Building a Customer Inquiry Database System

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ABSTRACT

Organizations invest in customer database software to keep customer data safe and secured. That also allows them to increase operational efficiency of business. In this article, the authors will discuss development of a customer inquiry database system for use by small businesses. The proposed database system is destined to store customer information, inquiries, and company product information. The authors have designed and developed user interfaces (UI) using the state of the art software development technology and developed business intelligence (BI) capability using this system. This article provides a holistic view of building a customer inquiry database system. Existing literature or database system books talk about these topics partially as opposed to our approach of an integrated view of customer inquiry system.

Keywords: Business, Business Intelligence (BI), Customer Inquiry Database, Database Design, IT Capability

1. INTRODUCTION

The 18th century Industrial Revolution is considered a major turning point in human history. People started living their lives from a manual-labor-based economy to an economy centered on a machine-based manufacturing. Consequently, material production capability has increased many-fold. More and more competition has escalated among businesses to sell their products to an increasingly global marketplace. As part of proactive customer orientation, customer services and inquiry resolutions are vital to do business in the 21st century. Information technology (IT) is playing an increasingly prominent role to augment competitive capabilities of a business by filling this need.

Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos said, “In the offline world 30% of a company’s resources are spent providing a good customer experience and 70% goes to marketing. But online 70% should be devoted to creating a great customer experience and 30% should be spent on “shouting” about it” (Zeithaml et al., 2002). This exemplifies the importance of handling customer inquiries and speedy resolution to customer inquiries. These days, customers expect sellers to respond effectively to their expressed needs and be innovative enough to proactively address their latent and future needs. Farouk (1987) and Blocker et al. (2011) assert that proactive customer orientation is the most consistent driver of customer value in a business. They propose a proactive customer orientation construct in terms of “proactive
customer orientation → value → satisfaction → loyalty chain” (Blocker et al., 2011). Szymanski and Henard (2001) observed that by sensing the importance of customer satisfaction many companies in the US have come up with slogans such as ‘Our focus is customer satisfaction’ – Gulfstream Aeronautics; ‘Our customers will be totally satisfied with the products services and technology we supply’ – Shell Chemical Company; and ‘Satisfaction Guaranteed’ – Wal-Mart Stores, Inc.

A few quotes from successful business entrepreneurs (Morris, 2012, 2013):

*Your most unhappy customers are your greatest source of learning.* – Bill Gates, Founder, Microsoft

*If you work just for money, you’ll never make it, but if you love what you’re doing and you always put the customer first, success will be yours.* – Ray Kroc, Founder, McDonalds

*There is only one boss. The customer. And he can fire everybody in the company from the chairman on down, simply by spending his money somewhere else.* – Sam Walton, Founder, Wal-Mart

*You’ve got to start with the customer experience and work back toward the technology – not the other way around.* – Steve Jobs, Founder, Apple

*If you do build a great experience, customers tell each other about that. Word of mouth is very powerful.* – Jeff Bezos, CEO, Amazon.com

*Quality in a service or product is not what you put into it. It is what the client or customer gets out of it.* – Peter Drucker

An organization’s ability to continuously “generate intelligence about customers’ expressed and latent needs, and about how to satisfy those needs, is essential for it to continuously create superior customer value” (Slater and Narver, 2000). With the advent of computer hardware, software (Sommerville, 2004), the internet and other emerging technologies (Akhter et al. 2014; Rahman et al. 2014) business organizations have been taking advantage of computer application-based customer service systems (Umar, 2005). Internet technology has opened the flood-gate of global business opportunities and competition. Business competition in the early 21st century has compelled organizations to pay more attention to customer services. Organizations have switched from mere product selling to customer relationship and services oriented companies. Business organizations have embarked upon a paradigm shift from a transaction-based economy to a relationship-based economy (Romano, Jr. and Fjermestad, 2003). Business organizations have started taking advantage of information technology to achieve this transformation. Some companies have adopted e-business initiatives to better manage their internal business processes and their interfaces with the external environment (Wu, et al., 2003). Strategic use of IT has significant impacts on business performance (Huang, 2013).

In this article, we describe the build of a customer inquiry database system for small businesses to automate the customer service and inquiry system. Small businesses typically start their business with little or no computer information system. This gives us motivation to come up with a simple to implement customer inquiry database system. Suppose a small business does not have a customer support data collection system to collect and track the volume and type of customer inquiries received. With an expected increase in business and data volume the business’ Customer Service needs an effective tool to assist in providing timely resolution to customer issues and a way to report on what has been done. We create an inquiry database system that will retain and centralize customer inquiry information from receipt to resolution. The database is to include query and reporting capabilities to help determine the volume and types of inquiries that are being received (Inmon, 2002).

To build a customer inquiry database system for a company, the nature of business, customer inquiry and user inputs (Keil and Carmel, 1995) are important and need to be taken into consideration. Under this initiative, we would like to work on a few user specifications and requirements, and reflect them in
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