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A productive talk with the customer starts with having the right information

Noordhoff integrates back and front office systems

By Frank Veerkamp

In order to provide a good service to your customers you need to know what's going on – in detail. It is annoying if the relevant information you need is spread across different systems which don't communicate with each other. Publisher Noordhoff is now linking all its systems with each other. Klopotek is providing the technology for this undertaking with its new STREAM platform.

An organization like Noordhoff Uitgevers stores and manages a lot of customer data, on schools, teachers, and the managements of schools and universities. Currently, the information is still being kept in different systems, which means that it can be troublesome to gather all the information on, for example, the relationship between the publisher and a particular school.

Olaf Hoge, Manager Services, Noordhoff Uitgevers: "Currently [in marketing], we often adopt a scattergun approach, as there is no other option. We do actively target, but soon our targeting will be so much better."

Picture source: https://nl.linkedin.com/in/olaf-hoge-ab5abb66

'With the new system we'll link the information of the back office system and the front office system,' says Olaf Hoge, Manager Services from Noordhoff Uitgevers. This means that every employee in marketing, sales, and customer services who is entitled to do so will soon be able to display a customer's information in an overview screen. 'As an account manager or a customer service agent you'll start your conversation with a customer in a completely different way if you know that there are still open help desk questions or outstanding invoices, or offers which have already been made.

In this case you can immediately tell the customer what's going on and how things are progressing. You'll have a much more productive talk on the phone. Service and sales have to be connected and follow each other, but this is only possible if you know what the situation is. You start your conversation in a different way if you're well prepared.' In order to ensure that everyone has the most up-to-date version of the information, the system processes data in real time whenever possible. This means that each change in the data is processed immediately and is directly visible to every employee (who has access to the data).

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Targeted marketing

It is also important for marketing to know what the situation is at a customer. The more information you have the better and more targeted the communication will be. Olaf Hoge: 'Currently, we often adopt a scattergun approach, as there is no other option. We do actively target, but soon our targeting will be so much better. The benefit for our customers is that they'll get less information from us which is not relevant for them. If they know that the information we send them is in most cases really relevant for them, our e-mails will become more relevant and valuable for our customers.'

If you're able to approach your customers in a targeted manner, you can handle your contacts more efficiently. You no longer have to plan actions which will show no result because the recipient is not interested in them. You can focus your efforts instead on providing the information or making the offer to the people who will value it. And your customers are no longer 'bothered' by information which is less important for them.

Noordhoff will soon also be able to approach teachers with totally different information. Olaf Hoge: 'We'll soon be able not to only send a teacher simply a folder but also, for example, a sample of a chapter from a method we're still working on. Or reading material which covers a specific issue of current interest which can be used by the teacher in class as soon as the next day.'

Ruud Gerritsen, Director Klopotek BV (picture: Klopotek): "You have to define the customer journey: which problem can you solve for your customer, and how?"

Ruud Gerritsen from Klopotek: 'Customer relationship management and enterprise resource management were two different worlds for a long time: one had to do with relationships; the other with products. But in a company these two areas are linked in dozens of ways. In order to be able to help a customer, you have to know what they want, what makes them excited. This is why you have to be able to put yourself in your customer's position. You have to define the customer journey: which problem can you solve for your customer, and how?'

have to be part of this and have to agree to share their data: if you don't tell us what information you'd like to receive and what information you don't need, you're more likely to get an offer or an info e-mail from us which is not suitable for you at all.'

As the website will also be part of the linking process (Noordhoff has about 200, soon there'll be only one), the data transmitted using the website can also be stored and used – in addition to the data shared by the customers. Ruud Gerritsen: 'For example, you can check how many people looked at a specific page of the website in the last two months. From the statistics you can see what the visitors were looking for and if they found what they were searching for. Your next steps or actions can be based on this information.'

The new system will be introduced on a broad basis: Olaf Hoge: 'It won't be limited to the departments who deal with customers. For example, when a product has been released the only thing we need to do is tick a box and all employees – from Production to Customer Services – will get the information that this product is now available. In case Customer Services is getting many questions about a specific subject, they'll soon have the option to put an FAQ in their personal environment of the system, after login. These are just a few examples; in general, the result of implementing the new system will be that we can deliver tailored information without making this process unmanageable.'

Klopotek is developing and implementing a 360° customer view and will connect Salesforce's Sales Cloud, Pardot's marketing tools, and the CMS and webshop software Liferay with its own ERP system via APIs. All information can be accessed centrally. On top of this will sit a user interface, built by Klopotek: this is where the right selection of the massive amount of data is presented in a way which suits the customer's business needs. Of course, the publisher decides – within the scope of the software – which information is presented.

The right information

'It is not our goal to collect as much data as possible but to get the right data,' says Olaf Hoge. 'We comply with the privacy regulations and we want to bother our customers as little as possible with irrelevant information. We want to best suit their needs as far as possible and, in so doing, make the decision-making process less stressful for them. To achieve this goal we need accurate and comprehensive information. Our customers

An operation of considerable size

Some of the components of the system are already in use at other publishers in the Group, such as the Belgian subsidiary Plantyn and the Swedish company Liber. Noordhoff in Groningen and in Houten (both in the Netherlands) are the last ones in the line. Olaf Hoge: 'Every department in every office will be affected. There are 500 to 600 employees in total. So the roll-out as such is a project of a considerable size, but the main part will follow afterwards: everyone has to learn how to use the system. This means that manuals have to be written and courses have to take place. The employees have to be able to get used to working in a new way. It is an operation of considerable size and complexity, but it is definitely worth the effort.'

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