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SPLASH!

Issue 141 April/May 2022

Accessible swimming for everyone

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Pool industry
Overcoming the floods

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Customer relationship management more important than ever

By **Brett Lloyd Abbott**

When I was in high-tech equipment sales (several decades ago), the management at our Fortune 500 company approached us “sales engineers” as we were called then, and introduced a brand-new customer relationship management (CRM) software system we were all required to start using.

At that time, we were selling complicated seven-figure to eight-figure projects that could take a year or more to close. There was certainly no room for carelessness, or lack of professionalism. Stepping up to more professional sales management system was a perfectly logical step.

However, this concept and software was totally foreign to us, so we all squirmed a little at the concept of having to use this weird-looking software to track our daily activities on the computer. We had all grown accustomed to using our Day Timers or notebooks or manila folders, or yellow stickies, or whatever each of us had individually chosen to use to track our sales opportunities and action items. So resistance to change was no surprise.

Fortunately, it only took a few days of using the system to get comfortable with it. And I soon discovered the fairly significant advantages of having all of my client and prospect information in one place. (For me personally, I was finally rid of that nagging guilty feeling of accidentally losing some critical information that I may have squirreled away on a sticky note somewhere.)

It also made it much easier to let management know what we were doing. I no longer had to create handwritten reports of my status, because the status of my opps, and my activity related to it, was right there in the CRM system, at their fingertips.

Fast forward 30 years, and virtually every medium to large sized business is using some sort of CRM. In fact, latest statistics from BuyerZone say that 91 per cent of all US businesses with 12 or more employees are using a CRM.

Apparently, the pool industry didn't get the memo.

In 2019, I reached out to about 100 US pool builders and asked them (1) “What CRM are you using?” and (2) “Are you happy with it?”

The responses floored me.

Shocker 1: The most popular CRM amongst all the builders I surveyed was “Pen & Paper.”

Shocker 2: The second most popular CRM amongst all the builders was “None.”

Shocker 3: The third most popular CRM amongst the builders (coming in at 11 per cent) was the Jandy ProEdge system. But that was primarily for the construction management platform. Most of the users admitted they weren't too crazy about the sales CRM side of the platform, and had abandoned that.

Shocker 4: Of the 45 pool builders who were actively using a CRM, there were at least 23 different brands in use. Twenty-three!

Conclusions: Unlike pumps or filters or heaters or vinyl liners or interior finishes, or even distribution companies or buying groups, the pool industry has curiously not yet narrowed down to a typical list

of “top three providers” when it comes to sales CRMs. Or perhaps more to the point, the industry has obviously not yet figured out how powerful a sales CRM can be for their business.

So let's review a few undeniable facts regarding the sales process for inground swimming pools:

- There's a lot of money at stake here. (We're selling a product worth \$50,000 to \$500,000 or more.)
- It's a fairly long buying cycle (typically several months or more) compared to buying groceries (a few minutes), or a new car (maybe a few weeks).
- Each sale is unique. (Even with pre-built fiberglass pool installations, every project is different.)
- There are a LOT of unique details to keep track of, including what they want, how big is the yard, what are the property setbacks, are there community issues, what features do they want, how many kids in the family, how are they planning to pay for it, what are the buyers' personality styles, and so much more.
- And if you're like most pool builders and/or designers, you've got way too many unique opportunities to keep track of.

Heck, I would even argue that selling a swimming pool is more complicated than selling a house (with the exception of all the ridiculous real estate paperwork, of course).

With so much money at stake, and so many variables in play, why wouldn't you take advantage of a sales CRM? It's actually quite easy to adopt (unless you get one of the expensive, complicated ones). You can then immediately begin to:

- Track all of your opportunities “in the cloud,” which means they are accessible to you anywhere, and anytime.
- Segment your opportunities, so you can focus first on the hottest opportunities, and worry about the “future buyers” later.
- Set timers and reminders for specific tasks that need to be done, to keep that particular opportunity moving.
- Maintain that “personal touch,” even though much of your communications will now be automated.
- Close deals faster, because you can respond more quickly through the CRM system, whether that's with email, voicemail or text.
- Maintain the relationship after the sale, which is perfect if you'd like to upsell maintenance contracts or any other services after the pool is finished.

A sales CRM is the perfect tool for any business trying to sell inground pools in this crazy post-pandemic time. If you don't have one, get one soon, because your competitors are likely to do the same. ■

These articles by Pool Builder Marketing's Brett Lloyd Abbott's are designed to provide pool companies with unique insights that will help them address modern marketplace challenges.

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