arrive at a consensus regarding the value and accuracy of the data to determine the sequence for importing.

As discussed in this document, the back-office data is extremely accurate and contains customer financial information. This is usually the data set to start with when considering a new implementation of a front-office system.

Step 3: As needed, prepare additional data imports to load pre-existing systems data.

Step 4: If remote, field-based front-office users receive synchronized data as part of the implementation, consider the impacts of the new data and identify plans to assign teams and ownership schemes using territory management tools to assign appropriate data ownership rules.

Configure the Integration Services

Configuring the integration services consists of using the configuration tools that are part of the software. These configurations establish connections between front and back-office systems. Refer to the product documentation for the exact steps to follow in setting up the connections.

Extending past the product documentation, there are other practices to consider such as creating a naming convention for the configurations. There are many variations to creating configurations and there may be multiple configurations to an implementation. Save time by identifying a way to quickly tell which front-office database is connected to which back-office company, as well as the mode and scheduled run time.

Import

The process of actually importing data is completed in two phases. The sequence is dependant upon the decisions made in the Data Import Planning stage, and is dependant on the data value decisions.

Phase I is to import the data determined to be the most valuable and that provides the most accurate information. If it is deemed that the back office information is the first data set, execute an initial integration import. If other pre-existing data sets are deemed the most valuable data, import this data first using the data import tool of choice.

Phase II is to import the secondary data set. Once the data validation of Phase I is complete, import the secondary data set.

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Data Cleansing

Once the data has been consolidated into the front-office product, it is possible that the combined system contains duplicates. This will depend upon the import tools chosen. Some third-party import tool products have matching software that helps to eliminate duplication.

Regardless of import tools, the data cleansing step is important to start the implementation off with a wholesome dataset. Taking the time to use de-duplication tools will continue the implementation process down a successful path.

Matching Front-Office Account with Back-Office Company

Up until this point, the back-office company information and the front-office account information may not be connected or linked together to form a connection across the systems. This stage of the implementation connects accounts in the front office to the back-office company. As the implementation progresses, the front-office software is loaded with information from the back office and if needed, data imported from other systems throughout the organization. To create a link or connection between the front-office account and the back-office company, certain cross-reference information must be populated. During the data import phases, when the information is inserted from the back office, this linkage is automatically created.

Matching Front to Back-Office Lists

Other auxiliary data lists affect the harmonious and congruent flow of information between the front and back office. The acceptable values in these lists must match between both front and back-office systems. Each system may have special logic or rules associated to the values. An example where this becomes important is during a sales order — the sales person code and the shipping methods must match. If they do not match during the order validation process in the back office, the order or quote will not be processed.

Field-Based, Remote User Databases

If the implementation is supporting remote or field-based front-office users, there are many considerations that surface. Deployment of remotely synchronizing field-based users, data volume, and account ownership must be considered.

If during the data import planning stage of the implementation, teams and ownership were assigned, there may be no further action needed. If they were not assigned, this is the time to look at tools needed to assign territory ownership in the front-office product and further investigate the individual user's synchronization settings.

It is difficult to set remote user transaction volume guidelines because each company runs their business differently. It suffices to say that expectations for initial and follow-up remote user synchronization sessions must be set.

Further, the process of creating a remote user's offline database should be performed after all the initial imports, synchronizations, and front-office accounts and back-office companies are complete. Creating a remote user database before all the data importing could create

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unnecessary perceptions and dissatisfaction due to the potential length of time it could take for remote users to update their databases.

Capabilities

The situation is defined, the needs are apparent, an execution plan is feasible, and a responsible person is selected with an implementation partner ready to help. Now the IT questions begin. This section is dedicated to reviewing the more technical qualifications and capabilities to consider when implementing a customer-centric integration project.

Technology Measuring Stick

Integration from a technology perspective can be delivered in multiple ways. Each implementation situation must be evaluated for the correct technology solution deployment. The following page lists characteristics to consider when evaluating solutions.

