

Modern Methods for Improved Customer Experience

Topias Talvo

Author Topias Talvo	
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<p>This thesis has been created to understand how companies can positively separate themselves from competition with improved customer service experiences. Thesis will investigate the factors that lead to better customer experiences and will also explain how these factors can be implemented inside an organization. There are many ways to implement strategies, but this thesis will limit the research to understand how technology can play a part in helping organizations to create better customer experiences.</p> <p>Thesis consists of four parts:</p> <p>Chapters 1-2 will explain the research aim and the process how the research will be executed.</p> <p>Chapters 3 and 4 will cover the theoretical framework of how companies can differentiate themselves with improved customer experiences.</p> <p>Chapters 5-8 will focus on the implementation on how the theoretical framework can be implemented inside an organization, using technological softwares.</p> <p>Chapters 9 and 10 will conclude the thesis with an answer to the research question and give further recommendations how the research could be continued.</p> <p>This thesis is supported and commissioned by a company called Salesforce.</p>	
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1 Introduction

This Bachelor's thesis has been created to investigate a challenge many companies are dealing with in the 21st century business world and investigate a set of software solutions that will help to solve the challenge. The author of the thesis calls the challenge as the "21st century business problem". It has a grand name, and for a good reason: it affects all the companies in the world who put emphasis on creating an outstanding product/service without considering the overall customer experience the buyer will have. Especially the smaller businesses have faced big challenges when the resources to adapt to a new digital way of doing business are very limited. (Gray & Zappalà 2006, 3.)

Before the Internet became the mainstream source to find products/services, people used to rely on the companies who were operating in the region where a customer was located. This meant that the customers would not have much choice on where he/she would buy that product/service, regardless of how the companies would serve their customers. So to say, the cards were dealt to the buyers and they had to live with the fact that they may still need to buy that product/service from companies who did not necessarily put too much efforts on improving their customer experiences. When the Internet came along to this equation, customers could now research products/services online and even buy them across the globe. This phenomenon had a massive impact on the situation that if a customer would not have a positive experience with a local company, they could always research some other company online and order the product/service from them. When the supply for products and services increases, customers now have total freedom to choose the company they want to become a customer of. From the company perspective, they now needed to start moving away from a mindset called product centrality towards more customer centric mindset (which both will be examined more in-depth in chapter three). (Selin & Selin 2013, 9.)

1.1 Commissioner

The thesis is commissioned and supported by a company called Salesforce, whose software solutions will be introduced later as a potential solution to the

business problem described above. To offer validation and neutrality, the research will also compare Salesforce solutions with the top three service providers from the same industry (based on market share size).

Salesforce was founded in 1999 by Marc Benioff (CEO) and Parker Harris (CTO) with a vision to change the way business applications were created, implemented and used.

At that time business softwares (like all softwares) needed to be installed physically in a computer's hard drive, which was slow and for bigger enterprises it was a huge cost as well when hundreds or even thousands of employees needed to install the software to their computers. This created a problematic situation for a software company because the costs of purchasing and implementing a business software had massive up-front costs when they had to purchase the software from a vendor up-front and hire a team to handle the implementation and downloading of the software to the company.

Marc & Parker decided to develop a business software that would run in the "cloud", meaning that the software wouldn't have to be downloaded anymore to the computers. Instead the users could access the software through their computer's browsers, which meant that the customers would no longer need to have multi-million costs before they are able to access the software.

Salesforce launched their first product called the Sales Cloud in 2000. Sales Cloud was a customer relationship management software that was running in the browser. Marc & Parker ended up creating a SaaS (Software as a Service) business model for Salesforce, which meant that customers do not buy the software anymore, instead they will buy a license to use the software that would run in their browsers. The SaaS model quickly became a big phenomenon for software industry because this eliminated the need for massive up-front costs and customers would no longer need to hire an IT-team to install and maintain the software when the service provider would take care of all that. To make it easier for customers to become as a customer, Salesforce created a pricing plan where customers would rent the software only for the people who use it with monthly fees (which would still be paid one year at a time). The pricing model and the flexibility created a safer and easier environment for customers when they could just pay the licenses of the users and resign the contract without the need to commit to a long-term one-time purchase. The SaaS model and new pricing model turned out to be a big success

not only for Salesforce, but for other software companies as well. Today Salesforce is the global leader of CRM-software business with a market share of 20% in fiscal year 2018. (Salesforce 2018a.)

The company has acquired multiple business software companies over the years and is now known of a software product portfolio creating a “360 view of the customer”, meaning that the customer is able to get Salesforce softwares designed for Sales, Service, Marketing and IT-departments to handle the complete customer experience regardless of the department. Salesforce Sales & Service solutions will be examined further in chapter six and seven. (Salesforce 2018a.)

1.2 Research aim and question

The aim of the thesis is to provide solutions to a common problem that businesses are having in the 21st century competitive landscape. The Internet has created many opportunities for companies, but it has also offered many opportunities for customers when they are able to compare the products online and even buy products and services overseas. A research stated that 68% of marketing department leaders have said that their company is increasingly competing based on customer experience. (Salesforce 2018c.)

Companies struggling to differentiate themselves from competitor's products will need to reinvent either their products or reinvent their competitive advantages. This thesis will focus on the latter one and will examine how modern companies are able to improve their customer experiences using business softwares and eventually gain a sustainable competitive advantage from superior customer experiences. Therefore, the research question of the thesis will be as following: *“How can modern companies use business softwares to improve their customer experiences?”*

The author acknowledges that there are many other ways to improve customer experiences, such as service design, however this thesis will intentionally focus on software solutions that aim to improve customer experiences. The next chapter will examine the structure and methods of the research which will lead to the aim of thesis: to give businesses of any size and industry an understanding what aspects impact the customer experience positively and

how these aspects are put in practice inside a company with the help of technology.

2 Research method

The research method used in this thesis will be a qualitative research. Qualitative research has been described as an umbrella term to a variety of different, non-quantitative research approaches of the natural social life. In practice this means that the research will aim to study things that cannot be necessarily measured in numbers. (Saldana, Leavy & Beretvas 2011, 3.)

The data collection for this qualitative research comprises of data from academic books and articles to study the theoretical concepts of the thesis, and data from website articles and visual materials to gain a more up-to-date perspective of the results of implementing softwares to help companies to create superior customer experiences. The collected data is mainly from unbiased sources which do not have a link with the commissioner. However, some parts of the thesis required commissioner-based data, such as chapter eight of successful implementations of Salesforce systems. This decision was made to gain concrete examples of users of CRM- and service systems.

The subjects of research will be divided into four parts:

1. Theoretical understanding of the research problem (21st century business problem). Aim is to fully understand what business-related problems companies are experiencing in relation to differentiating themselves from competition.
2. Study of the technological concepts which help companies to solve the problem. Understanding which technologies are positively influencing in solving the above-mentioned problem.
3. Comparative study of the three best software solutions to solve the problem. Analysis of the three most influential software solutions in the market (based on global market share size) that are using the above-mentioned concepts to positively influence the 21st century business problem.
4. Study of the ways how companies have adopted the solution to a problem and what benefits they have gained from it. Analysis of companies

who have adopted a software to help in the 21st century problem and the results they have gained from the adoption.

These four subjects will give a comprehensive understanding of the challenge's companies are having in differentiating themselves, an overview of the technologies that can help companies to solve those challenges and lastly, concrete examples of companies who have succeeded in solving differentiator challenges with the help of technology. This will ultimately lead to an answer to the research question: *“How can modern companies use business softwares to improve their customer experiences?”*

3 Defining the 21st century business problem

A real-life case study below demonstrates the research problem of the 21st century business problem:

A study conducted by a consulting company Accenture in 2010 found out that 37% of South-African financial service companies' clients are switching banks, caused by insufficient quality of customer service. (SAPA 2010.) To further support the problem, The World Retail Banking report also investigated the topic in 35 different countries with more than 18000 consumers and concluded that 38% of consumers are likely to change their current financial services company when facing insufficient quality in customer service. (Capgemini 2012.) The World Retail Banking report also investigated the level of satisfaction from different channels the banks were providing, and the discovery was that more than 50% of the consumers were unsatisfied with the service channels available for them. These reports served as indicators that the banks were not focusing on creating positive experiences for their customers and they were too much focused on the actual core businesses of the finance sector. The solution Accenture suggested was to obtain a "customer centric" way of doing business and start shifting away from the "product centricity" which will be examined in chapter 3.1. (Accenture 2011.)

