

CRM CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT

Provident secures sweet deal with BT

Dublin company predicts exciting times for open source solutions, writes **Dermot Corrigan**

Dublin company Provident Technology has secured a deal to roll out SugarCRM, an open-source customer relationship management (CRM) solution in the British market in partnership with BT.

"We are supplying all of the professional services to deliver SugarCRM to BT's customers in the UK," said Gary Cullen, sales and marketing director, Provident Technology.

"We are one of Sugar's longest-standing European partners, so when BT wanted to become a partner and needed to skill up very quickly, Sugar asked us to engage with them and help their sales team deliver for their customers. They are currently closing their first deals, and we are starting to engage with their customers."

Provident is already creating jobs on the back of the BT deal.

"We are ramping up now," said Cullen.

"We took on two staff late last year, and another person since January. We have seven people now but, as the BT relationship gains momentum, we will probably take on another two new staff in April or May."

SugarCRM is the biggest selling, commercial, open-source CRM application worldwide.

Provident first partnered with the provider in 2004, but Cullen believes the product is only now reaching critical mass.

"Before Lehman Brothers went belly-up [in September

2008], SugarCRM did not really have a big market opening.

"A lot of people looked at the product and liked it. They saw it was cheap compared to its competitors, but they were wary of open source," he said.

"When companies were forced to look for alternatives, there was a huge change in attitudes. People have seen the success of open source companies such as MySQL. The situation has changed and it is an exciting time for the open-source industry," said Cullen.

CRM enables companies to centralise customer information in one easy-to-access system.

"Most people come to us for similar reasons. They want to share distributed data – they have spreadsheets, e-mail, existing older systems – and they want to have better access to their information," said Cullen.

"They want to be able to recognise, cross-sell and up-sell opportunities, reduce costs, get better customer service and, as a result, more repeat business. CRM as a tool should allow all that to happen."

Cullen said CRM gave each employee in a company automatic access to the latest information on every customer.

"It allows for collaboration across the business – for the person in sales to draw on information from support or marketing, without having to pick up the phone and set up a meeting," he said. "It should all be easily accessible at the click of a mouse. No matter who picks up when the customer

calls every question they have can be answered quickly."

Cullen said that CRM software could be configured to fit neatly with a company's internal processes. "A true CRM system has a workflow engine in the background that you can programme with your business processes. The system should make sure that if you promised to return a phone call to someone, then that call is made," he said.

"This means a gold customer gets the level of service paid for, without each employee having to know that or having to search through the documentation to find it out. The system should take over and drive your business for you."

SugarCRM benefits from input from some 18,000 active developers.

"Version 5.5 was released just before Christmas. It was focused around social CRM, with social cloud connectors, a built-in wireless mobile client, and more web 2.0 services embedded into the user experience, allowing sales people to use Facebook or Twitter to drive sales," said Cullen.

The next full version of the system would continue this social development trend, he said.

The first beta version of SugarCRM 6.0 is due out next week, with the full version due to hit the market in May.

"The front end will feel like a Facebook-type environment. It is more intuitive and learns what each user is doing and of a mouse. No matter who picks up when the customer



Gary Cullen, sales and marketing director, Provident Technology

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been upgraded, with a new marketing module. However, the innovation is really in adopting the trends in Web 2.0 and becoming more user-friendly," said Cullen.

The versions of SugarCRM on offer include on-demand, on-site and appliance-based

solutions. Cullen said costs were dependent on each individual project.

SugarCRM is generally sold on a per-seat, per-year model.

"The licence fee includes hosting in the Sugar open cloud or installing the system on a server in your office, or

hosting it elsewhere if you wish. As a SugarCRM certified partner, we can do some business analysis, customisation, localisation and user training, depending on what the customer feels their requirements are," said Cullen.

"We have a five-day package

which is popular, and costs €4,500. That gets a company with 15 to 20 users up and running.

"Businesses can get a return on investment in about two months, because the price point is much lower than proprietary competitors," he said.

Established in 2002, Provident Technologies is an open-source supplier of security, telephony and CRM solutions. Its customers include Quinn Insurance, Halifax, Newsweaver, Wycs Estate Agents and the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform.