

A Study on a Partner Relationship Management (PRM) Solution

Soyoung Moon¹⁾, Euiho Suh²⁾, Hyunseok Hwang³⁾

¹⁾Pohang University of Science and Technology, Graduate School for Information Technology
(dana@postech.ac.kr)

²⁾Pohang University of Science and Technology, Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering (ehsuh@postech.ac.kr)

³⁾ Pohang University of Science and Technology, Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering (ieman@postech.ac.kr)

Abstract

The advent of e-business has changed the business environment dynamically. Every company should make benefits in e-business, since the environment creates fluent chances and opportunities such as Customer Relationship Management (CRM), which attain new value from customers through the Internet. However, it also causes the complexity of relationships among entities in that area so that another business strategy is required to manage the complexity and provide the optimized and efficient relationships. As a response of the need, Partner Relationship Management (PRM) emerges, since it is able to accept various entities operating business processes and handle them flexibly to gain more value. As the complexity of demand networks increase, PRM intends to widen and strengthen the functionality accepting that situation. This paper discusses what is the new phase of PRM and what features should be considered through the case of implementing a PRM solution.

Corresponding Author:

Soyoung Moon

Room352, Bldg. of PIRL & GSIT, Graduate School for Information Technology,

Pohang University of Science and Technology,

San 31, Hyoja-dong, Namgu, Pohang, Kyungbuk, 790-784, Korea

Phone: 82-054-279-5680 Fax: 82-054-279-2694

E-mail: dana@postech.ac.kr

1. Introduction

The advent of e-business has changed the business activities more variously and dynamically. It gathers all of the entities that has participated in the activities externally and causes the more complex and diverse relationships among the entities. Over the Internet, every entity can work together and make more close relationships in order to attain common goals. In the view of firms, the relationships with customers, suppliers, partners, etc. should be maintained and developed because the firms realize that well-maintained relationships satisfy the external entities at last, increase the benefit.

The most important concern of firms is customers. In e-business, the relationship with customers can be much closer and it improves customers' loyalty conclusively. The general business strategy as an effective marketing method has appeared, Customer Relationship Management (CRM), which attracts and maintains customers.

Suppliers have traditionally managed their relationships with partners (resellers) using inefficient, fragmented, and labor-intensive communications processes involving phone calls, faxes, e-mail, snail mail, post-it notes and so on have typically consisted of unintegrated assortments of contact management systems, sales force automation(SFA) applications, and outsourced services. As a result, the tasks of managing resellers and of precisely monitoring reseller productivity, converting leads to sales, have been difficult indeed [15].

Two factors encouraged the emergence of a new business strategy to address these supplier-reseller challenges. First, as CRM primarily has managed the direct channel environment considering end customers, it was quite natural for companies and CRM vendors alike to turn attention to addressing the indirect channel, supplier-reseller management

challenges. Second, as e-business requires more complex network with other parties including not only customers, but also suppliers and resellers, it encourages a new business strategy attaining benefits from the complex relationships. Therefore, Partner Relationship Management (PRM) emerges as the new business strategy.

Here, the reason why PRM is required by enterprises in e-business is investigated. PRM emerges as a new breed of business strategies in e-business. To build PRM as a competitive strategy, desirable ways to manage partners are considered and suggested through the study on a PRM solution.

In this paper, firstly the general meaning of PRM is studied and the differences between PRM and CRM are addressed to specify PRM. Secondly, the main features of PRM are studied and the market analysis proves that PRM is a proper business strategy in e-business. More specific concept is built up and the important features are suggested with the case study on a PRM solution.

2. Review

E-commerce presents business markets with various opportunities, including reduced costs, access to new market segments, and the ability to provide worldwide information on a continuous basis. However, e-commerce also introduces potentially significant challenges. Channel conflict is perhaps the most serious concern for companies as they add e-commerce. In a recent survey of 50 manufacturers, 66% indicated channel conflict was the biggest issue in their online sales strategy, three times as much as the second most frequent response [21].

In spite of the conflict, many firms try to build the more various channel networks. The primary motivation for supplier firms establishing more and more complex distribution arrangements as shown in Fig.1 is the desire to increase market share and reduce costs [6]. Providing multiple channels is the best way for producers to effectively serve a diversified customer base, and manufacturers need to use the power of a multichannel distribution system in order to be everywhere [16][20].