Table 3: Evaluation Details to Consider

Consideration	Explanation
Scalability	This is an indication of how much data and processing the approach can accommodate.
"Future" Resilient and "self-realizing"	This is trait that allows the integration components to discover new functions as they are added. This provides a basis for intelligent and dynamic functionality adjustments. It also makes maintaining the products simpler from an upgrade perspective.
"Generic"	Does the integration method support a true gateway for other solutions/products to use the framework?
Development Knowledge	How much does the development staff need to know about the integrating product(s) programming interfaces? Is your team responsible for creating parts of the integration components?
Transactional Integrity	Is the transactional integrity maintained? How is this handled? How will that affect the integrating products technical support functions? Will product support for the integrated product be dropped because of the integration modifications?
Maintenance	Is a new team required to manage this product?
Technical Support	What does the Applications Support team need to know about the integrating product(s)? Do you need to have the domain knowledge?
Installation/Configuration	What are the modifications that must happen to the integrating products? What components/modules are required with the integrating product? How do you know if they are installed?

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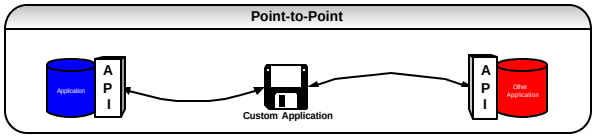
Consideration	Explanation
Licensing Costs	What are the licensing requirements? Is there a Developer's license required to perform configurations? What are the costs and who will provide these licenses?
Flexibility	How flexible is the data mapping? Can additional fields be added, removed, remapped?
Data or User Interface	Many aspects of integration are concerned with data movement and the user interface is handled separately. Are the UI and data movement components tightly coupled? How seamless does the integration feel?
Out-of-the-Box Integrations	Does this type of architecture support pre-built, ready to deploy integrations that require minimal configuration or development work?
Advanced Configuration Possibilities	Does this type of architecture allow for customizations, multi-server, multi-database configurations?

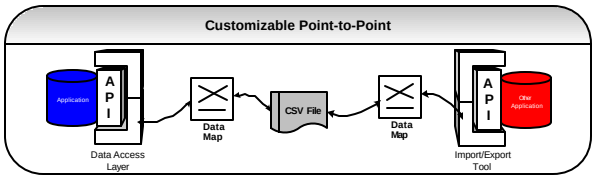
Architecture Options

Below are three architectural approaches to performing integration: Point-to-Point, Customizable Point-to-Point, and Multi-Point. Each is diagrammed on the following page with specific comments about how each method performs.

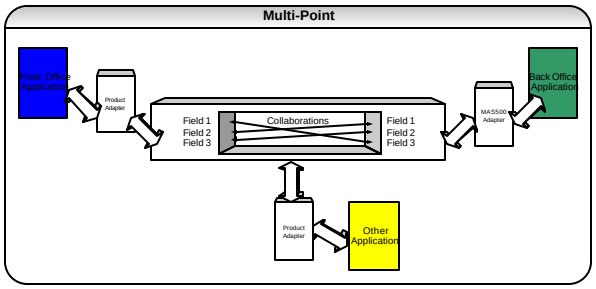
Point-to-Point



Customizable Point-to-Point



Multi-Point



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Method	Point-to-Point	Customizable Point-to-Point	Multi-Point
Considerations	**Comments**	**Comments**	**Comments**
Scalability	Low	Moderate	Extremely high. Limited only by the native products.
"Future" Resilient and "self-realizing"	Typically not capable.	Data mapping allows the addition of new data fields and new functions can be coded.	Highly
"Generic"	Typically not designed this way.	Open, customizable mapping makes this a decent solution.	The structural components make this highly generic and put the specialization at the driver level.
Development Knowledge	Should hide the need for knowledge of both products.	This type of solution allows for pre-built integrations so product knowledge may be reduced. However, as soon as customizations are required, significant knowledge of the data and import or export tools is needed.	This solution masks the need to know heavy details about both products.
Transactional Integrity	Depending on the vendor's knowledge and certifications, this approach could violate the transactional integrity of both systems due to lack of knowledge.	Excellent – it uses natively supported tools from the vendors.	High integrity maintained because each of the adapters are knowledgeable about each application's rules.
Maintenance	When working correctly, minimal.	Minimal	Minimal
Technical Support	This approach requires significant knowledge of both sides of the integration and excellent knowledge of all products involved.	This approach requires significant knowledge of both sides of the integration and excellent knowledge of all products involved.	Simplifies the learning curve and number of new products required to learn.
Installation/Configuration	May be easy	Requires additional products to install and configure connectivity information.	Installation can be challenging depending on the use of self-configuration.
Licensing Costs	Special licensing may be required for both products.	Requires Import/Export module purchases.	May require additional licenses from each integrating product.
Flexibility	Low	Good	Good

