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**Customer Relationship Management:**

***A tool to boost Organic Growth***

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**Regarding an advisory report**

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***A tool to boost Organic Growth***

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**Cape Town, June 2013**

**Preface**

Herewith I present to you my advisory report: “Customer Relationship Management: A tool to boost Organic Growth” – based on the right and proper of the host organization of my internship Real Life Concepts, situated in Cape Town, South Africa.

This advisory report is written by order of The University of Applied Sciences Utrecht, as it is to complete my two year studies Communication- Event Management. This report describes the process of the choice for a suitable Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system, for the commissioning company mentioned above. – And is part of the associated product “The Microsoft Office Access 2007 Implementation Scheme”, where theory meets practice.

I aimed to complete this process as professional as possible. – Partly due to engaging the employees of Real Life Concepts, as well as the management of the organization, in the project. By doing so, a broader project foundation could be created. Which, in the end, has been beneficial for both myself and the host organization.

The final product offers the management of Real Life Concepts a clear overview of not only what CRM system would be the best fit, but also how this system can be integrated into the existing organizational structure. Note: The hopes and wants of the management are taken into account.

Before I go in-depth, I would like to thank all parties involved. Explicitly:

Jordi de Looff and Willemijn Jumelet, host organization coordinators, for the time they have offered their organization, Real Life Concepts, as a platform for me to learn from. I want to thank them for sharing their insight knowledge, providing me with a scoop of what the true business (activities) entails.

Kim Herman, the Marketing- and Communication Assistant, for her role as a go-to person. I want to thank her especially for the guidance that she has given me through this process.

At last – but certainly not least – I would like to thank Johan van Summeren, my placement coordinator, for all the help he has given me during this period of time. Specifically regarding to the course of realizing my advisory report and associated product(s). He has been there for me from the start – he has been there not only to listen, but also to share his supportive advice.

Donna Hijner

Cape Town, June 2013

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**Executive summary**

*Today’s customers have explicit views about the organization they’re dealing with, and share their views with hundreds – if not thousands – of fellow customers. Their expectations, of both consumers and business customers, are soaring. These (customer) groups have the power to make or break an organization overnight. Therefore, the customer relationship has become key. Now more than ever before.*

**Question of the commissioning company**

*How can Real Life Concepts activate its customer relationships (via organic growth)?*

**Definition of host organization’s problem**

As stated above, the commissioning company’s problem statement is: How can Real Life Concepts activate its customer relationships (via organic growth)? Before any answer could be given to their question, a more detailed definition of the company’s problem is crucial. This definition is as follows:

Real Life Concepts, also known as RLC, is a small-scaled organization – qua personnel – but their clientele is relatively active. Also thanks to the constant strive of Real Life Concepts for activating its customer relationships. However, the chance of an internal- and, thus, corporate communication failure increases because of this. Managing tens of clients by the hands of few is an art on its own.

So there is a growing need for the automation of the customer process – with a focus on organic growth. Such automation will also create more grip on the organization’s internal communication.

However, there is no big budget available for an in- and extensive Customer Relationship Management (CRM) pathway. Therefore, the commissioning company’s solution is looked for in a pragmatic approach.

With the above explanatory statement in mind, the research question reads: *What is a suitable system to activate customer relationships with?*

**Goal of research**

Now it is clear what Real Life Concepts its problem seems to be, the solution is in sight. But before any further steps are taken, it is of necessity to clarify what is strived for – by doing this research.

So I can say that the goal of this research is to find a suitable solution for RLC to process its information streams into internally usable – and relevant – data. Finding such solution is mainly based on practically oriented research. This will eventually lead to a (strategic) advice, which fits with the right and proper of the host organization.

The eventually given advice entails what Customer Relationship Management system will be the best choice, but also how this choice can be integrated into the existing organizational structure of Real Life Concepts.

**Research methods**

To bigger the chance of achieving the goal of research, I have used five research methods. Each of these have their own contribution in the overall research. – All methods used have both practical and theoretical purposes:

1. **SWOT analysis**

2. **Problem analysis**

3. **Desk research**

4. **Literature research**

5. **Questionnaire**

**Results**

**Via the above-mentioned research methods I can not only provide the host organization with the desired answers, but also offer them a broader look on the choice for a CRM system.**

**After an in-depth analysis on the topic of research, I found that there are three main advantages when Customer Relationship Management is put to use:**

**1. The identification of the organization’s key customers.**

**2. The development of valuable relationships with the organization’s key customers.**

**3. The establishment of the organization’s segmentation of their customers.**

When the long-term relationship is the organization’s doctrine, CRM seems to be the ultimate solution. The solution that Real Life Concepts has been looking for. Findings from IBM show, moreover, that in the next one to three years 80% of organizations plan to use Customer Relationship Management more extensively. – But before any more things can be said about the topic of research, a determination of the criteria that the system must comply with is needed:

1. **Inexpensive:** Unfortunately, there is no big budget available.

2. **Accessible:** The program must be usable for anyone, anywhere.

3. **User-friendly:** Every office has a computer nitwit, the system must take this into account.

4. **Training:** Because there is not a big budget, the system must require little to no training.

5. **Navigation process:** It must be easy to navigate through the chosen program – Again, nitwit.

6. **User-interface:** The system exists of a – preferably – comprehensive user-interface.

7. **Customization:** A system that can be updated accordingly to today’s customer-driven paradigm.

Real Life Concepts has set seven criteria. These criteria delimit the selection of suitable systems. – Which is the next step in the research process.

With this information in the back of my head, the following options are taken into consideration:

1. **Sage Pastel ACT!** – Because this Customer Relationship Management system can be integrated with Microsoft Outlook, which is the program that is used internally by RLC. Therefore, it will be fairly easy to export a big part of the existing communication details into the new software.

2. **Microsoft Office Access 2007** – Because this Customer Relationship Management system is already part of the existing software on the computers used in the office of RLC. Which means the use of this software will cost no (extra) money, there will be only need for an explanatory training on how to fill in the system and because it is no standard system the possibility to customize is unlimited. In other words: the implementation process will be as easy as pie.

**Conclusion and recommendation**

The long-term customer relationships are those the commissioning company likes to put their focus on. Real Life Concepts is very aware of their surroundings and, thus, aware of today’s customer-driven paradigm. Therefore, their question on how they can activate their customer relationships.

After visualizing the company’s surroundings, talking to all the parties involved, analyzing the organizational problem and – for further on-topic information – looking into several theoretical sources, I made a selection of two appropriate systems:

1. Sage Pastel ACT!

2. Microsoft Office Access 2007

These results are discussed with the management as well as the employees of RLC. – Seen the system will be used by the employees mainly. As I also shared my vision on the situation, a joint decision has been made.

The final conclusion: **Microsoft Office Access 2007 is the way to go.** Considering both the main purpose of the chosen system and Real Life Concepts set criteria, Microsoft Office Access 2007 is the most compatible of the two options given.