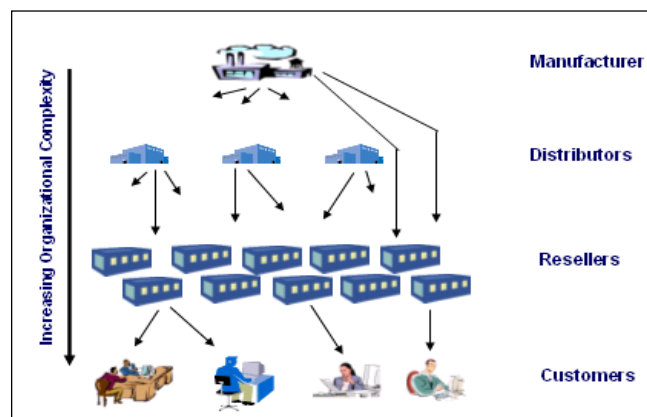


Fig. 1 The complex relationship between partners and channel levels

Therefore, a new breed of e-business strategies has appeared, PRM, which is a business strategy for improving relationships between companies and their channel partners [1]. It is a business strategy that aims at enhancing an enterprise's ability to work with an leverage demand network partners to better markets, sell and serve end customers [4].

2.1 PRM vs. CRM

CRM emerged in the late 1990s as a major initiative in most of large enterprises, and many smaller, more innovative companies are following suit. In 1999 the CRM market is projected to exceed \$2 billion and to continue to grow by 50% annually for several years. Yet with all this growth, CRM has been slow to catch on in the channel, especially for relationships between vendors and partners, and between partners and end customers [8].

CRM has considered customers who contact with a firm directly. However, e-business causes the complexity of business relationships. A firm intends to work together with multipartner and multisupplier in order to serve the right product to customers on the right time. Actually CRM has the apparent limit accepting this complex environment. Therefore, PRM emerged as the new opportunity to conquer the complexity.

As mentioned above, CRM was born in a direct channel market managing customers. However, PRM covers the extended markets, which indirectly access to customers through resellers and distributors as shown in Fig. 2.

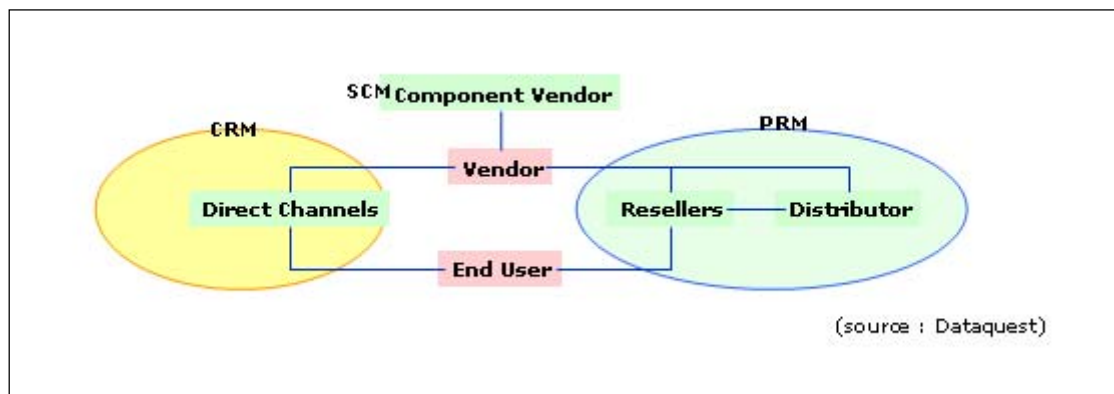


Fig. 2 The different targets between PRM and CRM (Dataquest)

PRM fosters an extended enterprise which includes external entities, especially partners, into the business activities, and pursues sharing and increasing benefits through the seamless co-working with them.

From the standpoint of eCRM which involves the integration of Web channels into the overall enterprise CRM strategy [17], CRM supports the wide range of business activities from marketing to service and concerns various entities related to the processes such as corporate, field employees and customers. However, CRM still has a problem handling the whole business area, although PRM grabs the part, channel partners, which CRM misses indirect sales markets as shown in Fig. 3.

