

Databases play a critical role within fundraising, helping to make supporter care quicker, easier and more effective. But is the sector happy with the software on offer? Gareth Jones presents the results from the inaugural PF survey which aimed to find out

There were few surprises when it came to assessing which company was the leader in the charity CRM (Customer Relationship Management) software market place. Blackbaud topped the popularity chart with 18 per cent of the 219 respondents using Raiser's Edge, closely followed by

Donor Strategy and Fisk Brett. However, despite the dominance of these three key players, overall the CRM market place is extremely dispersed with a plethora of packages ranging from Microsoft's Excel to ESiT's thankQ in use throughout the sector. Interestingly, Salesforce, the world's fourth most profitable CRM vendor, has yet to make a significant dent in the UK charity sector, pulling in just 2 per cent of respondents, despite the continued charm offensive and apparent suitability of the product in terms of price.

Bespoke systems, despite being roundly dismissed as a thing of the past by analysts and consultants, remain prevalent, with 6 per cent still clinging to the charms – and frustrations – of their often dated custom products.

Owning software is one thing, satisfaction with it is another. The results for whether charities would recommend their CRM software raise some interesting questions. Donorflex from Care Data Systems tops the poll with 100 per cent satisfaction. However, with a sample of just five responses this may not be statistically significant. Of the more widely used packages, Donor Strategy can certainly be proud of a 96 per cent recommendation rate, which put it ahead of its rivals Blackbaud and Fisk Brett, though all three scored better than average.

The everpopular bespoke systems do little to justify their existence, with less than half their owners saying they would recommend them. A similar figure was also unwilling to recommend Microsoft's range of products. Most surprising is the dissatisfaction with Westwood Forster's Visual Alms product, with just 33 per cent of users willing to recommend it to others, though this perhaps stems from its complexity and the need for a thorough installation and training.

The ratings game

Results from the question: 'How do you rate your CRM software?' perhaps not surprisingly reflect the views above, with Care Data Systems again topping the overall satisfaction levels for its Donorflex software and for its qualities as a supplier. As before, however, it only had five responses for this question. Donor Strategy again came second in both categories, with particularly strong scores for knowledge of, and commitment to, the charity sector, plus the cost of its package.

Strangely, although owners of bespoke software were unwilling to recommend their packages, they scored quite highly in terms of software and satisfaction with suppliers. While consultants often warn that custombuilt CRM software can put the organisation at the mercy of just one individual – the person who designed it being the only one who knows how it works and can maintain it – it would seem this personal touch allows a level of customer service absent in other suppliers. Trailing behind again is Westwood Forster which scored poorly, particularly in ease of use.

PF also asked users what they would like their CRM package to do that it currently does not. The most common wish was for improved integration with other packages, particularly with finance packages and web technologies, while several mentioned dissatisfaction with their CRM's reporting capabilities. There were also some horror stories of established products which simply weren't functioning. One respondent said: "We appear to be beta testing their new product, and still have installation issues after 18 months. Customer support is appalling, and there is insufficient space [in the questionnaire] to tell you all the issues we have."

What is the main CRM software package you use?		
What is the main CRM software package you use?	Number of responses	Score
Blackbaud (Raiser's Edge)	31	18%
Donor Strategy	29	17%
Fisk Brett (Progress)	23	13%
Microsoft (Access, Excel, Outlook, Microsoft CRM)	15	9%
Westwood Forster (Visual Alms)	6	3%
Donorflex	5	3%
Sage (ACT!, Sage CRM)	5	3%
IRIS (Care, Charisma)	4	2%
ESiT (thankQ)	3	2%
Salesforce.com	3	2%
Bespoke	11	6%
Other	40	23%

How long has it been your package?				
< 1 year	1-2 years	2-3 years	3-5 years	> 5 years
18%	16%	15%	19%	32%

How often do you review your CRM software?			
Every year	Every two years	Every three or more years	Never
10%	11%	50%	29%

How was your CRM package chosen?			
Full tender process	Personal recommendation	Don't know	Other
42%	11%	30%	18%

Several respondents admitted they didn't have the expertise to use the system properly, although again, some of the responsibility for this falls on the supplier to make their product userfriendly. One respondent said: "The problem is more whether I know how to do it – the language they use in their very detailed manuals is not always intuitive and often I discover [after doing something the long way] that there was a shortcut, but I didn't have the terminology correct." Another said: "We do not get the best out of our CRM package as when it was installed there were no set guidelines for use. Consequently there are large chunks of data missing and we are unable to make the most of the package".