Microsoft Office Access 2007 may perhaps not be the ultimate solution ad infinitum, because of today’s customer-driven paradigm. However, with the hopes and wants of RLC taken into consideration, the host organization will be able to take one step forward in a more modern approach of its customer – which can only benefit their customer relationships and thus be profitable for the long-term continuity of Real Life Concepts as an organization.

**P.S. Did *you* know?**

Barack Obama is considered the first 'CRM President'.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Barack Obama was the first U.S. President to use Customer Relationship Management (CRM) technology as a tool to encourage constituent feedback – and participation [to lead the campaign he ran in 2008].

- Erika Morphy

**1. dgbd.pngIntroduction**

*To provide the reader with a better feel of where I have gained my practical insights from for the realization of this report, as well as to provide the reader with more understanding for the further course of this report, herewith a small introduction to the bases of my research.*

**1.1 Internship Placement**

Real Life Concepts, Cape Town (SA).

**1.2 Description of Host Organization**

The host organization, Real Life Concepts (also known as RLC), was established in 2006 by Willemijn Jumelet and Jordi de Looff – two Dutch nationals who moved to South Africa, after an overland trip from Amsterdam through the African continent. Their pay-off: Turn ideas into business success.

Real Life Concepts is a business development and branding company that turns ideas into business success. The business development aspect focuses on the creation of new ideas and innovations for entrepreneurs, seed investors and venture capitals. The branding aspect of the organization – on the other hand – goes mainly about the strategic marketing and communication of brands, and visualizing those into attractive design. For their clientele, Real Life Concepts also uses (brand) events as a marketing tool. – Real Life Concepts their direct clientele is B2B.

The Real Life Concepts team exists of creative entrepreneurs, creative communicators and marketers, graphic designers and multimedia artists – as well as supporting staff members, such as an intern.

Real Life Concepts initially started in Cape Town. In 2011 the Uganda office was established, unlocking Central Africa as part of the strategy to become 'the African specialist' – with European expertise behind the steering wheel. In 2012 another Real Life Concepts was born, this time in the directors their homeland: Holland. Over the years Real Life Concepts has grown, and more products and services have been added to the portfolio.

Ultimately, RLC sells entrepreneurship – as all business development and branding is focused on enhancing sales. The organization distinguishes itself by their creation of the Real Life EntrepreNurture scan. This scan is developed to guarantee a high success rate for turning the ideas of their customers into business success.

**Values**

1. Trust – “Trust starts with truth and ends with truth.”

2. Added Value – What would we do without RLC?

3. Over delivery – Good is not good enough.

4. Entrepeneurial attitude

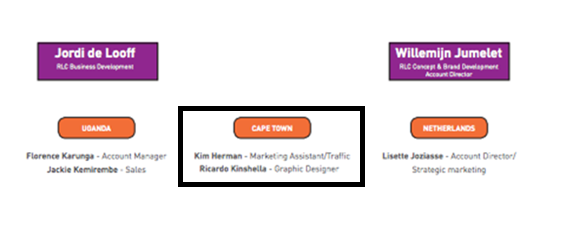
5. Winning team – “Play to win!”

6. Communication

**So, this is what Real Life Concepts aims for**

To be the leading entrepreneurial concept, brand and business developers from scratch – and beyond – in Africa. Real Life Concepts wants to position itself as the go-to company for entrepreneurs, looking to expand in Africa, with the input of European expertise.

**1.2.1 Organogram[[2]](#footnote-2)**

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**1.2.2 Partnership Hospitality Affairs**

To broaden their expertise, Real Life Concepts partnered with Hospitality Affairs. Hospitality Affairs is an event company with a focus on the B2B market segment. – Just like Real Life Concepts. Their situated in Cape Town, and work all over South Africa.

Seen RLC is not only a business development company, but also a branding company, their partnership with Hospitality Affairs enables them to be a full-service marketing- and communication organization.

Real Life Concepts is the strategic and creative partner for Hospitality Affairs. Together they deliver (corporate) brand events with substance. Such brand events are a nowadays mean of communication, for which the request is growing. To respond to this request of their surroundings, Real Life Concepts competitively fused together with both the event business knowledge and the -abilities of Hospitality Affairs.

Real Life Concepts their role, in this partnership, is to bring the commercial and the creative together. Among their clients are Oprah Winfrey, FNB Leadership Conference, MTN (Africa’s leading telecommunications provider) and McKinsey.

**1.3 Definition of Host Organization’s Problem**

Real Life Concepts, the commissioning company, is a small-scaled organization – qua personnel – but their clientele is relatively active. Also thanks to the constant strive of Real Life Concepts for activating its customer relationships. However, the chance of an internal- and, thus, corporate communication failure increases because of this. Managing tens of clients by the hands of few is an art on its own.

It has happened, noticed and perhaps unnoticed, that certain steps in the customer process were not taken on time or – even worse – at all. What possibly could jeopardize the company’s long-term continuity. And the customer is precisely that what such organization is dependent on.

Thus, there is a growing need for the automation of the customer process – with a focus on business expansion via increasing the overall customer database, an increased output per customer, new sales or a combination of these. In other words: Organic growth. Such automation will also create more grip on the organization’s internal communication.

There is no big budget available for an in- and extensive Customer Relationship Management (CRM) pathway. Therefore, the commissioning company’s solution is looked for in a pragmatic approach. – One that is easy to implement and thus easy to use.

**1.4 Report Structure**

To give you, the reader, an idea on what to expect by reading further into this report. – Not only chapter 1, but also chapter 2 is an introductory of the research purposes. By the use of these chapters, a good look and feel of the overall report is given.

This report exists of a total of 6 chapters. The report slowly but surely builds up to a conclusion, where also a personal recommendation is made. This recommendation is a (strategic) advice, based on the right and proper of Real Life Concepts – the host organization.

**Chapter 1** is about RLC, wherefore the research is initially done for. This chapter describes the company and its key details.

**Chapter 2** is a concise look on the research itself. Here is discussed what the research is about, why the research is done and what is strived for by doing this research.

As for the rest, the structure is as follows:

- **Chapter 3** is an insight look on the topic of research: Customer Relationship Management. Its purpose is to give the reader background knowledge, to create more understanding for the topic of research.

- **Chapter 4** goes further into detail, where the plan of research is discussed. This chapter showcases an overview of the question of the commissioning company, the research question and sub-questions, but also the used research methods – manners that validate my research results.

- **Chapter 5** is an overview of the most sensible research results found. An answer to the sub-questions, which will lead to an answer of the research question, is given in this chapter. These results showcase the overall outcome of the research that is done, where after a final conclusion can be made.

- **Chapter 6** is the final chapter. This chapter shows the research its final conclusion made and a personal recommendation for the host organization. This recommendation is a suitable solution – produced as a joint opinion, but mainly based on my personal line of thoughts – for Real Life Concepts their defined problem.

This advisory report ends with a list of the used references and finishes off with the different used appendixes for the realization of this report. One of which is the associated product “The Microsoft Office Access 2007 Implementation Scheme”. – When theory is justified by an appendix, moreover, this is referred to in the text.