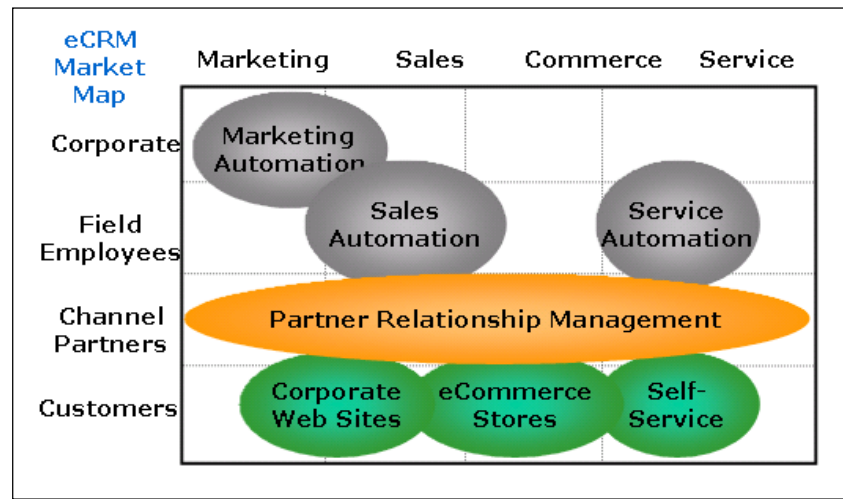


Fig. 3 The work area of PRM in eCRM market

Conclusively PRM services enable enterprises to model complex many-to-many relationships and distribute partner applications throughout an entire value chain. Regardless of where a partner is located in the value chain, it will be able to set security, encryption, alerts, permission and data access to enterprises further up or complementary in the value chain. This layer is the key difference in deploying a PRM application that provides a one-to-many model which supports a many-to-many relationship model [5].

2.2 The main features of PRM

To handle channel partners, required issues in channels should be considered. Fig. 4 denotes the issues. Channels think that communication is the most important issue in order to achieve their goals working with the vendor. These issues are supported by PRM.

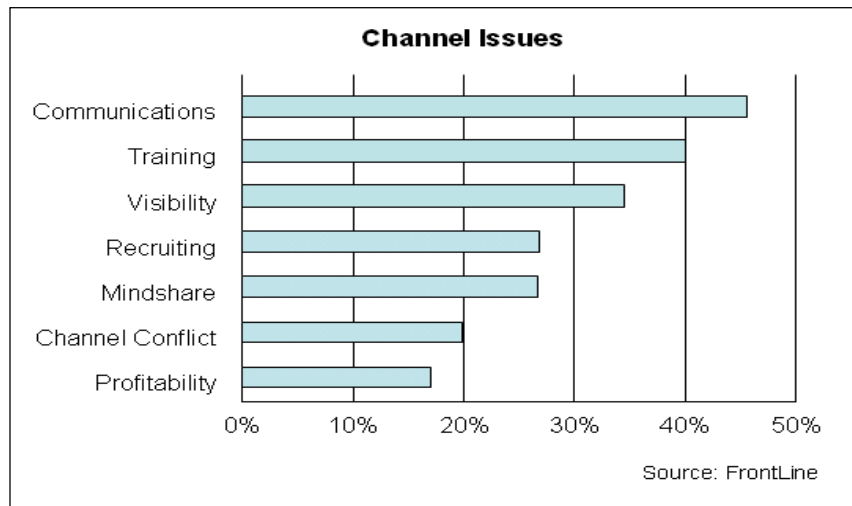


Fig.4 Key Channel Issues (FrontLine,2000)

Lead management and Partner profiling have tended to be the first modules that suppliers are adopting in PRM [15].

Lead Management: Lead Management is the most popular PRM solution to date. Lead management modules are designed to use Web-based capabilities to accelerate the movement of high-potential leads to most appropriate partner and to enable better tracking and follow-up of these lead opportunities. Other lead management functions include lead capturing, recording, tracking, routing, rerouting, and accountability.

Partner Profiling: Partner profiling modules provide functions for automating the generation, analysis and reporting of partner information such as corporate demographics, geography, specialties, clients, points of contact, certification status, partner service preferences, territorial coverage, customer base, and lines carried. Profiling may also include the automations of dedicated back-office functions such as partner order management and partner report generation. PRM partner profiling modules ease and improve the operations of partner channel managers by streamlining partner profile updating, enabling more targeted marketing programs for individual partners, allowing for more timely and accurate assessment of individual partner performance, and suggesting when and how partner stimulation is appropriate.

Other Functions: Complementary PRM solutions that tend to be adopted later include Web-based front-office modules for partner information management, partner fund management and partner training. Also available are Web-based back-office solutions for addressing challenges of partner order management and report generation.

