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CRM Tools Can Help Affiliate Managers

In affiliate marketing, it is all about traffic. There is nothing like quality traffic that converts well to get online advertisers and publishers jazzed. Affiliate marketers know they need good tracking software to make sure that traffic and the related purchases get recorded and compensated accordingly.

But there is another type of traffic that we don't usually talk about. It is communication traffic, flowing between affiliate managers (who manage affiliate programs for online advertisers) and the online publishers (called affiliates). Affiliate marketers manage this communication traffic using tools such as email applications, Excel sheets, calendars, networks and social media. But none of these tools manages this traffic with the same effectiveness that tracking software does for tracking statistics.

Customer relationship management (CRM) software is the exception. A CRM tool is the equivalent of tracking software when it comes to "tracking" all this communication traffic.

At the most basic level, CRM software allows you to have all your contacts' information, emails and calendar in a single location. You're probably thinking that Outlook already does that. That's true. But where CRM starts to stand out is how it treats contacts. With CRM, your prospects are treated differently than your business contacts. That way affiliate managers can focus on recruiting by sending mass emails out to just prospects, and then once those prospects join the program, easily convert them to business contacts.

Going further, a CRM can link records together to make it easier for you to find information. If you are an affiliate who deals with multiple affiliate managers with one advertiser, you can have separate contact records for each, but have them linked to a single advertiser record. Emails and other communications with contacts will show up under each contact. So rather than scrolling through thousands of emails in your inbox, you can go straight to a particular prospect or contact and easily view all communications there. You can also upload any signed agreements and attach them to specific contacts within a CRM.

Unlike email applications, which are built with a single user in mind, CRM systems are designed for multiple users. So if you manage a team of affiliate managers, you can easily assign which affiliates they manage, keep tabs on their communications, share calendars, and decide what information they can access. Also, when you have staff turnover, your new affiliate manager will be able to research all the accounts and histories recorded in the system. You won't have to start from scratch each time, and the employees you lose won't have taken all that information with them to their next jobs.

Using CRM just for storing contact information is kind of like an advertiser using a network just to store links to their creatives. Without the dynamic tracking that takes place once those links get clicked, the advertiser would be better off storing creatives on their own servers. So to get the full benefit of a CRM system, you should use the built-in workflows. Workflows automate business processes similar to the way an assembly line automates manufacturing processes. You'll still have to have some human input along the way, but the workflow essentially keeps putting the next tasks in front of you.

If you were to sit down and think about all the steps needed (including possible outcomes and resulting follow-up steps) to run an effective affiliate program, you'd probably end up with quite a roadmap. Without pulling that map out multiple times a day, you probably wouldn't know exactly where you are in managing your affiliate program efficiently. There is just too much to do. But by using that roadmap to create a workflow in a CRM system (so that every time you finish one task it automatically schedules a follow-up task, sends out another email, alerts you to overdue tasks, marks unresponsive prospects as terminated, etc.) you can focus on the appropriate tasks at the right times, without worrying about the process itself.

Although there are other benefits to using a CRM system, these are the biggest ones. Traditional companies have been using CRM effectively for years, so now it is time for online businesses to start benefiting from CRM.

To find out more about [great CRM tools](#) that are made specifically for affiliate marketers, visit Adam Ward's website at www.esilverbullet.com.

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