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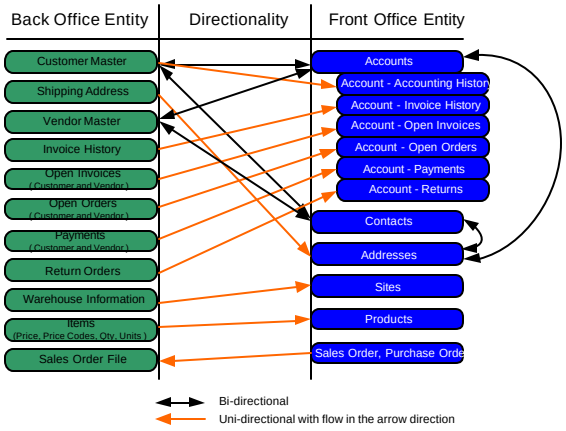
Method	Point-to-Point	Customizable Point-to-Point	Multi-Point
Considerations	**Comments**	**Comments**	**Comments**
Data or User Interface	The user interface is disconnected from the data integration requests.	The user interface is disconnected from the integration requests.	The data movement and user interface can be tightly coupled in this model. A function request may be sent through the framework and the driver renders the user interface.
Out-of-the-Box Integrations	Yes – usually the only way this is deployed.	Yes	Sometimes
Advanced Configuration Possibilities	No. Configuration is fixed.	Yes – multiple servers and databases.	Yes – advanced in these capabilities.
Deployment Situations/Uses	Typically used in fixed product integration situations that are allowed to make minor modifications.	Deployable for a wider range of applications because of its flexibility.	Deployed where more scalable needs are required.

Information Exchange

Integrated systems enable access to a wealth of information, as discussed throughout this paper. The graphic to the right is a representation of some of the data entities that exist in the front office and the back office. The directionality column indicates the entity relationship and the information flow. The color-coded arrow differentiates the bi-directional (both systems allow updates) and the unidirectional (one system is the originator and the other is a receiver) relationships. There may be other conditions placed upon the relationships to create master and slave relationships. These conditions will vary from system to system.



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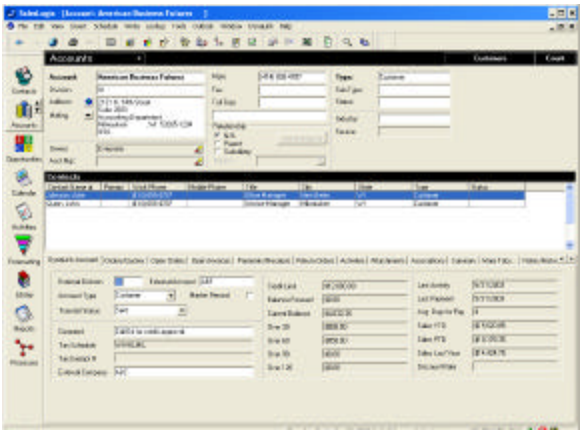
Customer-Centric Integration at Work

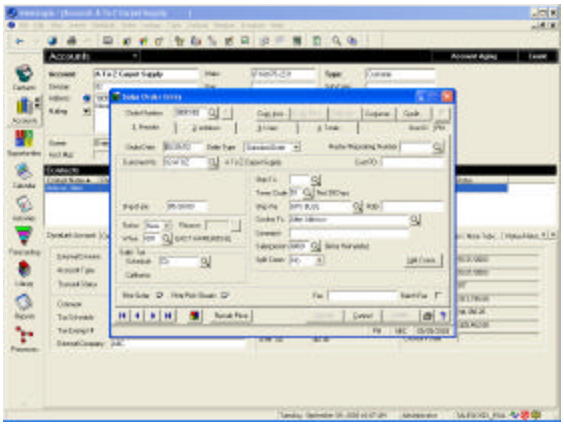
How does it look when all the systems are working together? Ultimately, the solution should look and feel like the native application the users are familiar with using. Shown here are screen shots of SalesLogix, the best-selling CRM application from Best Software, displaying accounting information on a customer including receivables, aging, credit limit, sales year-to-date (YTD), as well as other back-office data. By selecting the appropriate tab in the user interface, front-office users can view invoice history, sales history, payment history, and other important back office-related customer information.

Customer Information Using SalesLogix



Taking it one step further, there are situations where it may make sense to enable a front-office user to directly access the accounting system for reasons such as a customer inquiry or to place an order directly in the back-office system. With the front-office account and the back-office customer information linked together, users are able to click a button from the account record in their CRM solution and the back-office product opens in the appropriate screen with the correlated customer's information.

MAS 90 called from within SalesLogix



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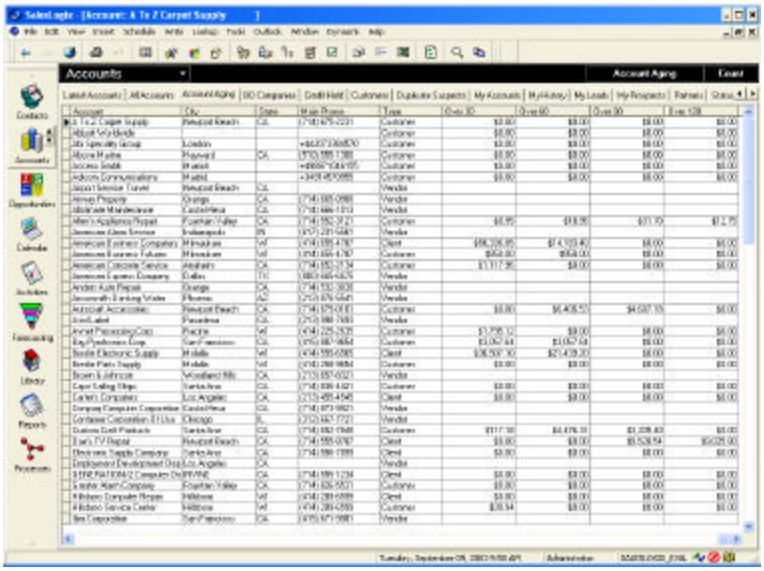
Extended Functionality as a Result of Integration – 1+1=3

In review, front-office systems are historically flexible and customizable. Back-office systems are typically designed around strict rules to maintain data integrity. With an integrated system, the flexible front office now has an extended set of business information to create a composite application whose value is greater than the sum of its parts.

Although the information views discussed below may not be specific product components of a particular integration suite or application, they are the results of applying the inherent functionalities derived from integrating the front and back office. Organizations that maximize this integration reap the rewards of excellent insight in their business. Take a look at some of the extended functionality that can be derived from an integrated solution.



Top Customer List

View a list of the top customers by simply creating a group of customers and including and sorting the year-to-date (YTD) sales field.

Customer Accounts Receivable Aging List

View which accounts are due and the collection aging.

Credit Hold List

View customers on credit hold.

Unprocessed Orders List

Orders correlate to dollars. A click of the button provides a list of unprocessed orders.

Collections Letters

Use mail merge capabilities to send customers friendly reminder notices that their accounts are past due and record the event to CRM history.

Buying Trends

Define criteria and manipulate the information in Microsoft Excel.

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Return on Investment

The price of integration software solutions ranges from as low a few hundred dollars to upward of a hundred thousand dollars. Additionally, there will be implementation and project-associated costs. Knowing this, vendors in the small and medium-sized business space are pricing the products to make sense for small and medium-sized company budgets.

However, as you know, when considering return on investment, there are countless factors that can and do influence costs, timing, and the final solution capabilities. It is inappropriate to prescribe an expected return on your investment with so many unknown conditions.