Main components of PRM are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Key components of PRM functionality (Mirani,R.,et.al,2001)

Lead Management	Coop, MDF, rebates, promotions, etc.
Partner Profiling	Partner information such as geography, specialties, client history, performance, transaction and interaction data, etc.
Fund Management	Coop, MDF, rebates, promotions, etc.
Training	Online product, sales, and technical training
Order Management	Configuration, pricing, order placement and tracking, product returns and problems, etc.
Report Generation	Ad hoc reporting such as marketing, sales, and service performance reports, etc.
Content Management	Product, company, and industry information, partner specific Web pages, etc.

2.3 Analysis of PRM Market

In the domestic market of Korea, CRM is pre-matured, PRM is beginning stage. Nowadays Hi-Tech manufacturing companies such as telecom, electronics, foreign IT companies, and so on, in example, Epson Korea, 3COM Korea, Samsung Electronics, are thinking about adopting PRM solution. However, CRM, PRM Market is ambiguous and

mixed together.

In the overseas market, CRM market is matured and PRM is a value-added function in case of USA. Lead Management and Partner Profile are the preferred function. European and Asian CRM market is also pre-matured like Korean market. PRM needs mostly come from Hi-Tech (IT, Electronics, Manufacturer) company. PRM special companies, CRM vendors, ERP total solution companies and niche software players of PRM come to the PRM market competitively.

Recently, the companies which depend on indirect channel, are focusing on PRM solution due to the Internet environment, and PRM market is gradually increased according to the growth of CRM. Anticipated global PRM market size increases with the high rate, as IDC forecasting states that PRM package sales revenue will grow from 36.9M USD in 1999 to 497.3M USD in 2003 (CAGR 92%) although CAGR of CRM solution is just 22%.

3. The new phase of PRM and a PRM solution

PRM has appeared to improve the relationships with channels which work together. Therefore, relationship management should be handled as a critical operation. To improve relationships, the creation of relationship managers, with clear job descriptions, and annual plans for their relationships is suggested [12]. Companies must continue to monitor their important relationships [19] and plan their development [18]. Companies identify essential relationships and handle them skillfully, and secondly to understand what these relationships contribute to profitability [11]. Three strategic issues for relationships are suggested: defining the operation as a service business and developing partnerships and networks [16].

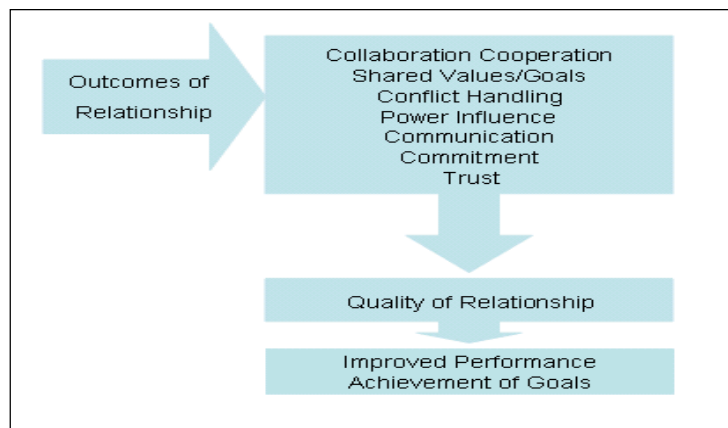


Fig.5 Maintaining and improving the relationship (Pick,P.,1999)

PRM is founded on relationships. Therefore, the quality improvement of PRM can be attained by the successful achievement of the relationship's preconditions, as shown in Fig.5: collaboration cooperation, shared values/goals, conflict handling, power influence, communication, commitment, and trust.

3.1 The new phase of PRM based on relationship in e-business

In e-business, enterprises intend to build various demand networks, which are the relationships established to request some processes, services or products to another in order to achieve the goal of each participant, since they realize that the relationship with a proper partner improves the whole business process and finally satisfies customers. It increases the complexity in the business environment. As a response to this need, PRM receives a spotlight because of the ability to drive and manage this complex and various demand networks in e-business.

For the most part, current PRM deployments remain focused on functions such as profiling partners, distributing targeted content and leads, or automating order management [3]. Such core functions are critical because they provide the foundation to deliver and derive greater value from the demand network. It also provides demand network partners with an opportunity to work closer together and begins to break down barriers of distrust [13]. As enterprises realize that PRM can serve as a foundation for more-efficient and effective interactions with partners, the breadth and depth of PRM deployment is increasing [14]. This requires a PRM application to work across the demand network, enabling the

integration of information from disparate systems and making it easier for them to work together. However, PRM must evolve beyond core capabilities to support a broader range of diverse and dynamic business processes that further enhance value [13].