**2. Research Proposal**

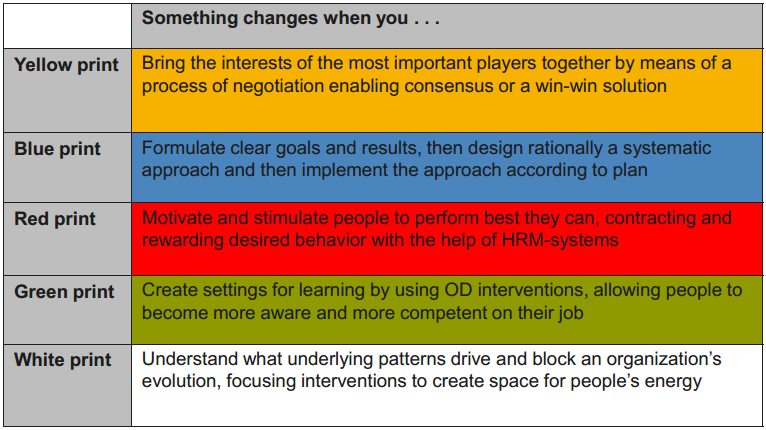
**2.1 Topic of Research**

“Information is Power.” – Is what my host organization coordinators – also known as the management of Real Life Concepts – told me, when we sat down to discuss the topic of my research, that is, the brief on their ‘problem’. It soon became clear that information is one of the main words going around in the Real Life Concepts corporate culture. – With a focus on internal information. Though, a database, even in its simplest form, does not exist whatsoever. The control of the streams of information is now solely based on a – so called – ‘gut feel’.

It is interesting to hear that a company that is aware of what they need, has not activated these needs yet nor is in the process to do so. While a company such as RLC is part of a so called fast-paced industry, where indeed information is (customer) power.

The management of Real Life Concepts might have a certain way of thinking about change, which may cause their reluctance to activating the organizational needs. Léon de Caluwé and Hans Vermaak of consultancy firm Twynstra Gudde say there are five (colorful) ways of thinking about change. Each of these provide as a map of possible change strategies, but are diagnostic tools as well.[[3]](#footnote-3)

As it is now, it appears to be that the management thinks as the Green print. However, it would be most likely of them to want to think as the Blue print. – Considering their current needs. Their ultimate strive overtime would be the White print thinking (see figure 2.1[[4]](#footnote-4) below).



*Figure 2.1: Five Ways of Thinking About Change*

Their strong – yet striking – opening statement, has now become my topic of research: Finding a solution that will empower Real Life Concepts via the source of information, a way to process this information into key knowledge. – As it is not only time to activate such need, but as this is what they believe in too.

Such solution will be specifically looked for in a suitable database, so the garnered information may be of good use concerning the commissioning company’s (customer) relationships.

**2.1.1 Motivation for Topic of Research**

After a couple of weeks of observing the in- and external surroundings[[5]](#footnote-5) carefully – as well as the daily activities, modes and means, intensity and frequency of communication – my attention got drawn to the notion of a misfit between the *information* *processing requirements* and the *information processing capacity* within the leadership of this organization.

As I got more acquainted with the decision makers of Real Life Concepts, let alone the fact that they run multiple ventures simultaneously, this misfit struck me. The following question arose: How do they process the streams of information into usable data (for decision making)? Mainly seen in the fact that a database in any of its forms does not exist.

The thought ‘haunted’ me as I got more aware of the current situation[[6]](#footnote-6), and thus the notion of a misfit occurred.

Seen from the eyes of a true connoisseur I will look into a suitable solution for RLC to process information into internally usable – and relevant – data, focusing specifically on a solution that enhances the activation of their clientele, via organic growth. This will lead to a strategic advice, based on the right and proper of RLC.

**2.2 Goal of Research**

The main gist of this project is to gain insight on what a suitable system would be, for RLC, to activate its customer relationships with. An interesting question: Is there an existing CRM system that complies with the hopes and wants of the commissioning company?

As it is clear what Real Life Concepts its problem seems to be, a misfit between the information processing capacity and the information processing requirements, the first step to a possible solution is taken. But before any further steps are made, it is of necessity to clarify what is specifically strived for – by doing this research.

After clarifying the organization’s problem I can say that the goal of this research is to find a solution for RLC to process their streams of information into internally meaningful data. Finding such solution is mainly based on practically oriented research. This will eventually lead to a strategic advice, which fits with the right and proper of the host organization. – The concept of organic growth is taken into account by the choice made for the system.

The given advice entails what Customer Relationship Management system will be the best choice, but also how this choice can be integrated into the existing organizational structure of Real Life Concepts. – As this is shown in the associated product “The Microsoft Office Access 2007 Implementation Scheme”[[7]](#footnote-7).

The chosen system makes sure (customer) details can easily be processed, as well as found – and, thus, enables RLC to constantly respond to the customer-driven paradigm, which will over time boost Real Life Concepts its organic growth.

**3. Customer Relationship Management (CRM)**

*“A customer is the most important visitor on our premises. He is not dependent on us – we are dependent on him. He is not an interruption in our work – he is the purpose of it. He is not an outsider in our business – he is part of it. We are not doing him a favor by serving him – he is doing us a favor by giving us an opportunity to do so.”*

- Mahatma Gandhi

**3.1 What is Customer Relationship Management?**

CRM is an abbreviation for Customer Relationship Management. The book ‘Management Information Systems: A Computerized Approach to Managerial Aspects’ defines CRM as: “*Customer Relationship Management is an information industry term for methodologies, software, and usually internet capabilities that help an enterprise manage customer relationships in an organized way*.”[[8]](#footnote-8) – Its final aim is to create more value for the organization as well as the client.

A Customer Relationship Management system is a built-in database of information about customers, prospects, suspects and other relations that describes the relationship of the organization with one in sufficient detail.

Every department within the organization can access the information. The system provides the possibility to match customer needs with product plans and offerings, to anticipate on customers service requirements and keep the organization up-to-date on (customer) activity history. And so build up strong(er) customer relationships.

Real Life Concepts has a small group of elite customers, with whom they have a good relationship. The host organization rather focuses on their elite, than on the potential customer. – With the thought of maintaining their current clientele. However, to receive their customer loyalty, it is of necessity for RLC to give this customer group the right amount of attention. Therefore, Customer Relationship Management is the tool they might been looking for.

Pieter de Rooy and Adri Buizert did research on the use of CRM in the event business.[[9]](#footnote-9) They distinguish three kinds of CRM:

1. Analytical

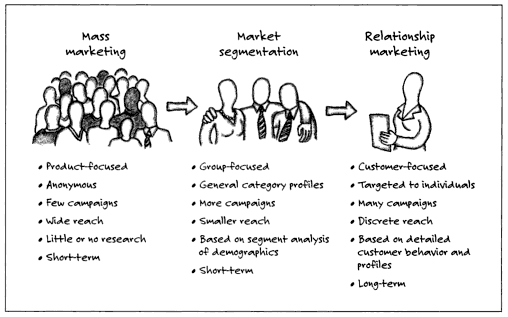
2. Operational

3. Strategic

In the case of Real Life Concepts the solution is sought for in strategic CRM. Here Customer Relationship Management comprises strategic topics, such as the use of the current means of communication, retention of the customer’s key details, customer loyalty, customer groups and the way to approach these.