3.1 Product centricity

Above mentioned financial services problem has a lot to do on how you view the way your company does business. Many companies are still on the product centric way of doing business. This means that the company puts all its efforts on creating the perfect product/service and forgets the fact that the product itself cannot guarantee increasing sales if there are similar competitors' products in the market. It is extremely difficult for a company to build a sustainable competitive advantage with company's core products unless the company is using technology that no one else is able to use or continuously having the lowest price on the market. (Grönroos 2000, 4.)

An American economist and professor Theodore Levitt (Levitt, T. 1960.) explained product centricity as an internal focus of a company to create and sell superior products. He also argued that the main purpose of product centric companies is to sell more products with ever-increasing profits. This style of

doing business can work in an area where the market has very few competitors and the company in question has the upper hand with superior products. Product centric companies usually know their product or service extremely well but face challenges in communicating the value of the product or service to the customer. (Selin & Selin 2013, 18.)

To further support the importance of customer experience, Salesforce conducted a survey which stated that 52% of business-to-consumer (B2C) customers have said that they would switch brands if they are not receiving a personalized customer experience. This means that the product is not the only priority customers have in mind when they are dealing with companies. (Salesforce 2018c.)

A study by a management consulting company McKinsey stated that a typical customer journey when buying a mobile phone is divided into five stages:

1. Consider – Stage where consumers consider buying a new phone with improved functionalities
2. Evaluate – Stage where consumers evaluate and research their options
3. Buy – Stage where consumers commit to one out of multiple options
4. Experience – Stage of experiencing how the phone and its related services work
5. Advocate – Stage where the consumer advocates the phone they have purchased (if they have had positive experiences)

The same study found out that in the evaluation stage, consumers stated that 68% have been consulted by friends on which phone to buy and 60% have reported to read online product reviews and forums. Based on this, providing positive customer experiences has an impact on the way existing customers advocate new customers to either buy or avoid buying a specific phone. If the current customers have had positive customer experiences, naturally they are more likely to recommend and advocate that product to their friends. (McKinsey 2012.)

3.2 Customer centricity

Denish Shah from Georgia State University described customer centricity that a customer is the central part in business value creation process. (Shah 2006, 2.) This means that the company identifies that customer is the number one stakeholder when considering how to create sustainable value for the company and its products. Companies activities should always consider that the customer dictates the purpose for the company, creates the demand for the products and eventually decides whether the company will be financially profitable or not. (Heinonen & Strandvik 2015, 477.)

Customer centric organizations may require a longer research and development process, rather than product centric organizations, since customer centric organizations want to understand the customers better, and not just create products they may need. They want to please that customer throughout the lifecycle of that customer relationship. In order to gain a sustainable and functioning customer experience, the customer needs to be considered from the very first stages of planning a business. This way the needs of the customer are part of the business already from the very beginning. (Selin & Selin 2013, 9.) This type of development and preparation work will become financially more profitable in the end, since your customers are having products that they want and the service that they like. This creates long-term customer relationships and customer loyalty which will increase your customer retention rates compared to companies who are only focused on the product and forget the service side customers also demand.

A study conducted by Salesforce stated that 69% of consumers see personalized customer care as a major or moderate influencer on their brand loyalty. This means that there are no shortcuts to the loyalty of your customers. The more personal your company can serve the customer – the more likely they are to stay loyal to your brand. (Salesforce 2018b.) To further support the need of personalization, Selin and Selin stated that by developing more personal and human customer interaction, the more likely your company is to stand out from the competitors. (Selin & Selin 2013, 11.)

3.3 Comparing product centricity to customer centricity

To compare product and customer centric business activities, two example companies will be examined; Apple and Amazon.

Apple is currently holding the third place on global mobile devices sales with the iPhone. (Statista 2018.) Apple was founded by a visionary pioneer called Steve Jobs and he has made a comment stating that “customers don’t know what they want until you show it to them”. One can argue that he was right, when it comes to technology and its capabilities of delivering innovations; consumers do not necessarily think of all the things that are possible to have inside technological consumer products. On the other hand, one can also argue that this comment is the typical statement from a product centric company. The company puts majority of their emphasis on driving innovations within technology, and suspects that consumers will embrace those innovations.

Apple has established a massively recognizable brand where customer loyalty has been built on a basis where the product innovations exceed customers' expectations, but what happens when the customers are disappointed by the latest product launches? The most loyal customers will probably keep buying those products, but those customers who are not loyal to the brand, will eventually buy their products from one of the competitors (WNS 2018.)

Amazon is the e-commerce giant operating in a completely different industry than Apple, but the founder and CEO Jeff Bezos has succeeded to create Amazon an extremely customer centric company. Jeff Bezos describes their company philosophy; “If you're competitor-focused, you have to wait until there is a competitor doing something. Being customer-focused allows you to be more pioneering”.

By adopting the customer centric mindset, companies are no longer focused on their competitors because the customers' desires are the ones that should drive the change of the business in order to satisfy their needs. By actively thinking like a customer and adopting customers opinions in companies research and development activities, you are always able to develop your business in a way that a customer is happy and will continue to use your products or services. This style of thinking can lead to extremely great customer satisfactions, loyalty and more stable growth than the companies who try to innovate products/services without knowing if the customer ever finds them acceptable. (WNS 2018.)

To put it short, product centric companies drive innovation around the product (which can lead to massive short-term success if the customer finds the innovation usable. Customer centric companies instead, drive innovations to please the customers with products and services they need and want, thus leading to greater customer satisfaction and safer way to grow your business. Below is a comparison table to help understand how common business topics are seen between product versus customer centric mindsets. (Selin & Selin 2013, 19.)

Table 1. Product vs. Customer centric mindsets (Selin & Selin 2013, 19.)

Product centric mindset	Customer centric mindset
Acquiring customers for the product	Acquiring solutions for the customer
Viability of the product	Viability of the customer
Product development	Customer relationship development
Product features	Customer needs
Product lifespan	Customer relationship lifespan
Distribution	Customer experience channels
Sales increase	Deepening of the customer relationship

4 Adopting customer centricity

Becoming a customer centric company does not happen overnight, especially if a company has previously had a product centric approach to the business. Size and existing culture inside the company plays a big role in driving the change toward customer centricity. The bigger the company is, the harder it is to change the mindsets of the employees to start thinking and doing customer centric changes inside the organization. Customer centricity cannot just be implemented with customer-facing employees, it needs to be in the core of the business and all of its employees. Every single unit has either a direct or indirect effect on how customer will experience the service they are given in that company. It does not matter if a salesperson provides the best customer service there is, if there is for example a service engineer who prioritizes something else over the customer – it will have an impact on the overall experience of that customer. (Robson 2013, 1-2.)

Customer centricity can be achieved by adopting five key activities;

1. Having a leadership team focused on driving the business forward with a customer focus and not for example the shareholders focus.
2. Truly understanding who your customers are.
3. Designing the customer experience.
4. Having more metrics than just revenue i.e. customer satisfaction and retention rates.
5. Getting feedback from employees and customers that drives the continuous organizational and product/service improvement.

The top challenges of achieving the customer centricity in a business can be separated into two themes; cultural issues and informational issues. (Superoffice 2018; Grönroos 2000, 198.)