From the viewpoint of demand networks, traditional PRM has focused on the indirect sales market that a manufacturer does not handle customers directly, and the role is concentrated to partners which work together as shown in Fig.6.

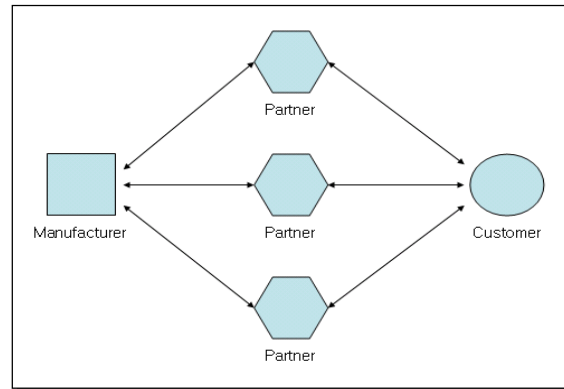


Fig.6 The demand network of traditional PRM

However, as this demand network is focused on only the indirect sales, the varying relationship cannot be managed with incumbent PRM solutions easily. If a firm should run with multipartner or multisupplier, the various networks should be defined and the requirements of each network should be considered.

There are several types of demand networks [13]. They present the required relationships in e-business, although they cause the complexity.

For the demand network working with partners and customers as shown in Fig.7, the required capabilities for this approach are the tight integration of processes involving multiple demand network partners and a seamless customer experience – providing consumers with relevant information and transaction capabilities, independent of how consumers interact with the demand network.

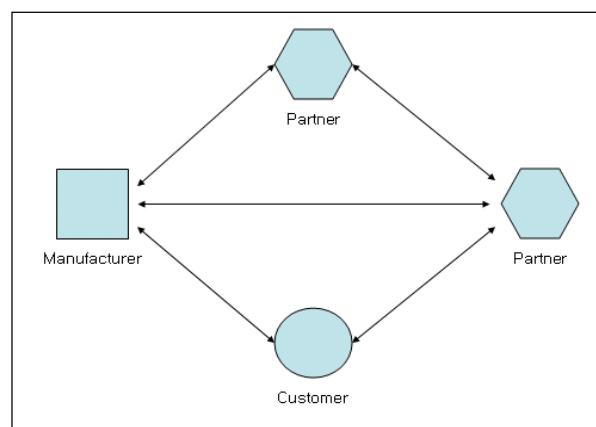


Fig.7 The demand network working with partners and customers (Gartner Research, 2001)

To accept the demand network working through partners as shown in Fig.8, partners create and maintain their own profiles, business rules and workflows for content input, maintenance and delivery within their organizations. And they create and maintain customer profiles while restricting or prohibiting manufacturer or other partner access to customer contact information.

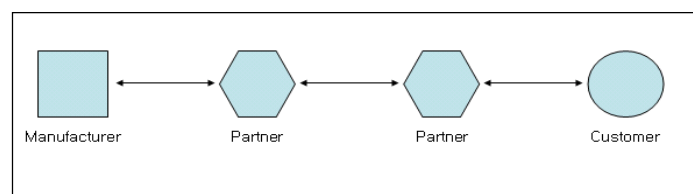


Fig.8 The demand network working through partners (Gartner Research, 2001)

Demand network partners locate, engage and collaborate with other partners, with or without the involvement of the enterprise that provides the enabling infrastructure, and identify and exchange physical and intellectual asset, and associated services in order to establish the demand network among partners and customers as shown in Fig.9.

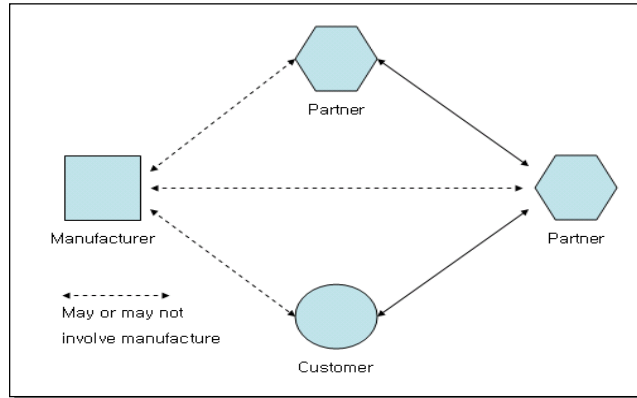


Fig.9 The demand network among partners and customers (Gartner Research, 2001)

For the demand network working with multiple, overlapping partners as shown in Fig.10, the required capabilities are a single instance of a PRM application that provides dynamic support for varied processes, depending on the business logic and roles of the users involved and simultaneous support for varied languages and currencies.