**3.2 The Importance of CRM for Events**

Customer Relationship Management (CRM) is a strategy, used by an organization, to manage its customer relationships. The marketing term is relationship marketing (RM), which can be defined as attracting, maintaining and enhancing the customer relationships. Its aim, of both CRM and RM, is to provide the best possible customer service (see figure 3.1[[10]](#footnote-10) below).



*Figure 3.1: What is Relationship Marketing?*

As the figure shows, the current focus of an organization is on the individual customer approach. All because the nowadays customer-driven paradigm businesses need to take into account. The fact is, the customer is what an organization is dependent on.

However, to what extent has the event business to do with what is stated above? The answer is fairly simple. An event is a trendy used mean to build up – and keep – a good customer relationship. The resemblance to Customer Relationship Management is thus not looked far for.

As probably known, organizing an event is a big commitment. – There is plenty to take care of. Therefore, organizational talent will be put to the test. But not only that. For every phase in the event management process – usually – another application is needed, which leads to difficulty in communication and, so, perhaps mistakes. Seen Real Life Concepts their partnership with Hospitality Affairs – as mentioned before – they are involved in the organization of (corporate brand) events. CRM can serve as a key tool in such organization (e.g. Contact Management).

Also because all the information that comes along with an event is usually not available at one place, it makes it harder for the organization to measure not only the effects of the event, but the return on investment (ROI) as well. The ROI, moreover, gives the organization a good look on how efficient the investment of the event has really been.

A CRM system, that – for Real Life Concepts – mainly has its purpose in the preparation- and the evaluation phase of the event management process, can free the organization of the hassle that comes along with hosting an event. So the focus can solely be organizing, producing and the follow-up of the event.

Such system also offers a wealth of information of (customer) data a.k.a. customer knowledge. – It provides the commissioning company a good look on when, where, how, what and in who to invest to boost their organic growth. Which must lead to a more constant activation of their clientele.

**3.2.1 Event-Driven Marketing**

Event-Driven Marketing (EDM) is time-sensitive marketing, or sales communication, as a reaction to a customer-specific event. Event-Driven Marketing, which can also be called event-based marketing, can apply to a certain group of customers or to the individual customer. EDM ensures that the right action targets the right customer at the right time. Moreover, event-driven marketing requires a solid process automation.[[11]](#footnote-11) In other words: The use of a database can only empower such marketing, if not a necessity.

Because of a CRM system, and in the course of the event management process as well, Real Life Concepts will facilitate itself in their reaction to a customer event. For the host organization as to the event business, the CRM system its main purpose is the mapping of the event agenda of their clientele. – A CRM system enables RLC for straightforward action to specific (customer) groups.

When the commissioning company, for instance, is in contact with KWV – that have their business in wine – and RLC knows they have attended one of South Africa’s biggest wine festivals, they can easily respond to the client’s specific business activity by mentioning it at the first post-festival touch point.

As Real Life Concepts is in the process of adapting to such approach, it is seen that the following – conforming – concepts[[12]](#footnote-12) are taken into consideration:

- **Customer centrality:** “Customer is king.”

- **Interactivity:** Changing the communication process of a monologue (from the company to the customer) to a dialogue (between the company and the customer). In a dialogue, it is the customer who leads the conversation. The customer decides when it starts, but also where it ends.

- **Customer loyalty:** It is more cost-effective for an organization to invest in loyal customers, because these acquire new (loyal) customers.

- **Customer intelligence:** You need to have knowledge about the client to develop products and/or services customized to their expectations. Therefore, the organization must convert these expectations into usable data – which can be filed in a database, where after used to the organization’s benefit.

**3.3 A CRM trend: Hiring a Virtual Assistant (VA)**

As a living environment we develop almost constantly. As commonly known, so does the technology. – And in this case the technology of Customer Relationship Management. Instead of implementing the usual CRM system into your corporate database, you might as well ask for help from an online connoisseur. This online connoisseur is a so called Virtual Assistant (VA) and is the latest buzzword in modern working.

It certainly sounds interesting, but the big question is: What is *it*? The International Virtual Assistants Association (IVAA) define a Virtual Assistant as an independent entrepreneur providing administrative, creative and/or technical services. Utilizing advanced technological modes of communication and data delivery – a professional VA assists individuals or organizations in their area of expertise from their own office, and usually on a contractual basis.[[13]](#footnote-13) – Keep in mind that a Virtual Assistant is not a virtual full-time employee, they are professionals who work for specific clients.

Maintaining a database requires effort, is often seen as tedious and inconvenient and on-board help is costly and unmanageable. Thus there are six good reasons for hiring a VA instead of using traditional employees[[14]](#footnote-14) – according to Michael J. Russer (a.k.a. Mr. Internet), who is the president of RUSSER Communications:

1. **Money:** VAs cost less – figuring in extra tax, benefit costs and geographical wage differences.  
  
2. **Location:** VAs don’t require office space, equipment, benefits or much management – everything is done via phone, fax and the internet.  
  
3. **Attitude:** VAs tend to be more focused, because they’re specialists in one area. Also, their work is typically based on results – rather than a job description.  
  
4. **Working hours:** VAs are typically more flexible with their time, because they don’t have to fight traffic to be at your site every day. This means you can use them for far fewer hours per month than the typical (part-time) employee.  
  
5. **Professionalism:** VAs can do a particular project better, because you hire them for their specialty.

6. **Commitment:** VAs can be hired (and fired) quicker.

But, can the Virtual Assistant eventually be the substitute of a regular CRM solution? If we follow Cambridge University’s lead, who are already one step ahead of what the nowadays Virtual Assistant is supposed to be, the Virtual Assistant might indeed be ‘the face of the future’.[[15]](#footnote-15)

**4. Plan of Research**

*Real Life Concepts has a growing need for an automation of the customer process. The question that came to my mind: How do they process the streams of information into usable data (for decision making)?* *– Seen a database in any of its forms is inexistent as of now. Via research I might find the solution RLC has been looking for. To eventually present valid results, though, a set research plan is a must.*

**4.1 Question of the Commissioning Company**

How can Real Life Concepts activate its customer relationships (via organic growth)?

**4.2 Research Question**

Unfortunately, it is not enough just to try to understand the customer. An organization also has to act on what it learns, a fact that Real Life Concepts has failed to do thus far.

Because of today’s customer-driven paradigm, the customer has significant power – as Real Life Concepts is intensely aware. Hence, their top priority is to enhance their long-term customer relationships. However, seen the control of all (internal) knowledge is trusted on ‘gut feel’, a system that all involved can truly trust on is of major necessity. This brought me – conforming to the question of the commissioning company – to the following research question:

What is a suitable system to activate customer relationships with?