However, it is appropriate to provide some guidelines to consider when looking for contributing factors for your investment and return calculations.

Table 4: Factors Influencing Return on Investment.

Customer-Centric Integration Savings Influencers	Customer-Centric Integration Cost Influencers
Customer Management, Attrition and Loyalty To consider gains in this category, a baseline number is needed to understand the organization's customer management costs (CMC). Once this value is known, calculations may be computed to understand customer profitability. Knowing these numbers and then applying them against a customer attrition rate will yield a value. Conversely, this process may reveal a savings by approaching unprofitable customers with options to drive them into profitability or save your CMC dollars by no longer servicing this customer.	**Data Conditions** The number of systems and the data consolidation requirements will affect service or internal costs.
Labor Savings One of the big benefits to implementing a customer-centric integration solution is the potential labor savings. Consider the cost savings that could occur by reducing the double-entry time across two or more departments (not to mention the accuracy gains). An example would be sales reports that are prepared by a sales person, but later modified by the sales manager and/or the sales vice president.	**Hardware Acquisitions** Does the current hardware in your company meet the requirements? It may be necessary to add or update machines.
Customer Base Sales Opportunities Providing great customer care can turn into a profitable business practice. Knowing your customer base more intimately may enable your organization to increase revenue with current customers. Assign value to the cross-sell and up-sell opportunities and allow that to be part of the justification.	**Software Updates and Acquisitions** This includes the cost of the actual software, updates to existing applications, operating systems (if they are not up to specifications).

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Customer-Centric Integration Savings Influencers	Customer-Centric Integration Cost Influencers
	Out-of-the-Box Capabilities The scope of integration can increase the overall length of the project. Solutions designed to solve challenges for small and medium-sized companies are available that offer working, out-of-the-box integrations. Extending these pre-built solutions will increase costs.

There are many examples of customers that have experienced return on investment from integrating their front and back offices. Code 3 Collectibles, a retailer of high-quality, realistic and detailed limited-edition collectibles, has integrated Best Software's CRM solution, SalesLogix, and the company's financial and accounting system, Platinum for Windows by Best (PFW). These two products also work with the company's shipping software. When its time to ship an order, data flows automatically among the systems, cutting shipping time from five days to just over 48 hours — a 60 percent reduction from shipping time prior to integration.

Conclusion

Successful customer-centric integration is achievable and affordable for small and medium-sized companies. By following the guidelines outlined in this paper, you can be on the correct path to success within your organization. The key is to keep the customer's experience with your organization at the forefront during the integration process. In addition, it's important to show the internal constituents the win-factor for them, along the way, to garner support.

Customer-centric integration represents an unusual and yet fantastic opportunity for the entire organization to benefit from the unified solution. For the specific constituents outlined in this paper:

Sales wins by:

- **Having** unprecedented levels of insight to the order and invoice process.
- **Having** up-to-date product information, pricing, discounting, and inventory available when quoting or taking orders. (*No need to wait for accounting to call you back with product information or the latest pricing.*)
- **Knowing** the account credit status, terms and account balance before creating an order.
- **Knowing** the invoice, payment, outstanding balance and aging information to offer more complete customer service.
- **Using** past product purchasing information to plan future marketing campaigns.
- **Using** the front-office tools to identify and focus on unprocessed sales orders or customers with excessive past due balances.
- **Using** front-office process tools to follow-up with customers after they purchase.

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Accounting wins by:

- **Maintaining** control over the order entry process so salespeople generate accurate and complete orders.
- **Controlling** product pricing and/or discounting.
- **Reducing** the time spent answering questions from sales or producing reports because the teams have accounting information at their fingertips.
- **Reducing** double work re-keying orders.
- **Reducing** customer maintenance activity.

Overall, everyone wins because orders are moving to accounting more quickly, customers receive product sooner, the company gets paid faster, salespeople receive commission checks earlier, employees are more satisfied with their jobs, and customers receive higher levels of customer service.

The time is right to identify integration as a key corporate initiative, conjoin your data silos, and start reaping the rewards of the synergistic capabilities that a customer-centric, integrated business can offer.

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