For the cultural part, the common problems are: The culture of the company is not focused on driving the customers' needs because the organization is focused on driving sales progress. The organization has no clear idea of what customer centricity means as a concept. Employees of the company often knows the product and service very well, but they lack the capability of seeing where, why and how the customers would use the product or service in the first place. (Selin & Selin 2013, 18.)

As for the informational issues, the common problems are: Lack of customer data (information of the customer) sharing inside different teams of an organization. Lack of technology and resources to collect, share and analyze that customer data. And finally, there is insufficient expertise to analyze the customer data that could be accessed through different technological software systems. (Superoffice 2018.)

4.1 Handling cultural challenges

There are numerous of ways to start adapting your culture towards customer centricity, but one of the key aspects of it is to emphasize to the employees the importance of even having customers in the first place. They are the ones who create the demand and pay your bills and salaries, so the customers should be treated as the number one stakeholder. Customers are the reason why your company even exists in the first place. (Rubanovitsch & Aalto 2007, 32.) When employees start to see things from this perspective, it becomes easier to start adapting to the mindset that the customer should be always on top of the mind no matter if you work in sales, marketing, service etc. (Superoffice 2018.)

According to HubSpot, adopting a customer centric approach requires 4 key activities:

1. Creating two-way communication channels between customer service and product development (this will give the product development teams an insight on the issues and challenges that are commonly raised in the customer service cases and development teams are able to react to those insights)
2. Collect qualitative & quantitative feedback from the customers (these feedbacks will give you an outsider's perspective how your company, products or services are performing and where you are able to improve)
3. Building a product with a service that will support the customer experience throughout the product lifecycle (support the customer through

presales, sales & aftersales to get the customer to become loyal to your company)

4. Research and design customer journeys (get a complete overview what your customer goes through when purchasing from your company and you are able to improve and innovate new ways to each touchpoint where you interact with your customer)

As can be seen from above, HubSpot's perspective is very much aligned with Superoffice's view on how to adopt customer centricity but gives concrete examples on how to start creating that culture into business processes where the customer is placed as a number one priority regardless of the business unit. (HubSpot 2018.)

4.2 Handling informational challenges

As discussed in chapter four, companies usually face also informational challenges. These challenges are related to the lack of information of the customers, their attributes or journeys they go through when making a purchase from a company. This information is crucial to have when adopting customer centricity into a company's culture and business activities. (Superoffice 2018.)

4.2.1 Data sharing between departments

The first challenge regarding information was described to be the lack of customer data sharing between different departments inside a company. (Superoffice 2018.) Typical challenge for companies who have multiple departments such as marketing, sales or service is that each department (or in worst case scenario each individual) stores their customer-related information in files with no visibility to other departments. (Selin & Selin 2013, 104.)

An article by Forbes magazine explained the growing importance of data sharing between different departments. (Forbes 2018.) The article researched the process of hiring a new employee into a company and investigating different touchpoints where data of the recruit would be required. It may seem odd in the beginning that a recruit's information would be shared across departments like accounting or internal training teams but when looking closely to the journey an employee would have, the more sense it makes to share the information of the candidate with those departments:

An employee starts at a new position inside a company. The employee is asked to fill out an electronic form which is asking to fill out the basic contact details and his/her bank details, tax certificate, and attach copies from job-related certificates such as fire safety or first-aid certificate.

Sooner or later the employee will get his/her first paycheck and attend internal training courses which the nature of the job would require. These activities now involve HR, accounting and internal training departments and they all need information from the employee. Therefore, one can justify the need to have data integration (sharing) between different departments inside an organization. The more companies can collect relevant information from the employee, the easier and faster onboarding time will be.

The same process applies in acquiring a new customer, just in a bit of a different and more complex format. The more you know about your customer, the better chances you have of designing a relevant and pleasant customer experience for them. The customers will not see each department as separate units, they will see your company as a whole and therefore your company's each unit needs to be able to serve the needs of a customer. (Rubanovitsch & Aalto 2007, 32-33.) Selin & Selin supports the ideology in their book with a statement which argues that the customer operations are in their best form when there are no barriers who can speak to the customer. (Selin & Selin 2013, 11.)

4.2.2 Ineffective support function

The second challenge regarding information is the effectiveness of the customer support functions. Many companies are still struggling with an issue that they don't have relevant data of the customer who is contacting the support function. This leads to many, sometimes tricky questions directed at the customer. A study conducted by Salesforce stated that 83% of business buyers have rated that it is critical or very important for them that they are routed to a service agent who is most knowledgeable of their issue when dealing with customer service. (Salesforce 2018b.) Knowing your customers, their needs or demands and communication is the cornerstone of successful customer experiences. (Blinnikka & Kuha 2004, 137.)

If you would have an issue with for example a license for a software that your company has bought for you, you would first contact the customer service and then they would first need to identify from which company you are calling (to identify what customer they are dealing with), which product/software they are using, and what type of license does your profile have (basic, standard, premium etc.) By manually always asking these questions, it takes a lot of time of both the service agents and the customers. And perhaps in some cases the customers do not even possess that information which license they have or what product they are even using. This issue leads to two things:

1. Frustrated customers when they don't necessarily have all the information in their hands right away (and in big organizations they might not even have any idea where to get that information).
2. Unproductive customer support agent (when they must spend time asking questions before they are able to start identifying the problem of the customer).

If the service agent would now have to internally solve where he/she could get information on what products/services the customer has bought, the most logical department would be the sales department. As previously discussed of the example case about the collaboration with HR and Accounting functions, the same example can be applied to sales and service functions. The more collaboration and data sharing there is between the departments, the more efficient the service process would be.

5 Tools to improve customer centricity

As demonstrated above, the key to creating customer centric business mentality has a lot to do with data sharing between different departments inside a company. Total data transparency between departments creates the baseline for superior customer experience. The more you know about your customers, the better you can market, sell and service them. (Selin & Selin 2013, 11.) The investments that go to acquiring new customers are crucially important for companies to thrive and grow their business but the stabilization to the revenue comes from existing customers. These customers will not tolerate poor customer experiences, so when they face an issue, there usually is loads of other companies to choose where they would move their business to.

So, the question is how companies can adopt and implement this data sharing activity inside an organization? To answer this question, one needs to understand the concept of business intelligence: Business intelligence (BI) is a term used to describe the outcome of collecting, storing and analyzing information that is meaningful for a business. (Chau & Xu 2012, 1211.)

When the Internet is becoming more and more popular place for business transactions like shopping and paying, the actions consumers and businesses take online create an online “footstep” called data. Business Dictionary has defined the word data as following: “Information in raw or unorganized form (such as alphabets, numbers, or symbols) that refer to, or represent, conditions, ideas, or objects. Data is limitless and present everywhere in the universe.” (Business Dictionary 2018.) This activity is extremely valuable for companies when they can collect and analyze that data. Analyzed data can be used in for example creating more personalized customer experiences for specific customer segments.

Collecting, storing and analyzing different types of data requires software systems, that are meant to take a set of data and make it meaningful for organizations. In a nutshell, these systems translate raw unprocessed data (that is collected from the Internet or other online platforms) to meaningful insights for the company. These insights can include information that is collected internally (inside your company, such as sales departments data) or externally (outside your company, such as generic information from your customers). BI-systems present those insights in forms of reports, dashboards and analytics. With the

help of a BI-system, businesses can make faster management decisions based on real-time insights. There are numerous types of BI-systems in the market, but this thesis will focus on systems that are directly linked to understand customers better and use that customer data to improve customer experiences. Therefore, chapters six and seven will focus on BI-systems called Customer Relationship Management (CRM) which is a system used to gather insights of your customers and the other one is called Customer Service System which is designed to handle service requests directed to companies. These two systems create a foundation for companies to gain insights of their customers and service them more efficiently, creating an improved customer service experience for the customer.

6 Customer Relationship Management system

Customer relationships form the backbone of a company's cash flows. (Kaarnio, Pennanen, Storbacka & Mäkinen 2003, 7-9.) This statement means that the relationships between your company and the client's needs to be nurtured in order to maintain the ongoing cash flows they bring in as a customer. And in order to maintain these relationships, you need to be constantly up-to-date on the activities and details of that specific customer. Typically, companies store their customer related data in spreadsheets that can get rather complicated when there are multiple products, multiple clients/customers etc. In many cases this complicated spreadsheet leads to the situation where the file is not shared with everyone who is involved in customer interaction or the spreadsheet gets just too big and complicated and the staff simply stop using it and start using their own ways. (Selin & Selin 2013, 104.) In order to provide superior customer service experience, companies must always know as much as possible from their customers, and if the customer data is siloed inside multiple complex spreadsheets, the information is no longer accessible in an efficient way. (Chen & Popovitch 2003, 673-675.)

One crucially important Business Intelligence system in this area is called the CRM-system (Customer Relationship Management). CRM systems collect, store and analyze your customers information in one place where the company employees will have full visibility to all customer related data. CRM-systems tackle exactly this typical problem of data being shattered all over without a single place where every relevant person would have access to. The main purpose of a CRM-software is to support the sales function in different touchpoints of customer relationships. Sales is not just about selling; sales also require extensive knowledge of the customer thus influencing the products and improving the service sales personnel are able to offer to them. (Selin & Selin 2013, 132-133.)

When customer-facing employees have access to all the relevant information of a customer in an efficient way, companies need to also consider how they use that information to influence the customers in a positive way. The usage of CRM-system depends a lot on the business and the activities the company does. The main point for customers is usually that they want to have a personalized and efficient customer experience when they deal with companies. With the help of a CRM-system companies can:

- Identify the customers and the activities they have had with your company
- Differentiate your approach for each customer with unique details
- Interact with your customers by setting tasks to remember to nurture the relationship

These three points are essential when businesses want to improve 21st century customer experiences by personalizing the service and making the service experience as effective as possible. (Ameyo 2018.)

6.1 Key functionalities of CRM-systems

As established the importance of customer centric way of doing business in chapter 3.2, sales staff are required to serve as more of a consultant than just a person who sells the product/service to a customer. Customers no longer have tolerance for sales staff to just push products/services to them, they require professional consultative help to make up their minds if your product/service is the right one for them. In order to serve the needs of the 21st century end customer who relies on sales persons' expertise, the sales people need to have the relevant information on that customer immediately when they start to interact. It is here where a CRM-system steps in to help the sales people to visualize the customer information within one system. This part of the thesis will focus on the key functionalities and features of CRM-systems creating the centralized view of customer related data.

6.1.1 Customer data management

CRM-systems store and collect information of your customers into one centralized location where your employees will have access to. This type of information can be for example:

- A list of customer companies (or individual customers)
- Contact details (of individual customers)
- Sales related documents (like contracts, presentations, media files etc.)

By gaining a centralized view of all the information mentioned above, customer facing employees will have a quick and efficient overview of the customers which will lead to faster and personalized customer service experience

when the employee would not have to spend time browsing this type of information in multiple spreadsheets, notes or other internal systems. (Egan 2001, 197.)

6.1.2 Opportunity management

Sales process steps and length can vary a lot in companies and industries. Some industries like many B2B industries require a more complex and lengthier sales process with many steps, and this is where many sales organizations can get overwhelmed of the overview of the process. This is why the CRM-systems have a functionality of an opportunity management. Opportunity management visualizes the sales process based on the data the sales person has input in the system. In CRM-systems the sales process can be divided into stages and the salesperson will then update the system if there are any progression in the stage of the deal. Usually there are multiple opportunities or deals in place so it can be hard to memorize the progression of each deal and therefore CRM-systems visualize that progression in each customers case as stages in an opportunity. (Egan 2001, 197.)

6.1.3 Lead management

Most of the companies have websites these days and many of the sites have a section where potential customers can contact the company by leaving a “contact me” form. The forms include typically the name, e-mail address and a phone number of the potential customer. This type of potential customer is called a lead in sales terminology. Many times, websites send the information of the lead from the website to an email which is appointed to receive this type of information. The problem in this is that typically one person is receiving this information and the lead is then accessible by only one person. CRM-systems are able to connect to websites of your company and have that form transfer the lead information into the CRM-system and even distribute that lead to a salesperson who would be the appropriate expert to handle that potential customer. This way the lead will not be handled by only one person and the information won't get lost in the email inbox. (Egan 2001, 197.)

6.1.4 Reporting and forecasting

Most of employees in an organization have a manager or a superior whom to report of their activities. Especially in sales, accurate reporting is crucial in order to illustrate how the company sales is doing, since it has a direct impact on the revenue and the financial success of the company. As elaborated previously, companies who are not using CRM-systems tend to use complicated spreadsheets where all the sales and customer information is stored. Yes, it is possible to make reporting work with spreadsheets, but it can get extremely complex and time consuming when the information is spread over multiple tabs and spreadsheets. The more variables in the manual report sheets there are, the more chances there are to make mistakes impacting the accuracy of the reports. If a company would be using a CRM-system, all the sales details would be logged in the system and a report of for example this quarter's deals could be done in minutes. Financial results are not the sole use case for reporting: sales leaders could also be interested in reporting how many meetings their representatives have done or how many emails or calls they have made. From those you could also gain information like how many calls or emails would it take to get a meeting set up with a customer, and how many meetings were successful leading to a deal. It is crucial to get reporting from the whole value chain in order to create an understanding how companies are succeeding in different parts of the value creation process. This way it is relatively easy to drill down where the company needs to improve their operations. If CRM-systems reporting indicates that there is a good number of customers coming in but also many customers leaving at the same time, the company could make assumptions that the customer service or aftersales team needs to improve their operations. (Ala-Muta & Talvela 2004, 150-152; Mäntyneva 2003, 60-63.)

6.1.5 Mobility

Sales people tend to be on the road often and the daily life is hectic and as a business you would probably like your sales people be as productive as possible. If a sales person would be in a meeting with a customer and the conversation would lead to something worth mentioning, you would normally type it into your laptop notepad or handwrite it to somewhere. There is nothing wrong with these methods, except that the notes typically don't end up to a place where all other sales people could read it as well. Imagine that this sales person retires or changes job, and the notes of an important meeting would be in

his/her computer notepad. They will most likely disappear, and the replacing sales person would lose valuable information of that meeting that could be valuable in making a deal with that customer. Most of the CRM-systems have an application for smartphones which has the same functions as you can find in the computer version of the CRM-system. This means that the sales representatives are able to access all the information of the customer from their smartphones and create notes on the go. This way the notes will stay in the systems and can be accessed later by every relevant personnel. (Mäntyneva 2003, 65-67.)

All of these functionalities are crucial for companies to have, but sales function itself cannot guarantee positive customer experiences for the customer. Aftersales or the service function plays as important role as sales in creating positive customer experiences for the customer. However, a CRM-system is not able to answer the needs of the entire organisation, therefore it is necessary to have a system for the service function as well which communicates with the CRM. (Selin & Selin 2013, 132.)

6.2 Example

A sales representative falls ill and has multiple customer meetings scheduled for today. Another representative has to take over those meetings, but all the notes, contact details and contracts are stored in the computer of the sick sales representative. The backup representative would have to get those details from the computer of the sick sales representative, which can be a bit difficult. If this sales organization would possess a CRM-system, all those documents and details could be found from one system where all the relevant personnel would have access to.

6.3 Impact on customer centricity

In chapter 4.2 that deals with customer centricity as a concept, the key takeaway was that customer is the central part in business value creation process. Considering the capabilities CRM-systems can provide to an organization, one can identify that CRM is the go-to-place for all things regarding your customer. In order for a company to be customer-centric, they need to gain as much knowledge of the customer that is possible to offer them the best customer experience. (Shah 2006, 2.)

An article by Forbes magazine explained that customers are starting to demand personalized customer experiences as something which would be self-evident to them. The same article also claims that customers are willing to spend more when they receive positive customer experiences. As previously discussed, salespeople are not just purely selling anymore, they are trusted consultants of customers who expect the salesperson to have personalized suggestions based on their own preferences. (Forbes 2017.)