**4.2.1 Sub-questions of Research**

To ensure the answer to my research question, the following four sub-questions – conforming to the research question – are looked into:

1. What data is the system used for?

2. What are the main criteria the system must comply with?

3. Which of the existing systems are suitable?

4. What are the elements these systems exist of?

To offer the host organization a more complete view on the topic of research, I extended the results of the above-mentioned sub-questions with the aspect ‘the looks of CRM’.

**4.3 Research Methods**

I have used five research methods. Each of these have their own contribution in the overall research. All methods used have both practical and theoretical purposes.

1. **SWOT analysis:** A SWOT analysis is another definition for a situation analysis. SWOT stands for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. A SWOT analysis is an important research method, because it informs on later steps in planning to achieve the project objective.

By using a SWOT analysis as one of my research methods, I created a clear overview of the internal and external surroundings of the commissioning company.[[16]](#footnote-16) With the SWOT analysis I visualize – not only for myself, but also for the management of Real Life Concepts – the current situation in a relatively simple way.

2. **Problem analysis:** This analysis is a way to think clearly on how the current problem might have emerged, but also gives a view on how the possible solution may play its role.[[17]](#footnote-17) In other words: Another visualization of the current situation in a relatively simple way, but this time a visualization of the host organization’s problem.

3. **Desk research:** Desk research is research by the use of existing data from e.g. (study) books. This research method is used to create an overall view on the current situation – besides the more detailed specifications of the situation such as the SWOT analysis. In this case, desk research is used to give me a good look and feel on the topic of research.

The SWOT analysis, the problem analysis and desk research are all three mainly used as preparatory research, to create a good view on the host organization’s current situation.

4. **Literature research:** Literature research is research by the use of existing data as well, though it exists of data that is found e.g. via a search engine or a specialist journal. One of the (online) specialist journals used for this report is High Profile Events.

By the use of literature research a bases for the theoretical framework of this research could be build. The research is done within this framework, and provided me an overall broader look on the ins and outs of the topic.

Moreover, literature research is in this case – as it is in most cases – used as an extent of desk research.

5. **Questionnaire:** A questionnaire is a research method that exists of a series of questions. So it can be seen as another, more fancy, word for any form of an interview.

By the help of a questionnaire a more in-depth look on the internal situation is given. This research method enables me to gather information directly from the needed respondents – whom are both the management and the employees of Real Life Concepts.

In this case, the questionnaire existed of two types of an interview: Quantitative and qualitative. Whereas the quantitative questionnaire is a list of statements on the relation of the organization with Customer Relationship Management and such system.[[18]](#footnote-18) The qualitative questionnaire entails several conversations with the involved parties. These conversations are about the current situation as well as the preferred situation.

**5. Results**

*By means of the plan of research, herewith I present the sensible results found.*

**5.1 The looks of CRM**

**Via the previous mentioned research methods I can not only provide the host organization with the desired answers, but also offer them a broader look on the choice for a CRM system.**

**After an in-depth analysis on the topic of research, I found that there are three main advantages when Customer Relationship Management is put to use:**

**1. The identification of the organization’s key customers.**

**2. The development of valuable relationships with the organization’s key customers.**

**3. The establishment of the organization’s segmentation of their customers.**

**It came to my attention, though, that there is also ‘the other look’ on the topic of research. – If the process of the choice for such system is not gone through well, there are seven possible ways to ‘sin’.**[[19]](#footnote-19) **And although some of our world’s sins may leave a pleasant aftertaste in your mouth, it is of major importance to know which of these – that have to do with CRM – you need to avoid.**

**Before any further steps are taken, Real Life Concepts must be aware of the following:**

1. **Failure to define a CRM strategy:** Companies routinely misinterpret business requirements and thus underestimate the complexity of CRM. Even if gathering consensus on what CRM means to the business takes longer than you would have expected, take the time.

2. **Failing to manage staff expectations:** All users must be stakeholders from the inception of the CRM project, from planning through development and through to deployment. Anything else risks alienating potential end users, an irrevocable situation.

3. **Failure to define success:** Define discrete success metrics – they'll be different for increasing customer profitability than for improving customer satisfaction – and then measure against them. If you don't, there could actually be business successes that aren't rightfully attributed to CRM.

4. **Hasty (on-demand) software decisions:** Many companies are underestimating their in-house resources – and set of skills – and jumping blindly onto the on-demand bandwagon. Make any final decision based on your business- and functional requirements.

5. **Failure to improve business processes:** CRM should formalize and automate customer-focused business processes. The organization must be willing to drastically modify and continue to refine the business processes, and make sure the CRM technology incorporates these process modifications. Also, processes should be defined from the customer's perspective, not the technology's.

6. **Lack of data integration:** Effective customer-focused decision making means understanding each customer across the various touch points. The difficult truth is that most customer data exists in multiple systems on a variety of technology platforms across the organization. Finding, gathering, and consolidating this data isn't easy – but is absolutely crucial.

7. **Failure to continue socializing CRM to the enterprise at large:** CRM is an ongoing process, and success breeds success. CRM successes should not only be practiced, but should be formalized and updated via regular newsletters, status meeting and/or an internal website.

Findings from IBM show, however, that in the next one to three years 80% of organizations plan to use Customer Relationship Management more extensively[[20]](#footnote-20). Moreover, when the customer relationship is the organization’s doctrine, CRM might be the ultimate solution – with or without the above-mentioned ways of possibly doing wrong.

**5.2 What data is the system used for?**

Now a clear overview of what not to do when implementing a CRM system into your organizational structure is presented, the next step of this research can be made safely.

It is defined that the need for a database might be on its high, therefore it’s vital to provide RLC with a suitable solution for their problem. The found solution makes sure that the host organization – at the end of this process – is as far as thinking as the Blue print, as shown in figure 2.1.

Before the number one mentioned sin – ‘Failure to define a CRM strategy’ – tricks the organization into falling for it, it is wise to start with doing the opposite: Establish for what data the system is used for. Then not only *why* Real Life Concepts is in such need for a database, but also *how* the database will be put to use gets clear(er) for both the management and the employees of the host organization. And so the number one sin is ‘defeated’.

Thus herewith, the most important data the system will be used for:

- General details of the (key) customers of Real Life Concepts. – Such as the customer’s name, the company’s name, the address and telephone number.

- More details on the contact person’s (job) title. – There is always a contact person when the business of a specific customer needs to be reached. This can be the customer themselves, but also one of their employees. These details serve so you not only know who you can contact, but also who you are exactly in contact with, if there are e.g. certain questions.

- More details on what the customer’s character is like. Both their business- and their personal character. This enables everyone of RLC, during any touch point, to communicate a certain way with a specific customer.

- The (ABC-)categorization of the customers into customer groups. Who is (financially) more important for Real Life Concepts, when looked at the continuing existence of the organization?

