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Marketing-as-a-Service (MaaS)

By Karen Schwartz

This is More Than Marketing 2.0

Just when marketing automation software is becoming an accepted add-on to CRM systems, technology vendors are upping the ante, providing growing capabilities as a service. One of the earliest out of the gate is MaaS Impact, a new company that provides *marketing automation services* with a backbone from Marketo, including lead generation and nurturing, via the cloud computing model.

This nascent category, called **Marketing as a Service (MaaS)**, is an extension of the marketing automation software provided by technology vendors like Eloqua, Aprimo, Neolane, Silverpop, Sitecore, Pardot and Uniqua. Like Eloqua, Aprimo and the rest, Marketing as a Service vendors help companies plan and manage marketing-intensive activities such landing page creation, campaigns design, nurture marketing, lead scoring, lead distribution and marketing analytics — capabilities that often are given short shrift in traditional Customer Relationship Management systems, and which tend to focus on sales force automation and customer service more than marketing.

Marketing as a Service providers operate in the cloud, hosting the application, making sure it integrates well with whatever CRM system you're using, and providing other systems integration or consulting services as needed.

It's the system integration and visibility to the complete demand generation cycle that's key. A recent survey by ResearchCorp of San Jose, Calif. found that of the companies currently using marketing automation tools, only 28% are calculating and tracking their ROI on campaigns. The ResearchCorp study speculates that the reason is because current lead generation solutions have limited integration of sales and marketing processes — processes that are required to perform closed loop analysis — and limited understanding of meaningful and consistent metrics to measure campaign effectiveness.

All of this means that MaaS is a model worth emulating, but it will take some time, according to Chris Selland, a technology analyst who focuses heavily on CRM strategies. MaaS Impact may be the first to make the leap from traditional marketing automation software to hosted, *software as a service solutions*, but they won't be the last, he believes.

For one thing, more companies are used to the idea of hosted solutions in general, making it an easier sell. For another, these systems are often used in concert with an existing CRM system, making the integration component incredibly important. Today's popular lead generation systems from companies such as Eloqua, Aprimo, Neolane, Silverpop, Sitecore, Pardot and Marketo all offer packaged integration with popular sales force automation (SFA) systems such as Salesforce.com, Oracle, SugarCRM, Microsoft Dynamics CRM and NetSuite.

So what kind of companies should consider a cloud-based marketing automation solution? Small and mid-sized companies are often more open to the idea, mostly because they often don't have the human or technical resources to deal with heavy implementations, ongoing system administration and time consuming marketing programs. But don't count out larger companies, which are often overwhelmed with the information systems they already have, don't want to take on another one and already have a high propensity to adopt software as a service solutions where they make sense. And all types of companies need to make sure that any marketing system they have in place is fully integrated with its SFA system so all touch points to customers are consistent.

All of this gives marketing automation vendors good reasons to emulate what MaaS Impact is doing. They are probably monitoring how MaaS Impact fares over the next year or so. If, as MaaS Impact and Marketo clearly believe, the market is ready and the category is mature enough, it will be full steam ahead. Stay tuned. ▦

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