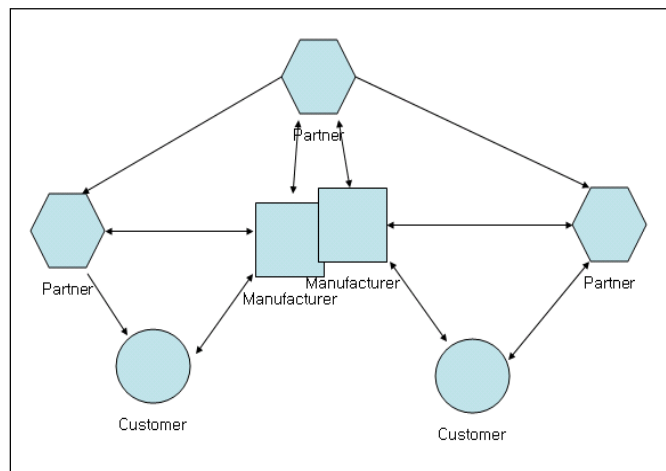


Fig.10 The demand network working with multiple, overlapping partners (Gartner Research, 2001)

Enterprises face to various demand networks such as those mentioned above. They also may act in the hybrid environment composed with the various network types. Therefore, for the improvement of demand networks, PRM has to consider dynamic changes and collaborative relationships among partners, customers, manufacturers, and so on.

3.3. The new features of a PRM solution

PRM drives and handles the collaboration with all participants. To handle the dynamic demand networks, a PRM solution should build the relationships among the participants in a business area dynamically. The two functionalities are suggested as key features here in order to manage the dynamic demand networks effectively. One is a virtual group and the other is a rule-based discipline. A virtual group makes it possible to accept the various entities and compose them, since in a well defined virtual group, each entity has an apparent role to determine the authority to work on a

demand network and also it is able to change the role depending on varying demand networks. And a rule-based discipline controls business processes so that it can be applied to various demand networks which have each specific operation rule.

❑ Virtual Group

A virtual group supports role-based operations. Operating PRM solution, users construct proper demand networks without any barrier or restriction among organizational divisions and different companies. It is set only by the user's authority. In the virtual space, all actors who operate their own business processes can define their roles flexibly. It can be established successfully only if a role is defined properly without conflicts with the other roles in business processes. Therefore, it is important to slice processes into atomic tasks. The tasks are composed dynamically for a role. They are derived from various processes so that they reflect dynamic demand networks.

❑ Rule-Based Discipline

A rule-based discipline defines the operations among the roles defined in the virtual group. The disciplines include the business processes and policies. They influence the whole process and pursue the seamless process over the demand networks linking roles. A rule means the way to run processes so that it presents business policies and strategies supporting various business processes more flexibly. For example, lead assignment can be operated differently by a predefined rule.

They become the foundation for a PRM solution to support and manage the demand networks. Implementing a PRM solution (Bizentro-PRM of Samsung SDS), both of them which are required in e-business were deeply considered and reflected.

3.4 The case study of Bizentro-PRM

Bizentro-PRM is a web-based PRM solution, designed to help a indirect channel focused company to success in business with its partners, including partner life cycle management, lead management, e-commerce support, effective sales and marketing information sharing and various communication method.

Bizentro-PRM is a role-based system so that everyone is able to participate in and operate any process only if he or she has a proper role. It actually supports dynamic demand networks among roles.

Bizentro-PRM provides general PRM functionalities as shown in Fig.11.