- More details on the business the customer is in. Such as what the customer’s business is specialized in and on what market segment they put their focus on. But also, business events the customer might attend, that is, Calendaring Management.

- More details on strategy of the customer’s approach. Who belongs to what (customer) group, and where might he/she/they be interested in? E.g. A Real Life Concepts networking dinner.

**5.3 What are the main criteria the system must comply with?**

Real Life Concepts puts their growing need for an automation of the customer process into the following question: How can Real Life Concepts activate its customer relationships (via organic growth)? Which leaves me, as the executive party involved, with the research question: What is a suitable system to activate customer relationships with?

To be able to do (validate) research on how RLC can do so, a determination of the criteria that the system must comply with is needed:

1. **Inexpensive:** Unfortunately, there is no big budget available.

2. **Accessible:** The programme must be usable for anyone, anywhere.

3. **User-friendly:** Every office has a computer nitwit, the system must take this into account.

4. **Training:** Because there is not a big budget, the system must require little to no training.

5. **Navigation process:** It must be easy to navigate through the chosen programme – Again, nitwit.

6. **User-interface:** The system exists of a – preferably – comprehensive user-interface.

7. **Customization:** A system that can be updated accordingly to today’s customer-driven paradigm.

**5.4 Which of the existing systems are suitable?**

Real Life Concepts has set seven criteria that the eventually chosen system must comply with. These criteria delimit the selection of appropriate systems. During the selection process, the mentioned criteria, the overall hopes and wants of RLC and the existing organizational structure are taken into account.

So it came down to the following options:

1. **Sage Pastel ACT!** – Because this system can be integrated with Microsoft Office Outlook, which is the main communication programme used internally by RLC. Therefore, it will be fairly easy to export the biggest part of the existing details into the new software.

Some of – what I think – the overall benefits of Sage Pastel ACT! are:

- ACT! is considered the number one Contact Manager.

- There is no need to purchase an expensive license at once, monthly payments are possible.

- Updates automatically to the latest version of the programme available.

- ACT! is compatible with Microsoft Windows 8.

2. **Microsoft Office Access 2007** – Because this system is already part of the existing software on the computers used in the office of RLC. Which means the use of this software will cost no (extra) money, there will be only need for an explanatory training on how to fill in the system and because it is no standard system the possibility to customize is unlimited. Hence, the implementation process will be as easy as pie. And seen a big budget is not available, this is a prerequisite.

Some of – what I think – the overall benefits of Microsoft Office Access 2007 are:

- The programme can be secured with a personal password.

- Different layouts for different users – the programme purpose may differ for the Marketing- and Communication Assistant as to the Business Development Assistant.

- Access 2007 integrates with all other Microsoft applications.

- It is possible to make queries, which may be handy for the categorization of the customer’s financial input. Note: This is part of the most important data the system will be used for.

The choice to present each of these systems – out of hundreds of existing systems – as a potential option, is based on the fact that both have their ‘roots’ in the organizational structure as it is now. Because there is no big budget available for an in- and extensive CRM pathway, this given detail can be of great benefit for the final choice of the organization.

By presenting both options to Real Life Concepts, I offer them a broader look on the market of CRM systems. With an eye on the customer-driven paradigm, this research may not only play its role now, but might play its role in the (nearby) future.

**5.5 What are the elements these systems exist of?**

Both of Sage Pastel ACT! and Microsoft Office Access 2007 its software can be used as a Customer Relationship Management system, though neither of the software is initially build to function as such system.

Sage Pastel ACT! its software is meant to primarily function as a Contact Management tool. It has moved, though, in recent years from a simple tool towards a true CRM system. Microsoft Office Access 2007, on the other hand, is a database management system from its origins. A database management system is a specially designed application that interacts with the (end) users, other applications and the database itself, to capture and analyze data.[[21]](#footnote-21)

Although ACT! is much more customizable now than the programme used to be, it still is more of a Contact Management system than it is a full bodied CRM solution. In that sense, Microsoft Office Access 2007 shows more possibilities for growing with the organizational structure of RLC. Seen the eventually chosen system will be used by the host organization, a marketing- and communication company with its bits in the event business, a Contact Management system probably won’t do ‘the trick’.

Sage Pastel ACT! does provide the ability to tailor the system in various ways to enhance the end user’s productivity, e.g. efficiently tracking down specific information the user is in need of. However, so does Microsoft’s solution. Both programmes, moreover, integrate with Microsoft Office Outlook – which is the host organization’s beehive of internal communication. Because of this, the import and export of data can be exchanged easily.

It seems that the systems exist of several similar elements. So, how does one system differentiates itself from the other?

Besides the fact that a Sage Pastel ACT! license will cost the host organization approximately R2000,- (which is equal to €150,-) and Access 2007 is already integrated in the current computer software, there are more specific (programme) elements in which the systems differ.

The comparison matrix below (figure 5.1) outlines the key differences between both systems. The matrix shows the presence or absence of both the systems elements, regarding Contact Management, sales, customer activity and customer service.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Customer Relationship Management System** | **Sage Pastel ACT!** | **MS Office Access 2007** |
| *Contact Management* | **YES**  **YES**  **NO**  **YES**  **YES**  **NO**  **YES**  **YES** | **YES**  **YES**  **YES**  **YES**  **YES**  **YES**  **NO**  **YES** |
| Managing contacts and accounts  Integrating with MS Outlook  Data import from other applications  Tracking all interactions with customer  Managing customers via groups and/or lists  Customizable fields and screens  Mobile device access  Access to the(/a) Web (interface) |
| *Sales* | **YES**  **NO**  **YES**  **YES**  **YES**  **NO**  **NO**  **NO** | **YES**  **YES**  **YES**  **NO**  **YES**  **YES**  **YES**  **NO** |
| Showing customer sales opportunities  Providing customized reports of sales  Generating quotes  Sales pipeline management  Analysis of customer as to sales  Categorizing customer groups  Managing queries  Automated lead routing to sales |
| *Activity* | **YES**  **YES**  **YES**  **YES**  **NO**  **YES** | **YES**  **YES**  **YES**  **YES**  **YES**  **YES** |
| Calendaring Management (Event-Driven)  Managing to-do’s and activities  Internal knowledgebase  Automation of customer process  Automation of workflows  Managing customer’s activity history |
| *Customer Service* | **YES**  **YES**  **YES**  **YES**  **YES**  **NO** | **YES**  **YES**  **YES**  **YES**  **YES**  **YES** |
| Scheduling follow-up activities  Managing customer’s record  Managing customer’s preferences  Access customer’s details anywhere  Access customer’s details all involved  Customer details secured |

*Figure 5.1: Comparison matrix of Sage Pastel ACT! and Microsoft Office Access 2007*

**6. Conclusion and Recommendation**

The long-term customer relationships are those the commissioning company likes to put their focus on. RLC is very aware of their surroundings and thus aware of today’s customer-driven paradigm. Therefore, their question on how they can activate their customer relationships (via organic growth).