CRM-systems are not able to provide customer centricity on its own, it is the key place where the employees of a company are able to access those personalized aspects of each customer or customer segments in order to deliver personalized customer experiences. Without CRM, that data of customers or customer segments would be fractured in multiple systems, spreadsheets or notes, not offering the vital information centralized and ready whenever you need it. This would create great difficulties to provide personalized customer experiences in real-time.

6.4 Vendor comparison

There are many software service providers in the field of CRM-systems, therefore the thesis includes this part to compare the top three service providers based on global market share ownership (see figure one). The three vendors are compared against each other in appendix one and the analysis of the comparison can be found below in chapter 6.4.1.

The comparison will be fulfilled using a website called "Finances Online, Reviews for Business". Key metrics of comparison will be the following:

- Overall score which scores the following metrics and gives an average total score from 1-10: main functionality, collaboration features, customization, integration, ease of use, general impression, help & support, security and mobility
- Customer experience score from 0-100 (using the website algorithm that analyses customer reviews, comments and opinions across multiple social media sites)
- Price and payment schedule (to illustrate the price and the flexibility of the service)
- Compatibility with devices (to illustrate which devices support the usage of the service)
- Customer types (what sized companies are typically customers of the service)
- Integrations (illustrates the customization of the service and the platform to serve specific needs of a customer)

The reason why the author chose this type of source for comparison was due to lack of data from any other resources. As can be seen from the appendices one and two, some service providers do not publicly share detailed information of the systems they are offering and therefore “Finances Online” review was the chosen source for the comparison.

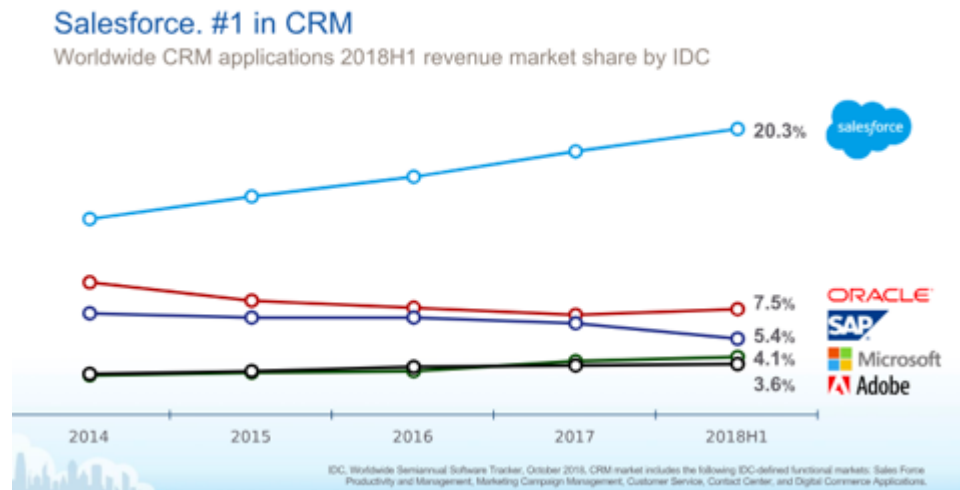


Figure 1. Global CRM market share size (IDC 2018.)

6.4.1 Analysis

As can be seen from the table, there are many similarities among the providers. There is no “one-size fits for all” solution and therefore the comparison cannot lead to a “best” solution recommendation. It is crucial to understand your own business and your resources before starting to investigate CRM-solutions.

All three scored extremely well on the overall score, which means that their overall performance on the normal use of a CRM-solution is really good. However, this score should not be blindly trusted and go with the best score. In order to have a better understanding of the capabilities of the software, one needs to understand the functionalities and especially integration possibilities between your company’s existing softwares.

Humans tend to believe other humans when making decisions, and the CX (customer experience) score represents other people's opinions of the softwares. All three scored 99/100, which indicates that other users in general do not have that much negative things to say about the softwares.

Pricing in software solutions is generally flexible. Most of SaaS (software as a service) providers use a yearly subscription model. The price is calculated per user per month, and the fee for the service is paid on a yearly basis. However, when taking a look at the price comparison, there is a big difference between Salesforce (\$25) and Oracle (\$75). It is highly recommended to not only consider the price, but the worth of what your company is getting for that price. SAP has not introduced publicly their pricing, but various third-party online reviews indicate that the price would be between \$50-75.

On the compatibility side, businesses should be able to relatively easily understand on which platforms they would be using the software. As mentioned earlier, salespeople tend to travel a lot, so it is recommended to go with a solution that enables salespeople to use their CRM-system on mobile devices. SAP does not support mobile usage of their CRM, however if mobility is not a priority for your organization, then SAP can still be a good option.

The needs can vary a lot depending on the size of your business, but generally speaking Salesforce and Oracle are suitable for small, medium and large enterprises whereas SAP can only cover medium and large enterprises. Salesforce and Oracle both have created CRM-solutions for smaller businesses which do not necessarily need all the functionalities, so both have created "light packages" of the premium-level softwares. The main differences between the light and premium versions can be for example the number of users, or storage space.

When it comes to features and integrations, one can see that the length of the lists are not similar. Some companies like to share more publicly, and some do not. Because of this, it is hard to tell which software would have the most or the best functionalities or integrations. Each software should be investigated separately with the service provider to get a deep understanding if there would be a match between the service provider and your company. It is crucial to get an understanding if the CRM-software is able to link to your company's existing systems (such as accounting systems).

To summarise, all three softwares have gained very good results from the test but it is highly recommended to get a consultation from a third-party consultant

or directly from the service providers to get an understanding if your company's requirements match with the service provider.

Reflecting back to the research question of the thesis; "How can modern companies use business softwares to improve their customer experiences?", one needs to understand that it is crucially important to remember that the platform investments your company makes has an impact on the overall customer experience. If your existing systems do not communicate well with the new CRM-system, it will have a negative impact for example on transactions between an online (existing system) store and a new CRM-system. Based on this analysis, your company can identify which service provider would be able to serve the needs of your company on a technical level.

7 Customer service system

Service function is highly important in the process of creating superior customer experiences. If you would be a customer with a non-functioning product/service, you may feel frustration, anger or other negative feelings. The first thing you would probably do is reach out to the customer service to report a problem with your product/service. The experience with customer service agents can get emotional because of the customers frustrations or other negative feelings and therefore it is crucial to handle the service case with empathy, professionalism and productivity. If the customer experience is not positive, you are in high risk of losing that customer, and there is also a chance that the customer will not speak fondly of your company on- and offline. According to a research made by Pew Research Center, 82% of American adults reported that they sometimes or always investigate online reviews before making a new purchase. (Pew Research Center 2016.) Therefore, it is important for businesses to serve the customer with positive service experiences in order to avoid negative online reviews. Needless to say, the reviews have a big impact if you will gain new customers as well. This part of the thesis will explain what kind of system would be able to help improve the customer service experiences.

7.1 Key functionalities of service systems

This thesis has urged the importance of data sharing between different departments many times. This shows also in the selection of softwares that aim to help sales and service personnel; The difference between CRM-software and service software is unclear. The key benefits and functionalities of service system are explained below.

7.1.1 Centralized view of customer data

Following the same theme of customer data access than in CRM, service systems aim to have customer related data within one place. This helps to keep track of the customer and the relationship they have formed with the company; contact details, bought products/services, previous service cases they might have had. If the service agent can have all this information within one system, the handling time of that service case will be dramatically lower than trying to find information from multiple systems or locations. (Tseng & Wu, 2014, 82-84.)

7.1.2 Case management and routing

A case stands for each customer claim that a service agent receives. These cases contain all the information that the customer has reported to be an issue in the product/service they have bought. These cases can be created for example on the service portals of a company's website, where the customer fills out the form what problems they have faced, and that form is then transferred to service system as a case for a service agent to handle. (Tseng & Wu, 2014, 82-84.)

