



## **1to1 Magazine**

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by: Marji McClure

### **Contact Management Provides Sales and Service Wins for Houston Aeros**

Houston Aeros' hockey fans come in all ages and sizes. And they prefer various ticket packages as well. From season ticket holders to Thursday night package holders, to school bands and drill teams, each group has different interests and needs. But they weren't always treated as the individuals they are in the 10 years the Aeros have provided minor league hockey for Houston.

To help them treat customers differently depending on the relationship they have with their American Hockey League team, the Aeros implemented a contact management system that has had enterprise-wide benefits. Sales, marketing and customer service efforts are all now more personalized and relevant to the nearly 30,000 names housed in the team's database. As a result, sales leads are more productive, and more fans are filling the seats. Before utilizing ACT!, the contact management system from Best Software, the team's sales staff had difficulty organizing its leads. The team had no database prior to ACT!'s implementation in 1999 and couldn't effectively track communications with its leads. Now they can record who they have spoken with and what happened during that conversation, and the 11 users who enter information into the system have complete access to everyone's information. The salespeople also use the system to store notes about their customers—facts collected during each interaction with the customer that can be used during any subsequent conversation. While the team keeps track of where its fans like to sit, it also makes notes of things such as a grandson's name or a wedding—anything that can help personalize an interaction. "So when you bring up their account to make a call on them or send them an e-mail, you've got those little things to use that you might not necessarily remember," says Ann Crivello, customer service manager.

The customer data also helps spark cross-sell and up-sell opportunities. For example, if a customer mentions his son plays hockey and that fact is entered into the database, it can help a salesperson pitch a fundraiser for the child's team. "So we went from a single game buyer to they're doing a fundraiser for their hockey team. One of the things that helps us make those connections are the notes [in the system]," adds Crivello.

Crivello says the personal notes help the Aeros build a loyal fan base because customers realize the Aeros staff remembers their history and preferences and treats them accordingly in both sales and service. "[The personal information] has made me sound and feel on top of what is going on in the lives of my customers," she says. "I remember weddings, births, favorite hockey teams, vacations, and even funny anecdotes, which give the clients the feeling of being special and not just another sale."

#### **Marketing reaps the benefits**

That relevant communication received from the salespeople has been duplicated in the Aeros' marketing efforts. Prior to using the contact management system, all marketing campaigns were essentially mass marketing efforts—every Aeros fan received the same promotional materials, which proved ineffective. Too many fans received information about promotions they were not interested in, and the team wasted money on paper and postage to blanket the entire fan base with one specific message or offer. Now the Aeros can segment fans depending on the packages they have purchased, in order to present them with a more relevant offer. The system allows users to separate customers into groups, such as season ticket holders or single game buyer. "I can go directly to who I know this [particular campaign] will benefit," says Crivello. "I would rather send 500 mail pieces out to the 500 people who I know will actually buy instead of sending 5,000 out and getting only 200 [responses]." Season ticket holders receive only offers pertinent to them, while fans who purchase holiday ticket packages, for example, will only learn about similar packages and not about every Aeros ticket promotion.

More tickets are being sold, and the more than 10,000 seats at Toyota Center, the Aeros' home ice, are near capacity. For the first time ever, the Aeros posted an increase in overall attendance for the 2003-2004 season. In addition, more season tickets and group tickets were sold. And they hosted the largest crowd for hockey in Houston since 1999. Crivello attributes these results to the increased efficiency and organization

of the Aeros' sales staff. Crivello also notes that the team will not post a loss for costs associated with the creation and distribution of direct mail pieces. Crivello says that the Aeros will increase their direct mail budget for next season. They plan to boost their direct e-mail efforts as well, which began in earnest during last season. E-mail campaigns geared toward season ticket holders and single game buyers for next season are already planned.

**next steps: Peppers & Rogers Group Perspective**

The Houston Aeros organization has been a great success thus far, and now that the customer service managers have become familiar with its basic functionality, they can start to employ some of ACT!'s more advanced functionality. The managers can use ACT! to forecast and track sales opportunities by generating graphs that help them better manage the pipeline. The organization can also integrate ACT! with its e-mail capabilities to enable the scheduling of sales meetings via the Web. In addition, managers can attach e-mails, letters, and faxes to the individual customer profiles so they know when and how they have communicated with each customer in the past, making them more knowledgeable when they talk and sell to their customers. The Houston Aeros could also benefit from conducting some customer value and needs analysis. Using variables such as campaign responses, purchasing history, and revenue over time, the organization can calculate current value and potential value, thereby helping to target only those customers who provide value to the organization. For example, it may not make sense to target a customer that only comes to games during \$5 nights. In addition, needs analysis will enable the sales organization to more systematically execute treatment strategies and campaigns. Currently, sales and marketing decisions are made by using the notes/comments section in the individual user profiles, which can sometimes be time-consuming. Needs analysis will enable the organization to categorize their customers into four or five main buckets, and then strategies can be created to help meet these needs across touchpoints.

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