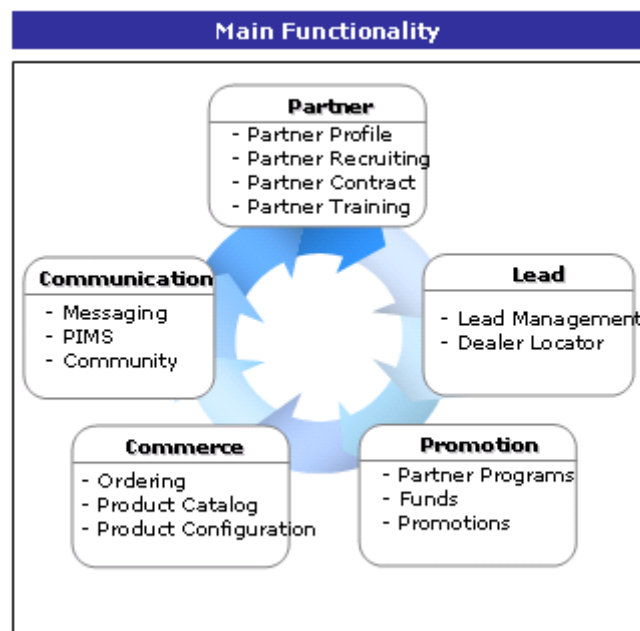


Fig.11 Bizentro-PRM main functionality

As mentioned above, the most representative function of PRM is Lead Management. Lead Management processes of Bizentro-PRM are shown in Fig.12.

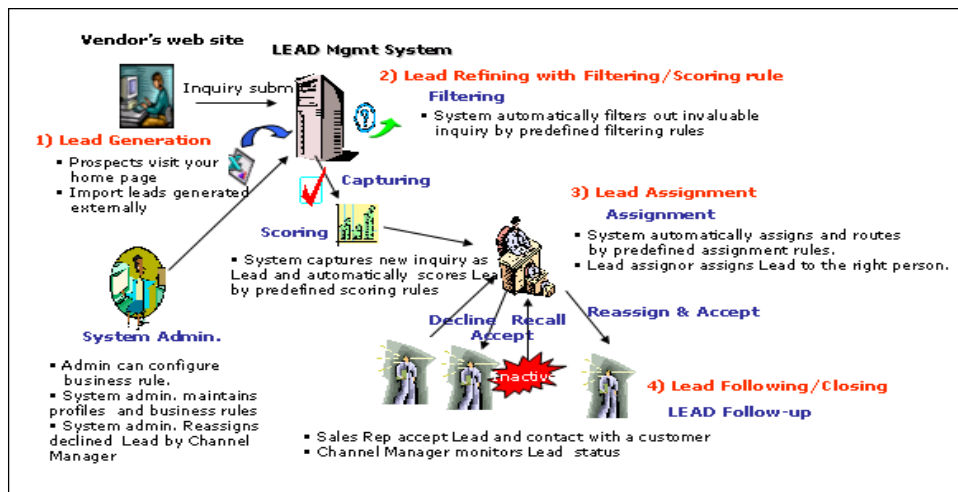


Fig.12 Rule-based Lead Management

Lead management processes are achieved basically according to the rule-based disciplines.

❑ Lead Capturing

This process begins with highly configurable customer inquiry which generates web page dynamically. At the next step, it imports leads information from various sources and adds additional business information such as Dun & Bradstreet data, if necessary. Last, it stores prospect information into prospect database.

❑ Lead Filtering and Scoring

This functionality provides configurable filtering/scoring rule using simple WEB Graphic User Interface (GUI). It is the right function based on the rule-based disciplines. The qualified leads are sent out to a proper person with predefined roles after scoring and assignment process. The filtered leads are sent to the literature fulfillment center or other groups for re-qualification. Effective lead classification and scoring at this stage often proves critical for later stages in the sales process.

❑ Lead Assignment

Here, there are two ways for lead assignment. First, automated assignment is based on geographic information. Configurable relationship between assignees and assigners is set by the rule-based disciplines. It determines that an assigned lead may be declined and reassigned to another party and be taken back by system or administrator and reassigned to another party. The assigned partner (or sales representative) needs to become aware of the new lead and have access to the detailed lead information using internet.

❑ Lead Follow-up and Monitoring

The system stores lead follow-up and progress, implementing closed-loop tracking. Partners (or sales representative) are expected to update their progress and the lead status as they work on the lead. If a partner (or sales representative) does not act on a new lead, the reseller and appropriate managers are all notified via alerts through an escalation system. Managers and representatives can view summaries of lead progress.

❑ Lead Closing

System can require leads assigned to sales personnel to be closed out on the system thereby getting the sales persons feedback on the lead. System can display all leads assigned to the sales person that have not been closed out and provide traceability between leads and sales order.

❑ Evaluation and Report

All data captured by the lead management system is available to the user group.

To find best partners and keep them is the key factor to success in business to a channel-focused company. Therefore, Partner Management of Bizentro-PRM provides partner life-cycle management from registry as new partners to making them as loyal and effective sales forces.