A Customer Relationship Management system is a nowadays solution to update a company’s approach of its customers. Especially in the marketing- and communication business, the customer process is that what an organization must be the connoisseur of. – Because that customer is what such organization is dependent on.

With the knowledge that RLC has of the business they are in, it is actually striking to see that they have no customer database whatsoever. Nevertheless, it is not too late yet to start now.

The management of Real Life Concepts has made clear they want such system to activate its relationships, but to over time boost their sales via an increase of the overall customer base, an increased output per customer, new sales or a combination of these. In other words: Organic growth. Though a big budget, unfortunately, is not in the cards.

After visualizing the company’s surroundings, talking to all the parties involved, analyzing the organizational problem, and – for further on-topic information – looking into several theoretical sources, I made a selection of two appropriate systems:

1. Sage Pastel ACT!

2. Microsoft Office Access 2007

These results are discussed with the management as well as the employees of RLC. – Seen the employees will be using the system mainly. As I also shared my vision on the situation, a joint decision has been made.

**Microsoft Office Access 2007 is the way to go.** Considering both the main purpose of the need for such system and the set criteria, Microsoft Office Access 2007 is the most compatible programme of the two options given. The overriding factor: The as easy as pie implementation.

Moreover, this system has ten benefits – so says Microsoft[[22]](#footnote-22). Which

are, more importantly, significant for the host organization – in reference to Real Life Concepts’ set criteria:

|  |
| --- |
| **1. Get better results faster with the Office Fluent user interface:** Even with no database experience, any user can start tracking information and creating reports to make more informed decisions. |
|  |
| **2. Get started quickly using prebuilt solution:** With a rich library of prebuilt solutions, you can start tracking your information immediately. Forms and reports are already built for your convenience, but you can easily customize them to meet your business needs. |
|  |
| **3. Create multiple reports with different views of the same information:** You can modify a report with real-time visual feedback and save various views for different audiences. |
|  |
| **4. Create tables quickly without worrying about database complexity:** Type your information and Office Access 2007 will recognize whether it is a date, currency, or another common data type. If wanted, you could even paste an entire Excel table into Office Access 2007 to begin tracking the information with the power of a database. |
|  |
| **5. Enjoy new field types for even richer scenarios:** Office Access 2007 enables new field types such as attachments and multi-value fields. You can now attach any document, image, or spreadsheet to any record in your application. With the multi-value field, you can now select more than one value (for example, assign a task to more than one person) in each cell. |
|  |
| **6. Collect and update your information directly from the source:** With Office Access 2007, you can create forms using Microsoft Office InfoPath 2007 or HTML to gather information for your database. You can then send this form to your teammates via e-mail and use their responses to populate and update your Access table to eliminate the need to retype any information. |
|  |
| **7. Share your information with Microsoft Windows SharePoint Services:** Share your Access information with the rest of your team using Windows SharePoint Services and Office Access 2007. With the power of both applications, your teammates can access and edit the data and view real-time reports directly through a Web interface. |
|  |
| **8. Track Windows SharePoint Services lists with the rich client capabilities of Microsoft Office Access 2007:** Use Office Access 2007 as your rich client interface to analyze and create reports from Windows SharePoint Services lists. You can even take the list offline, and then synchronize any changes when you reconnect to the network, making it easy for you to work with your data at any time. |
|  |
| **9. Move data to Windows SharePoint Services for better manageability:** This way, you can routinely back up the data on the server, recover deleted data from the recycle bin, track revision history, and set access permissions, so you can better manage your information. |
|  |
| **10. Access and use information from multiple sources:** With Office Access 2007, you can link tables to your database from other Access databases, Excel spreadsheets, Windows SharePoint Services sites, ODBC data sources, Microsoft SQL Server databases, and other data sources. |

**Food for thought**

Microsoft Office Access 2007 may perhaps not be the ultimate solution ad infinitum, because of today’s customer-driven paradigm. The quest for the next best thing can’t stay out for long.

However, with the hopes and wants of RLC taken into consideration, the host organization will be able to take one step forward in a more modern approach of its customer – which can only benefit their customer relationships and thus be profitable (organic growth) for the long-term continuity of RLC as an organization.

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**Appendices**

**Appendix I: SWOT analysis**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Strengths** | **Weaknesses** |
| – An eye for development in products  and services  – Broad network of (business) contacts  – The Real Life EntrepreNurture scan  (differential business method)  – Positioning organization as Business  Process Outsourcing (BPO) hub in  Africa (innovation)  – Organization’s ability is both creative  and analytical  – Strong portfolio (varietal) | – Only a few major clients (from tens  of clients)  – Barely to no communication internally  – No general database  – Difficulty to sell ‘the product’ (What is it  that Real Life Concepts does?)  – Not participating online (as competitors do)  – No up-to-date communication equipment  (to communicate internationally – e.g.  integrated conference system) |
| **Opportunities** | **Threats** |
| – The continuous growth of the organization  – Operating in growing innovative industry  – Strategic partnership(s)  – Extending distribution channels  (investments and shareholdings)  – The current technological developments  – Able to build up an international (customer)  database | – A highly competitive market  – Technological advances of competitors  – Part of a fast-paced industry (constant  response is of necessity)  – Keeping up with the ‘big guys’ costs money  – An attractive market with low barriers  to enter |

**Appendix II: Problem analysis**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **The problem** | **Possible causes** | **Solutions** | **Role of the CRM system** |
| *Missing online presence* | Not the right knowledge, too overloaded in other work – no priority now | In-depth research (what are the possibilities?), consulting (an) online specialist(s), controlling planning- and time-management | Manages (online) client relations and enhancing possibilities for feedback and co-creation – enabling organization to be on a platform the client is |
| *Office manager forgets... (e.g. to call clients)* | Laziness, too much (office) responsibilities, no procedure of organizing work (workflow(s) based upon ‘gut’ feel) | Controlling office manager’s workload by filing organization’s contacts | Manages office manager’s workload by importance of to-do’s, creates overview on office manager’s workload (separates the ‘unnecessary’- from the ‘necessary’ business) |
| *Mismanagement of customer relationship(s)* | It’s impossible to manage tens of contacts by the hands of few concurrently | Properly managing contacts by (ABC-)categorizing customer groups (e.g. financial input) | Reduces time spent on ‘useless’ contacts |
| *Decreasing effectiveness of… (e.g. mailings)* | No eye on customer process, low quality database, unclear market position, not the right personnel | Administering a (contact) database, ask the 'what-question' at first, report on reason(s) behind each fault made | Reduces office manager’s time spent on answering the ‘why-question’ – and facilitates directors’ focus on long-term (customer) relationships |

**Appendix III: Quantitative Questionnaire**

**Real Life Concepts as to Customer Relationship Management**

*Please score between 1-5 for each statement, whereas 1 is strongly disagreeing and 5 is strongly agreeing with the given statement.*

1. Real Life Concepts offers customized services – and products – to the customers.

2. All of the employees of Real Life Concepts treat the customers with great care.

3. Real Life Concepts makes an effort to find out what the (key) customers need.

4. Real Life Concepts customers preferences are established (after which monitored) at all of the customer’s touch points.

