

MBA 732
Knowledge Management
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Interview of Scott Rames, Salesforce Automation Manager at:
Dimension Data North America

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In 1999, Dimension Data Holdings purchased 7 US companies to create “Dimension Data North America” (DDNA). Knowledge Management (KM) was non-existent. DDNA’s CEO recognized that there was a dearth of knowledge sharing and even systems amongst the 7 companies that conflicted with one another. Some of the seven acquired companies had no systems in place at all. In assessing the situation, the CEO prioritized needs. First, DDNA needed to get their sales information in line. They literally had no idea what was being sold where and to whom. HR and financial systems were also addressed in parallel.

A new head of sales, Jere Brown, was hired with one of his main qualifications being that he implemented sales KM solutions previously. He, in turn, reached out to a former colleague who had done the actual implementation. The platform DDNA used is called Salesforce.com.

The Salesforce implementation expert is Scott Rames. He is DDNA’s Salesforce Automation Manager. Scott worked in five other organizations where he implemented other KM systems (some not as robust as this one), and has been at DDNA for about 2 years.

In Scott’s words, the key benefit of the sales KM tool is that it greatly increases communication across branches and across geographies, which is especially important in the dispersed structure of DDNA. Another key benefit is the predictive nature of the system, which can look at a variety of data and calculate future results based on algorithms.

How did this system get adopted? It wasn't without its challenges. Scott opined that the key method for overcoming "adoption challenges" was to insist that managers use the reporting tools in Salesforce. This effectively made the system the account managers' umbilical cord to their managers. If the AMs didn't use the system, it was clearly reflected in negative reporting to their managers, and to their manager's manager who was receiving roll up reports of their region. This in effect drove AM behavior without the managers ever having to "beat it into their heads."

The biggest success story was really a simple success story repeated many times. That is, it elicited from managers, time and time again, a certain "wow factor" that they now had full visibility into their group and could drill down into the specifics of their group, an individual, or a single opportunity. This also gave them visibility into their non-performers. Salesforce has made the sales organization transparent. No hiding is possible. Data is accessible, usable, and immensely practical.

Salesforce also created a common language amongst the sales teams. Since they drew from seven different companies, they had different terms, processes, and policies. Salesforce provided a linguistic, reporting, and process standardization that previously didn't exist.

But Salesforce isn't perfect. It has difficulty with workflow issues (i.e. if-then clauses) and it is still subjected to the adage of "garbage in-garbage out." If the people inputting the data put in the incorrect data or data that is weak, then poor results follow.

The implementation at DDNA has been a resounding success. The Australia and Asia subsidiaries of Dimension Data Holdings have begun to adopt the system. This will

further enhance the global companies abilities and more and more people around the globe within the company will become interconnected and can collaborate.

Scott finished by saying that a key component to the success is adequate training and discipline. He gives all new employees a group 2-hr presentation and then follows it up with a 1-hr one-on-one user training session to ensure user functionality. He also attends regional calls every other month to update users on new features or changes.