

Innovating...CARS.COM

“Salesforce has simplified data management and reporting for the 25,000 cases we handle each month. Now we can more easily extract metrics from the system, identify support trends, and manage staff resources. Managing our cases and communications in one place makes a huge difference in our business productivity”

-David M. Corkin
Operations Director

Identifying the Challenge

Partnered with more than 200 leading metro newspapers, television stations, and their Web sites, Cars.com is the most comprehensive destination for those looking to buy or sell a new or used car. The site lists more than 1.8 million vehicles from 12,000 dealer customers, classified advertisers, and private parties to offer consumers the best selection of new and used cars online, as well as the content, tools, and advice to support their shopping experience.

Cars.com's spectacular growth has included its share of challenges, of course, including difficulty managing a highly dispersed workforce, learning how to efficiently process hundreds of thousands of transactions each year, and gracefully revamping existing business processes to accommodate differences between business-to-business and business-to-customer interactions.

“We didn't have a real case management program, so when it came time to upgrade our CRM software we went through the typical discovery process for any young company,” recalls Operations Director David M. Corken. “We were already using Salesforce SFA and immediately recognized that an integrated CRM solution from Salesforce would provide the most comprehensive solution for managing both cases and our sales process.”

Cars.com's decision to implement Salesforce paid off and customer aren't the only ones who have noticed the company's dedication to providing quality service and support. In 2007, Cars.com was honored with a Service Elite Award from CRM magazine, a leading publication that serves the CRM industry.

Plotting the Solution

Salesforce wasn't the only choice available to Cars.com. The company shopped around, researching other case management programs and selected Salesforce for its affordability, accessibility, and flexibility.

Soon after, Cars.com deployed Salesforce Enterprise Edition and Salesforce's customer service application to more than 180 employees across the United States. The implementation process began in March 2005 and concluded three months later, thanks to the expert assistance of Model Metrics, a CRM consulting firm and salesforce.com partner specializing in on-demand solutions.

“Overall, the experience with Model Metrics was fantastic,” says Corken. “They were very knowledgeable with the Salesforce product and had a great understanding of the implications, benefits, and consequences of each step of the implementation process.”

Going Live

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Delivering Results

For Corken's growing staff, such a painless implementation process provided an important boost toward achieving an effective case management program. His division features a 23-person dealer support team, a five-person customer support team, a quality assurance team, and a production staff—in addition to a two-tiered product management, finance, and technical support team. All 41 members of the staff obtained Salesforce licenses, enabling each to navigate the many facets of interacting with customers in a cohesive way.

"We use dashboards to communicate with our agents now," Corken explains. "We tell them where we stand as a team, we track their turnaround times, and we monitor the case volume in the queue. We also use dashboards to note how many inquiries an agent has handled and how many are still open. Using dashboards is a great way to get everyone functioning as a team and lets each member of the staff know how he or she is doing individually."

In order to field the more than 25,000 inquiries the company receives each month, Cars.com now uses Salesforce to unify its business processes for responding to customers from multiple channels—primarily by phone and email. Tight integration of sales and service processes yields more accurate information about each customer, increasing efficiency throughout the organization.

Innovate.
Always.

With Model Metric's help, the company integrated Salesforce with an Oracle-based data warehouse, as well as with custom-built applications for order entry and fulfillment. By leveraging the Force.com Web Services API, which accommodates many types of data formats and programming languages, it was easy to get the data into Salesforce. System administrators also created parent-child relationships for managing complex cases, allowing agents to track cases by issue type.

Since implementing Salesforce, Cars.com has revolutionized the way it does business. The company is more efficient, with agent productivity climbing from six cases per hour to nine cases per hour, even as case-handling time has fallen from 13 minutes to 9.5 minutes per request. Similarly, the peak agent capacity has jumped from 600 to 800 dealers per agent and from 8,500 to 14,000 for-sale-by-owner customers per agent.

Not only has the team's effectiveness soared in recent months, but Cars.com has also enjoyed a new level of flexibility in its case management processes. With Salesforce, whether a dealer calls their sales rep or the support center, all of the case details are captured and stored in a consistent way. In addition, agents now have the flexible business processes they need to accommodate differences between business-to-business and business-to-consumer transactions.

"On the dealer side, we have established long-term relationships," says Corken. "As a result, we want to make sure we track every nuance of these relationships. Salesforce streamlines the workflow and delivers the reports we need to monitor customer satisfaction."

The email-to-case capability of Salesforce allows agents to send and receive messages from within the Salesforce environment without ever having to open Microsoft Outlook. An internal knowledge database simplifies training, makes it easier to document solutions to common problems, and speeds up resolution of common issues.

Corken and his team are now evaluating additional ways that they can use CRM technology to automate Cars.com's rapidly growing business including integration of Salesforce with computer telephony integration (CTI) software and IP phones to simplify call handling and improve responsiveness to customer requests.

Based on its past success with Salesforce, Cars.com anticipates a smooth ride into the future.