Before even thinking about CRM products...

a) Create a project charter document that covers goals, scope, exclusions and critical success factors

b) Quantify the inefficiencies of the current situation - what are the financial costs of the status quo? (IT support time, report compilation time, lost revenue)

c) Determine who the key stakeholders are - which department heads should be involved?

d) Interview the key stakeholders - identify and document current pains and key requirements moving forward

e) Interview end users - if there’s a large group of end users, consider distributing a survey.

If you start off on the right foot, you’ll be able to control the buying process rather than letting vendors control the selling process.

8 Reasons to Not Develop an RFP

1. There is already a short list of vendors available
2. There is near feature parity among vendors
3. RFPs are too high level to significantly advance the process
4. There are more impactful uses of time and money
5. An RFP does not help to define a services budget
6. The most qualified vendors may decline to participate
7. RFPs may not resolve internal differences of opinion
8. RFPs can significantly delay the buying process
Assemble and Analyze Input

Take the input that you have received from the interviews and develop a formal document that summarizes the current pains and future requirements.

Develop a corresponding slide presentation that summarizes the information contained in the document. You’ll need this for your workshop.

Items to document

a) Current state functional matrix - what current CRM features and functionality are being used and to what degree?

b) Current state business processes - what processes are mapped within your current CRM system?

c) Current issues and pain points - by department, what’s not working, what needs to be improved and what needs to be introduced?

d) Customer interaction touch points - what are the key interactions with your prospects and customers by sales, marketing and customer support teams?

e) Future state functional matrix - what’s the ideal picture of the CRM features and functionality that will be used in the future?

f) Future state business processes - if your business processes are not properly mapped in your current system, how should they be mapped in a new system?

g) Legacy data sources - what data needs to come across from contact managers, spreadsheets and other databases?

h) Data integration touch points - do you need to integrate CRM within any legacy systems? If so, it’s important to identify the details of these integration needs.

i) High-level reporting requirements - what types of reports do managers and executives need to improve the business?

Define Your Social Media Strategy

Your social media strategy might be, “we are going to ignore social media as it does not apply to our business model.” However, for most companies, social media should not be completely overlooked. It is the new way for many people, including most of your customers, to communicate.

As it pertains to CRM, your social media strategy might be as simple as providing a button that allows your salespeople to easily search LinkedIn based on a Contact’s first and last name.

It may be as complex as implementing a brand monitoring and social engagement system to respond to customer comments and complaints from Twitter, Facebook and other social networks.
3 Validate and Prioritize Requirements

Now that you’ve gathered substantial information from stakeholders and end users and you have compiled this information into a structured document and a supplemental slide deck, it’s time to echo the findings.

You can then validate the findings and work toward a consensus on the highest priority items (since you likely will not be able to do it all at once).

The best forum for this is a workshop. During the workshop, the findings are presented and key points are presented and discussed.

a) Present findings to team members
b) Discuss open issues and clarify ambiguous points
c) Introduce additional requirements that were not covered in initial interviews
d) Prioritize key functional requirements
e) Determine the list of potential CRM vendors

4 Develop a Vendor Scoring Method

A vendor rating system should not be just a feature scorecard. The chosen method should focus on specific functional requirements and on the vendor’s ability to deliver on these requirements. Examples include:

✓ Approaches for automating specific business processes
✓ Ease of searching for specific information
✓ Mobile device compatibility
✓ Management reporting design tools and distribution options
✓ Email client compatibility
✓ Social network integration touch points
✓ Likely degree of adoption by various user groups

Develop the type of scoring or ranking system that’s most suited to your company’s culture and to the personalities who are involved in the selection process.

Marketing Automation Systems

Marketing automation is a fast growing category of CRM compatible application.

Inbound marketing is going to become more prevalent and more important for organizations to adopt -- as people are increasingly resistant to traditional marketing communications.

Inbound marketing involves developing relevant, non-promotional content for your audience that attracts visitors to your site.

Calls to Action (CTAs) drive visitors to landing pages where they can download additional content so that you can convert site visitors to Leads.

Keyword optimized content and references on social media (social signals) both help to drive visitors to content pages.

Marketing automation systems provide the technology for setting this all up and for feeding Leads into your CRM system - as well as nurturing those Leads.
5 Schedule Tailored Vendor Presentations

Ensure that vendors are prepared to demonstrate to your needs.

- a) Pre-brief a sales engineer and a salesperson from each CRM vendor company on what will be expected to be covered in their presentation
- b) Ask them to present examples of how they’ve handled business issues similar to yours with other customers
- c) Determine whether clear proof is needed regarding the ability to deliver on any specific requirements
- d) Schedule presentations in as rapid a succession as possible - too much time between presentations could create an undesired bias toward one vendor or another

6 Select the Best, Long Term Solution

The next step is to select the system that your organization is going to be committed to for hopefully years to come.

- a) Review vendor scoring and get verbal feedback
- b) Follow up with vendors asking for clarification and/or for additional information
- c) Make a vendor selection, pending contract negotiations
- d) Determine your implementation strategy
- e) Develop an implementation timeline

7 Negotiate and Procure

Request a final quote from the selected vendor.

- a) Determine your initial CRM user count - it’s easy to add new user licenses at any point
- b) Decide on the duration of your contract - normally the longer the period you commit for, the better the price
- c) Request any additional needed commitments or functionality - now is the time to ask for extras
- d) Determine the subscription start date - if possible, make sure your implementation has started before the subscription clock starts ticking

By slowing down the CRM buying process, you may actually speed it up

Beware of vendor FUD (Fear, Uncertainty and Doubt) about their competition. Try to reach your own conclusions based on facts.
Additional Tips for CRM Buyers

- Be specific about required integration touch points and flows
- It’s never too early to start cleaning up your legacy data sources
- It’s possible to begin the implementation process before you have started paying for software
- There’s no such thing as being too detailed about your requirements -- even early on in the process
- The type of technology “shop” you are is important -- but it’s not everything
- “Skate to where the puck is going to be” -- think ahead to longer term needs
- Get your CEO or another representative of senior management to attend CRM vendor presentations
- If you want to get more leads from your website, consider a marketing automation system as well

It’s best to follow a disciplined selection process of one form or another. The seven steps outlined in this cheat sheet are the ones that have been followed by organizations that have had the most success with their CRM initiatives.