❑ Partner recruiting

Easy registry as a new partner and work-flow based approval process makes big partner applicant pool and prudential determination to choose a good partner

☐ Partner profile management

To minimize channel conflicts, clear communication is a necessity. You can maintain detailed information about a partner's location, organization, and expertise in a single database. Your partners can also manage and update their own profiles

☐ Partner training

Samsung SDS has been provided cyber training service over 6 years. With the accumulated experience, a distance education operation system, has developed. With this solution, Bizentro-PRM can help build cyber partner training site which will provide valuable partner training information like a calendar of on-line or off-line training, partner training history and certifications

To manage and drive the loyalty of partners, promotion is facilitated as a good way. Bizentro-PRM provides Promotion Module for it. Promotion is designed to help marketing activity of a company with simple and convenient content management tool. It also helps to manage partner program. As a starting point to get a new good partner, a company should inform their partner program to prospect effectively.

Commerce Module provides ordering fulfillment feature. Partners can order products through internet after looking up products in electronic catalog. Commerce also provides real-time interface with the legacy system that will reduce lots of unnecessary work and save time (Ver. 2.0+). This self-update service makes partners feel that they are really empowered. A lot of important information for sales like electronic catalog, changed price can be updated and shared effectively by Commerce Module

The effective communication is the most common issue in partner relationship management. Companies have been tried to improve their ability to share information on deal between them and their partners. Communication provides various communication methods between a vendor and its partners. Using e-mail, bulletin boards, department cabinet all system users can communicate and share information rapidly. Community module provides a simple interface to customize various business groups who have same interest, problems and target to sales. These community activities will make a partner feel close to you and other partners

Service Support provides policies and disciplines for the operation of Bizentro-PRM. This module contains the key features, a virtual group and rule-based disciplines, suggested in this paper.

☐ Easy to use Rule Configurator

With Tree-structured rule configuration functionality, user can change business rule easily without IT support. This process provides rule-based disciplines especially for Lead Management. Here, rule-based disciplines are created by an administrator.

☐ Role-based User Group

To determine roles, firstly tasks which are atomic subsets of business processes, should be defines and a role can be created composing the predefined tasks. Reflecting the varying situation in the demand networks, this system creates users with various roles. The roles are able to change dynamically according to the networks. This procedure creates a virtual group.

☐ Simple and rapid contents changing with Web Content Management

Using various content management template, user can manage web content flexibly.

☐ Interoperability support

This supports to add interoperability services like Wireless information transfer, video conferencing (Ver. 2.0+).

☐ Enterprise Application Integration

This supports integration with other business systems, like ERP, CRM, Legacy etc.

Although currently Bizentro-PRM works on indirect sales market so that it considers the demand networks of the market, through the functionalities for a virtual group and rule-based disciplines, such as Rule Configurator and User Group, it is able to accept the varying requirements and apply them to processes immediately, as the demand networks change. Actually the lead management processes follow the determined disciplines based on the both of them and are able to be redesigned whenever the demand networks require another business policy or operation.

Currently Bizentro-PRM is used in Samsung SDS America Co. (Samsung SDSA) and L'OREAL Korea Co. The firms focus on the channel management in marketing and sales. Both of them want to handle the complex and various demand networks efficiently and Bizentro-PRM supports their needs successfully.

4. Conclusion

E-business has changed the business activities more variously and dynamically. In the environment, the establishment of more dynamic relationships becomes a critical challenge to enterprises. Therefore, a specific business strategy is required for the effective relationships among the participants achieving business processes in e-business. PRM is the business strategy supporting the dynamic relationships, which establish the demand networks. PRM is able to extend sales, marketing, customer service and other enterprise business function to partners to foster more collaborative channel partner relationships. However, PRM has focused on indirect sales markets so that it is required to reflect the various demand networks. To improve the demand networks management, the two features should be considered applying a PRM solution: a virtual group and rule-based disciplines. They maximize the flexibility which accept the various networks and are implemented in Bizentro-PRM, a PRM solution of Samsung SDS Co. Therefore, it serves flexibly acceptable business processes, especially in lead management and in practice provides effective operations for companies which manage many channels and establish various demand networks. Here, for the more effective and trustful operations, rule-based disciplines and virtual groups should be strengthened and evaluated if they increase the relationship with partners.

As mentioned above, Bizentro-PRM supports only indirect sales market so that the suggested key features have not been evaluated on the various demand networks of other business areas. As the demand networks change, the key features should accept the changes. Therefore, to generalize them, the various environments should be investigated deeply and the way to implement the functionalities should be studied for the improvement of PRM in e-business.

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