It is, however, important for a charity to allocate sufficient resources, both in terms of finance and personnel, to ensure a coherent database strategy is implemented and remains effective. As one survey respondent admitted: "Our CRM package is not functioning – and has not functioned – since its implementation. We have been looking at alternatives but do not have a dedicated person to drive this aspect, nor do we have the budget."

How do you rate your CRM software?						
	Number of responses	Functionality	Cost	Integration with other systems	Ease of use	Overall
Donorflex	5	2.80	1.80	1.80	2.20	2.20
Donor Strategy	29	2.14	2.28	1.74	1.97	2.10
Bespoke	11	2.00	1.45	1.30	1.73	1.82
Fisk Brett (Progress)	22	2.00	1.71	1.20	1.82	1.77
Blackbaud (Raiser's Edge)	30	1.93	0.86	1.41	1.63	1.62
Microsoft (Access, Excel, Outlook, Microsoft CRM)	13	1.54	2.15	1.58	1.38	1.46
Westwood Forster (Visual Alms)	6	1.33	0.83	0.83	0.83	1.17
Other (including not specified)	69	1.99	1.70	1.38	1.76	1.74
Overall	185	1.97	1.65	1.41	1.73	1.76

Would you recommend your current supplier to other charities?	
Donorflex	100%
Donor Strategy	96%
Blackbaud (Raiser's Edge)	83%
Fisk Brett (Progress)	80%
Bespoke	45%
Microsoft (Access, Excel, Outlook, Microsoft CRM)	44%
Westwood Forster (Visual Alms)	33%
Other	65%

How efficient are your processes for recording contact information on your different databases?			
Very good	Good	Average	Poor
22%	32%	32%	15%

How would you rate the security levels of your contact databases?			
Very good	Good	Average	Poor
21%	44%	28%	7%

Another common problem is duplication of data (and therefore effort) over several databases. Some 34 per cent of respondents admitted to having at least one other database in addition to their main CRM, with some having five or six more. Many also admitted that duplication of contact records on their CRM was rife. There is clearly much to be done to improve efficiency in recording contact information, with just 22 per cent considering their organisations to be very good at this.

How do you rate your CRM software supplier?

	Number of responses	Technical support	Knowledge of charity sector	Commitment to charity sector	Overall
Donorflex	5	2.60	2.60	2.60	2.60
Donor Strategy	28	2.07	2.38	2.48	2.24
Bespoke	9	2.11	2.11	2.11	2.11
Fisk Brett (Progress)	22	1.73	2.00	2.00	1.80
Blackbaud (Raiser's Edge)	29	1.86	1.90	1.76	1.76
Westwood Forster (Visual Aims)	6	1.33	1.83	1.83	1.50
Microsoft (Access, Excel, Outlook, Microsoft CRM)	7	1.57	1.00	1.00	1.25
Other (including not specified)	65	1.94	1.89	1.94	1.95
Overall	171	1.91	1.98	1.99	1.93

Changing software supplier can be a daunting, expensive, time consuming and risky task, which perhaps explains why 32 per cent of respondents have been using their package for more than three years. What is concerning however, is that 29 per cent admitted they never review their CRM software, while half only do so every three or more years. Just 35 per cent said they would be doing so in the next 12 months. Finally, there is also much work to be done in keeping data secure, with 35 per cent rating their security as average to poor and only 21 per cent saying it is very good. Despite this, only 16 per cent of respondents said they had had an external IT security audit in the past year.

Gareth Jones
February 2008