7.1.3 Automation

If you have ever signed up to a webinar or an email newsletter, you have noticed that the response time is usually really fast when you receive an email from these activities. The same principle applies with service systems because the customers might have urgent needs to handle their service cases, so they need to be informed fast and kept up-to-date of the status of their service case. Service systems are able to automate manual service processes (in example communication with a customer). The process automation is able to significantly reduce service agents time by removing unnecessary but still extremely important manual work. This way the agents can put more time and efforts on the things they are specialized in. (Tseng & Wu, 2014, 82-84.)

7.2 Example

A software company has a service line where customers can call when their software is not working correctly. The service line receives multiple calls in an hour and there is only one person responsible of the service. When a customer calls, efficiency is the key when there are limited resources to serve the customer. The service person would then have to find out what products they are using and what license types they possess and other relevant information to solve the issue. The problem is that the company has no centralized place for this type of information and the spreadsheet of that specific customer is in a computer of the sales person who is meeting clients at the moment. This means that the service person must start asking very complicated questions from the customer and the customer does not necessarily have the answers, resulting to a very unproductive and unpleasant service experience. Unpleasant service experience does not promote customer loyalty and will eventually decrease your chances on winning future customers as well. Unproductive

service experience creates stress for both the customer and the service person as well since the workload keeps piling up from one call to another when the information needs to be manually asked from the customer. These results either in unsatisfied customers when the waiting time for service is long or higher staff costs, when the company needs to increase the amount of service employees to handle all the service calls.

If that company would have had a service system, the information would be accessed by simply typing the name of the customer into the system and all the relevant information could be seen by everyone in the organization who is in a customer facing position. This would save time of the service employee (resulting to handle more service cases with increased productivity) and increased customer happiness when the service employees are able to identify and personalize the service experience.

7.3 Impact on customer centricity

Reflecting to chapter three about the difference between product centric and customer centric companies, one could identify that customer centric companies develop a more personal connection with the customers and at the same time drive loyalty and stability to the business. One key activity that would increase customer centricity according to Superoffice was to have more metrics to measure businesses success than just financial metrics. (Superoffice 2018.) For the service side those metrics could include customer satisfaction and retention rates in order to identify where the business needs to develop their activities. If a customer is not pleased with the service they are receiving, it will show in customer satisfaction surveys and it will eventually show in customer retention rates if the negative experience will happen continuously.

To offer positive customer experiences in service department, they need to have the relevant information of the customer available as soon as possible so the service agents would not have to waste the customers time nor their own time. The relevant information can be also used to personalize the customers service experience by for example recommending products/services that can provide more value to the customer, thus providing upselling opportunities as well. As established many times in this thesis, data of the customer needs to be in a system that is accessible by everyone who are in customer facing situations. Effective and personal service department creates positive customer

experiences which have a direct impact on the loyalty of the customers and those existing customers are the ones that keep the financial success of the company stable.

7.4 Vendor comparison

Following the same structure as in CRM comparison, this part of the thesis compares the top three service system providers based on global market share ownership (see figure two). The three vendors are compared against each other in appendix two and the analysis of the comparison can be found below from chapter 7.4.1.

The comparison will be fulfilled using a website called “Finances Online, Reviews for Business”. Key metrics of comparison will be the following:

- Overall score which scores the following metrics and gives an average total score from 1-10: main functionality, collaboration features, customization, integration, ease of use, general impression, help & support, security and mobility
- Customer experience score from 0-100 (using the website algorithm that analyses customer reviews, comments and opinions across multiple social media sites)
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- Integrations (illustrates the customization of the service and the platform to serve specific needs of a customer)

The reason why the author chose this type of source for comparison was due to lack of data from any other resources. As can be seen from the appendices one and two, some service providers do not publicly share detailed information of the systems they are offering and therefore “Finances Online” review was the chosen source for the comparison.

Salesforce. #1 in Customer Service

Worldwide customer service applications 2018H1 revenue market share by IDC

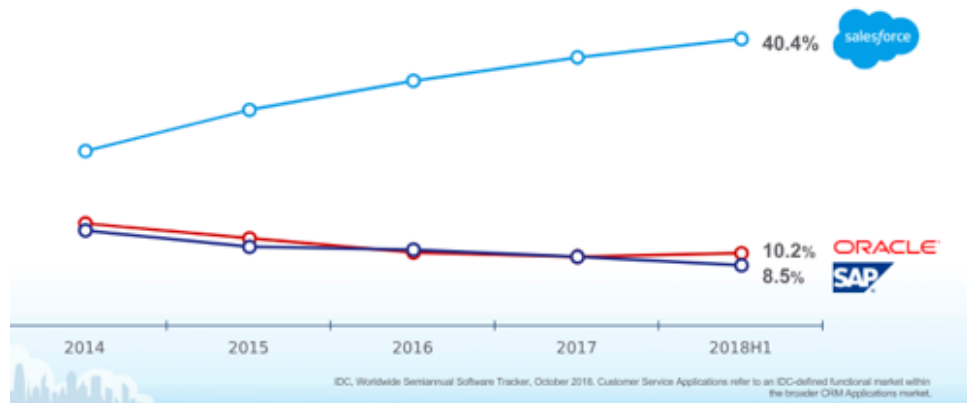


Figure 2. Global Customer Service applications market share. (IDC 2018.)

7.4.1 Analysis

As mentioned earlier in CRM-systems comparison, there is not a solution which would suit for all companies. Each company should evaluate their own needs and business requirements when choosing the right service provider.

Salesforce seems to score extremely well on the overall score compared to Oracle. SAP does not unfortunately have data on this part, so it is hard to make any justifications on SAP's software. On the CX (customer experience side), Oracle scored a respectful 100/100, outperforming Salesforce. Based on these two scores, one can already identify that the overall score does not guarantee that customers would be perfectly happy with the software.

Pricing follows the same pattern as in CRM-comparison, Salesforce has succeeded to lower the price to become attractive solution especially for the smaller companies with limited budgets. But again, the one indicator does not tell the whole truth so therefore it is recommended to not make any purchase decisions based on only price. The pricing reflects well on the customer types of the service providers; Salesforce offers solutions for businesses from small to large enterprises and therefore their starting price is also smaller. Oracle covers companies from medium to large enterprises and their price is also correlating with the customer type.

Because of limited amount of data from the service providers, the features and integrations list have differences between the three; some providers like to

share more information publicly and some do not. Again, the number of functionalities and integrations is not relevant, it is the usage of those functions and integrations what matters.

To sum up, Salesforce has succeeded to differentiate themselves positively from Oracle and SAP with customer types ranging from small to large enterprises. This gives the customer more leeway in pricing as well. However, as mentioned earlier, each provider should be considered separately before making any decisions to get a complete understanding what your company needs, and which service provider is able to deliver the best to those needs.

Following the same pattern as in the analysis of chapter 6.4.1, one needs to understand that it is crucially important to remember that the platform investments your company makes has an impact on the overall customer experience. If your existing systems (such as an existing CRM-system) do not communicate well with the new customer service system, it will have a negative impact on the overall customer experience. Based on this analysis, your company can identify which service provider would be able to serve the needs of your company on a technical level.

8 Success stories

This chapter is focusing on real-life examples of companies who have adopted CRM- and service systems. Due to lack of information from Oracle and SAP customer references, the reference cases explained below are only from Salesforce customers. This research was a qualitative research of Salesforces own customer success story database, which includes reference customers of companies who have implemented Salesforce services and the results they have achieved. To provide a wider perspective of the successful implementations, the companies chosen for the research are both from business-to-business (B2B and business-to-consumer (B2C) side and represent the following industries: engineering and service, software and logistics.

8.1 Company #1 KONE

KONE is a Finnish elevators and escalators manufacturer with 450,000 customers globally and their products are being used by more than a billion people every day. KONE's challenge was to differentiate themselves from competition, acquire more customers and keep existing customers. In an interview, Michael Williams of KONE (VP, Head of Service Field Solutions Development) explained that they wanted to become more than a company that sells and services the products. They wanted to serve the customers better, and that would lead to the differentiating factor from competition.

KONE stated that from a historical perspective, the customer agents were having hard time servicing the customers when they did not have an answer what was wrong with the product. KONE adopted Salesforce Sales- and Service Clouds to get real-time data of each product of a customer and they are now able to identify which part of the elevator or escalator needs service operations. This was implemented using IoT (Internet of Things) sensors which measure the performance of the escalators and elevators and send that data to Salesforce Service Cloud. This allows KONE service function to monitor the performance of their products in real-time and they are able to forecast which part of the machine would need to be replaced, even before that specific part breaks. This means that the machines are taken care of in real-time, preventing potential malfunction of the product. On the customers perspective, KONE can proactively tell exactly what is going on with the machine and when would it need to be serviced.

This type of change did not only include the implementation of Salesforce softwares, it required a fundamental change from the management mindset of KONE. They realized that competing only with hardware of the product is not enough to be different from competition. This is a typical example of the “21st century business problem” where product centric companies need to rethink the strategy in order to gain more competitive advantage. KONE adopted a customer centric mindset and started to think about what is important for the customer. In this case, the customer is now able to get help from KONE before the elevator or escalator would be broken. This increases the feeling of safety and provides an opportunity of servicing the machine during times that are not that busy for the customer. has separated KONE from their competitors and created a customer centric mindset from the original product centric way of thinking. (Salesforce 2018d.)

8.2 Company #2 F-Secure

F-secure is a Finnish software company that provides businesses and consumers with security softwares. Olivier Pierrot, Director of Customer Care at F-Secure described their challenge: “To offer a great customer experience, F-Secure needs to ensure its products are backed by responsive support services. The quality of our support services is vital to our reputation. To provide an exceptional experience and win new sales, we need to be able to understand our customers”. In F-secures case it meant that the service function needed to understand what products the customers have purchased and the challenges the customers have faced with them. The company had an existing CRM-system, which was not meeting their standards because it was not originally designed to capture this type of information and modifying the software was slow and all the changes needed to be done by an external consultant.

F-Secure wanted to have systems that would create consistency and quality to the sales- and service functions in all of their operating countries. F-Secure adopted Salesforce Sales- and Service Clouds in twenty countries. Toni Urpi from F-Secure stated that “The sales teams can instantly see key metrics on the dashboards, such as order intake, number of active resellers, pipeline opportunities, and average lead handling time. This gives them a unique insight into performance, and what needs to be improved.”

The data salespeople have generated in Sales Cloud, is also visible to service agents in Service Cloud which means that the service agents are creating more informed responses on the service cases. Olivier Pierrot from F-Secure also stated that “we can now provide consistent and seamless service across multiple geographies to improve the customer experience.” F-secure’s new approach to sales and service functions with Salesforce services has helped improve its Net Promoter Score (at 50 in Q3 2016), which measures customer experience and predicts business growth. (Netpromoter 2017.)

F-secure also captures information from Service Cloud and the research and development team will then analyze the problems and make enhancements to future releases of their products and services. This supports the mentality of customer centricity when reflecting to chapter four of the activities that drive customer centricity: “Getting feedback from employees and customers that drives the continuous organizational and product/service improvement.”

Yet again, one can identify that regardless how good your products can be, alone they are not able to provide superior advantage for the company. F-Secure needed to adopt a mindset where they put themselves in “customers shoes” and modify their existing methods to serve the needs of customers. In this case, implementing the softwares is one part of the change but what is important is to use the data systems create to change the business activities. This way F-Secure will always have a “feedback loop” to develop their products even further when they can analyze the data coming into Service Cloud. (Salesforce 2018e.)

8.3 Company #3 PostNord

PostNord is a Swedish/Danish owned logistics and postal services company. The company delivered over five billion letters and 130 million parcels in 2015. Anders Mittag, Vice President of PostNord stated that they needed to keep up with changing demands of customers and this meant a transformation from a local post service company to an international customer-centric logistics company.

PostNord has operations in Sweden and Denmark, which meant that the two countries sales and service operations needed to be unified and seamless. The two countries had different systems which were not consistent and did not

support seamless customer experiences. PostNord then decided to implement Salesforce Sales- and Service Clouds, which would support the company to unify the two countries sales and service operations. Jimi Mejlfort, a Sales Manager from PostNord stated that “It is hard to explain exactly where sales stop and service starts, as with a 360-degree customer view it is pretty seamless.”. In practice this means that service people at PostNord have the same visibility to customer information as the salespeople, which creates a “360 view” of the customer.

PostNords sales representatives can check outstanding service cases from Sales Cloud with a click of a button, rather having to wait multiple days for a report from service agents. The sales representatives have also Salesforce mobile application on their smartphones which have gained 30% increase in their productivity. PostNord also reported that their service agents are now more motivated and up to 25% more productive with the help of Salesforce eliminating manual tasks and gaining access to information productively. Anders Mittag summed up the implementation of Salesforce in PostNord: “PostNord’s evolution and growth will continue with Salesforce solutions at the heart of its ability to be agile, profitable and customer-centric. Customers remember good service, and that’s why they’ll keep coming back to PostNord”.

Once again, the change of the company cannot be software lead, it needs to have more thought out strategy on what the concrete actions and benefits will be. PostNord wanted to keep developing their sales- and service processes to best serve the needs of the customer. PostNord has now more streamlined sales- and service functions internally and externally they are able to serve customers better, thus increasing customer loyalty and repeat business. (Salesforce 2018f.)

9 Conclusion

The key of creating and improving customer experiences lies in understanding your customer. In the 21st century business landscape, customer data is what companies need in order to create this understanding. Customer data exists online, but the question is how companies can collect, analyze and use that data. The research of the thesis showed that this process requires a business intelligence software to collect, store and analyze that data for the companies. These systems are able to offer companies insights of their customers and business, but the process of improving customer experiences does not stop there. The softwares can give companies insights of the customers but it is the companies responsibility to make those insights meaningful. Making those insights meaningful requires a fundamentally changed mindset where companies accept and adopt a customer centric way of doing business where they place the needs and requirements of the customer as their number one priority. It is extremely easy and dangerous to get lost in the “core actions” of your business, which usually are product related such as research and development work, but there must be a balance between product centricity and customer centricity. With this balance comes stability to cashflow when existing customers keep on coming back because of the superior customer experience. The combination of business softwares and customer centric mindset is the solution to create sustainable competitive advantages out of the constantly improved customer experiences.

Choosing the right software service provider is extremely important when considering the return of investment your company will gain from it. The software needs to fit to your company’s profile and the usage of the software should not create any additional headache for the employees. If the user experience of the software is not pleasant for the employees, the software will not provide sustainable value because the usage and adoption of the software brings the value. Therefore, it is extremely recommendable that your company would ask multiple service providers opinions before making the decision of which software you should choose from. There are many aspects you should consider before making the purchase, but the main ones would be regarding customization, business size and price. If your company has already invested in softwares like enterprise resource planning or human resource softwares, you should choose the service provider who supports the integration between these systems.

When referring back to the research question of *“How can modern companies use business softwares to improve their customer experiences?”*, one can say that softwares alone cannot necessarily improve the customer experience. As established many times during the thesis, the focus and strategy of the company guides the process of creating better customer experiences. One cannot assume that by implementing CRM- and service softwares, a change in customer experience would happen instantly. As seen from the example reference stories of Salesforce, the strategy was thought out in the management level of the company and then the softwares are the tools which help companies in the process of creating better customer experiences.

To summarize, business softwares can be used as powerful tools to implement the strategical concept of customer centricity into real-life business transactions. These transactions create data for the company, which can be used to guide and manage the company to a more successful, customer centric organization. This process is the key differentiator of future business competition.

10 Discussion

What comes to the process of investigating and writing the thesis, the author would have had better results if the research question would have been the same throughout the process. The changes to the question changed two to three times during the process, mainly affected by lack of previous research and availability to relevant material. Relevancy and accuracy can also be questioned when the author was employed by Salesforce when starting to write the thesis.

One can also argue that the research of other softwares than Salesforce softwares is very limited, thus affecting the validity and credibility of the results. The comparison between the softwares is very hard when you must rely on a third-party comparison, and not make the comparison by yourself. Further recommendation for the research would be to use in real-life cases all the softwares that are being compared and make own research, in order to gain a full visibility of all the capabilities of the softwares. The original plan of the author was to conduct interviews between Salesforce account executives to fully understand what makes companies purchase these kinds of softwares. This turned out to be more complicated process, because the account executives are trusted advisors and consultants so understandably the company did not want to disclose this type of information in a publicly showcased thesis. Therefore, the author needed to use publicly available materials in order to understand the business challenges and solutions available to solve them.

Further recommendation for the research would be to use in real-life cases all the softwares that are being compared and make own research, in order to gain a full visibility of all the capabilities of the softwares. However, this type of research would take significant amount of time when studying all the softwares. The use cases of the softwares would also be questionable because one feature of a software can be crucial for some companies and for some, they do not mean anything. Studying all of the softwares would also take either financial resources or extremely well justified reason why these companies would grant demo access for the researcher.

To sum up, the author sees the overall process of thesis writing extremely beneficial for further continuation of studies and career. It is easy to be blinded by an individual's loyalty to products, companies or brands, thus affecting the

skill of critical thinking. Critical thinking is what guides the decision making in private and professional life. If the thinking process is not critical enough, one cannot make holistic and neutral decisions in life.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. CRM-comparison




Product	 sales cloud	 ORACLE CRM ON DEMAND	 SAP
Score (1-10)	9,7	8,7	9,0
CX Score (0-100)	99	99	99
Pricing	Starting from \$25/user/month - annual subscription	Starting from \$75/user/month - annual subscription	By quote
Compatibility	Windows, Linux, Mac, Android, iOS, Mac, Web-based	Windows, Linux, Mac, Android, iOS, Mac, Web-based	Windows, Mac, Web-based
Customer types	Small business, Medium business, Large enterprises, Freelancers	Small business, Medium business, Large enterprises, Freelancers	Medium business, Large enterprises
Available features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Account and Contact Management • Opportunity Management and Score • Lead Management • Sales Data • File Sync • File Sharing • Sales Forecasting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social CRM • Customer data integration • Quote and order capture • Partner relationship management • Business Intelligence (BI) applications 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lead Management • Sales Force Automation • Contact History • Contact Management • Document Management • Sales Reports • Time Tracking

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sales-force Mobile App • Contact Manager • Real-Time Visibility • Drag-and-Drop Interface • Dashboards • Visual Workflow • Multi-Currency Support • In-Line Editing • Lead Assignment and Routing • Rules-Based Lead Scoring • Einstein Lead Scoring • Web-to-Lead Capture • Campaign Management • Duplicate Blocking • Mass Email • File Storage Per User • Sandbox • Google Apps Integration • Sales-force Engage • Email Templates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Price Management • CRM gadgets • Self-service and eBilling • Integration to Siebel CRM 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pipeline Management • Email Marketing • Partner Management
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Campaign Influence • Einstein Activity Capture • Calendar • Sales Console App • Enterprise Territory Management • Opportunity Splits • Salesforce CPQ and Billing • Contracts, Orders, Quotes, Products, and Price Books • Chatter, Files, Topics, and Recommendations • Case Management • Lightning Bolt Solutions • Partner Communities • Lead Registration • Roles and Permissions • Process Builder • Lightning Platform 		
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Web Services API 		
Integrations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Force.com • Heroku • Third-party apps at Salesforce AppExchange • Service Cloud • Marketing Cloud • Analytics Cloud • Data Cloud • Pardot • Desk.com • Exact-Target Fuel • JIRA • Freshdesk • FinancialForce • LeadExec • Samanage • Zuora <p>Zendesk</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Siebel CRM • Oracle E-business Suite • JD Edwards EnterpriseOne • Lotus Notes • Microsoft Office 	N/A

Appendix 2. Service-system comparison

Product			
Score (1-10)	9,6	7,8	N/A
CX Score (0-100)	97	100	N/A
Pricing	\$25/user/month - annual subscription	\$90/user/month - annual subscription	N/A
Compatibility	Windows, Linux, Mac, Android, iOS, Web-based	Windows, Mac, Android, iOS	Windows, Mac, Android, iOS, WP, Web-based
Customer types	Small business, Medium business, Large enterprises	Medium business, Large enterprises	Medium business, Large enterprises
Available features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Account and Contact Management Opportunity Management and Score Lead Management Sales Data File Sync File Sharing Sales Forecasting Salesforce Mobile App Contact Manager Real-Time Visibility Drag-and-Drop Interface Dashboards Visual Workflow Multi-Currency Support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Actionable insight reports Add-ins and custom code compatible Case management and guided resolution Complete customer profiles Compliance management Cross-channel customer interaction history 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Multi-channel service ticketing In-context social collaboration Knowledge base integration Service analytics ERP integration Social customer service Self-service

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-Line Editing • Lead Assignment and Routing • Rules-Based Lead Scoring • Einstein Lead Scoring • Web-to-Lead Capture • Campaign Management • Duplicate Blocking • Mass Email • File Storage Per User • Sandbox • Google Apps Integration • Lead Registration • Salesforce Engage • Email Templates • Campaign Influence • Einstein Activity Capture • Calendar • Sales Console App • Enterprise Territory Management • Opportunity Splits • Salesforce CPQ and Billing • Contracts, Orders, Quotes, Products, and Price Books 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Custom policy automation tool • Customer intent + content matching • Customizable and pre-built reports and dashboards • DIACAP, NIST, HIPAA, FISMA compliant • Email support, live chat, and virtual assistants • Facebook experience builder • Knowledge-base creation and management • Multi-channel social brand monitoring • Multiple customer self-service tools • Offer personalized, tailored 	<p>customer portal</p>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chatter, Files, Topics, and Recommendations • Case Management • Lightning Bolt Solutions • Partner Communities • Process Builder • Lightning Platform • Web Services API • Roles and Permissions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • services/advice • Open API • PCI Certified Cloud, Government Cloud for DoD • Service Level and Change Management • Unified multi-channel support 	
Integrations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Salesforce clouds • AppExchange • Autotask • ConnectWise • JIRA • Salesforce Service Cloud • ServiceNow • Zendesk • Oracle Service Cloud • Freshdesk • Freshservice • Desk.com • Help Scout • Cherwell Software • Wrike • SugarCRM • Microsoft Dynamics CRM • Zoho CRM • Netsuite • Autotask • Close.io • ConnectWise 	Oracle Service Cloud offers open standard-based APIs to enable integration to your other systems.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SAP Commerce Cloud • SAP Cloud Identity • Standard-based API integration • Hootsuite • Ribbon • Totango

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Infusionsoft • Pipedrive • HubSpot CRM • Oracle Sales Cloud • Base CRM • CustomerGauge • Act! Essentials • Sap Hybrid Cloud for Customers • Sage CRM • Bullhorn • Maximizer CRM • Microsoft Dynamics AX • QuickBooks • Freshbooks • Taxify • Sage Intacct • Sage 200 • Tipalti • Plaid • Shopify • Volusion • Ecwid • Bigcommerce • Magento • Etsy • Woocommerce • Weebly • SA-PAnywhere • Epages • Oracle Eloqua • Marketo • HubSpot Marketing • Act-On • MailChimp • Mailjet • Allbound • Autopilot • Constant Contact 		
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Kissmetrics• Facebook Lead Ads• Campaign Monitor• IContact• Insightly• Microsoft Dynamics GP		
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