5. Real Life Concepts has the marketing- and communication expertise to succeed in CRM.

6. Real Life Concepts has established clear business goals related to business expansion via increase of the overall customer database, an increased output per customer, new sales, but also via the activation of the customer relationships.

7. Real Life Concepts commits thought, time and money in managing the customer relationships.

8. Real Life Concepts has the right personnel for the utilization of a built-in customer database.

9. Real Life Concepts has the technological possibilities for a built-in customer database.

10. Individual customer information is available at every point of contact.

11. Real Life Concepts customers can expect that the employees respond to their requests promptly (customer-employee).

12. Real Life Concepts customers can expect prompt service from the employees of the organization (employee-customer).

13. Real Life Concepts fully understands the need of the (key) customers.

14. Real Life Concepts provides ways enabling two-way communication between the customers and the organization.

**Comments**

Do you want to share your thoughts on this topic? Please write them down in the space provided.

**Appendix IV: Article: Face of the future rears its head[[23]](#footnote-23)**

**Face of the future rears its head**

**Meet Zoe: a digital talking head which can express human emotions on demand with “unprecedented realism” and could herald a new era of human-computer interaction.**

*“This technology could be the start of a whole new generation of interfaces which make interacting with a computer much more like talking to another human being.” – Roberto Cipolla*

A virtual “talking head” which can express a full range of human emotions and could be used as a digital personal assistant, or to replace texting with “face messaging”, has been developed by researchers.

The lifelike face can display emotions such as happiness, anger, and fear, and changes its voice to suit any feeling the user wants it to simulate. Users can type in any message, specifying the requisite emotion as well, and the face recites the text. According to its designers, it is the most expressive controllable avatar ever created, replicating human emotions with unprecedented realism.

The system, called “Zoe”, is the result of a collaboration between researchers at Toshiba’s Cambridge Research Lab and the University of Cambridge’s Department of Engineering. Students have already spotted a striking resemblance between the disembodied head and Holly, the ship’s computer in the British sci-fi comedy, Red Dwarf.

Appropriately enough, the face is actually that of Zoe Lister, an actress perhaps best-known as Zoe Carpenter in the Channel 4 series, Hollyoaks. To recreate her face and voice, researchers spent several days recording Zoe’s speech and facial expressions. The result is a system that is light enough to work in mobile technology, and could be used as a personal assistant in smartphones, or to “face message” friends.

The framework behind “Zoe” is also a template that, before long, could enable people to upload their own faces and voices - but in a matter of seconds, rather than days. That means that in the future, users will be able to customize and personalize their own, emotionally realistic, digital assistants.

If this can be developed, then a user could, for example, text the message “I’m going to be late” and ask it to set the emotion to “frustrated”. Their friend would then receive a “face message” that looked like the sender, repeating the message in a frustrated way.

The team who created Zoe are currently looking for applications, and are also working with a school for autistic and deaf children, where the technology could be used to help pupils to “read” emotions and lip-read. Ultimately, the system could have multiple uses – including in gaming, in audio-visual books, as a means of delivering online lectures, and in other user interfaces.

“This technology could be the start of a whole new generation of interfaces which make interacting with a computer much more like talking to another human being,” Professor Roberto Cipolla, from the Department of Engineering, University of Cambridge, said.

“It took us days to create Zoe, because we had to start from scratch and teach the system to understand language and expression. Now that it already understands those things, it shouldn’t be too hard to transfer the same blueprint to a different voice and face.”

As well as being more expressive than any previous system, Zoe is also remarkably data-light. The program used to run her is just tens of megabytes in size, which means that it can be easily incorporated into even the smallest computer devices, including tablets and smartphones.

It works by using a set of fundamental, “primary color” emotions. Zoe’s voice, for example, has six basic settings - Happy, Sad, Tender, Angry, Afraid and Neutral. The user can adjust these settings to different levels, as well as altering the pitch, speed and depth of the voice itself.

By combining these levels, it becomes possible to pre-set or create almost infinite emotional combinations. For instance, combining happiness with tenderness and slightly increasing the speed and depth of the voice makes it sound friendly and welcoming. A combination of speed, anger and fear makes Zoe sound as if she is panicking. This allows for a level of emotional subtlety which, the designers say, has not been possible in other avatars like Zoe until now.

To make the system as realistic as possible, the research team collected a dataset of thousands of sentences, which they used to train the speech model with the help of real-life actress, Zoe Lister. They also tracked Lister’s face while she was speaking using computer vision software. This was converted into voice and face modelling, mathematical algorithms which gave them the voice and image data they needed to recreate expressions on a digital face, directly from the text alone.

The effectiveness of the system was tested with volunteers via a crowd-sourcing website. The participants were each given either a video, or audio clip of a single sentence from the test set and asked to identify which of the six basic emotions it was replicating. Ten sentences were evaluated, each by 20 different people.

Volunteers who only had video and no sound only successfully recognized the emotion in 52% of cases. When they only had audio, the success rate was 68%. The two together, however, produced a successful recognition rate of 77% - slightly higher than the recognition rate for the real-life Zoe, which was 73%! This higher rate of success compared with real life is probably because the synthetic talking head is deliberately more stylized in its manner.

As well as finding applications for their new creation, the research team will now work on creating a version of the system which can be personalized by users themselves.

“Present day human-computer interaction still revolves around typing at a keyboard or moving and pointing with a mouse.” Cipolla added. “For a lot of people, that makes computers difficult and frustrating to use. In the future, we will be able to open up computing to far more people if they can speak and gesture to machines in a more natural way. That is why we created Zoe - a more expressive, emotionally responsive face that human beings can actually have a conversation with.”

**Appendix V: The Microsoft Office Access 2007 Implementation Scheme**

This implementation scheme is drawn up for the commissioning company Real Life Concepts, and is the associated product related to the advisory report: “Customer Relationship Management: A tool to boost Organic Growth”.

It is of major importance, for the commissioning company, to put the chosen Customer Relationship Management system to use as soon as possible – seen the need for one is on its high. Thus the implementation process must be fairly simple. Hence, the choice for Microsoft Office Access 2007. This software is already installed on the computers used by RLC.

The end users of the chosen system are acquainted with the software, thus they know how to put it to use. Without an explanatory training in any of its forms, however, the final aim of the Customer Relationship Management system will soon go to waste.

Therefore, the implementation scheme – this scheme portraits what information needs to be implemented, when this information needs to be implemented – before or after a customer touch point, but also when the information needs to be updated – and who the main person is to do so.

Moreover, the scheme is meant for all involved in the daily (office) activities of Real Life Concepts. To ultimately activate the customer relationships, transparency within the organization is of necessity. – All involved need to be able to understand the customer relationship.

The implementation scheme is shown on the next page.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| *Data* | *What* | *When* | *Who* |
| General details | The customer’s name,  the company’s name,  the (business) address and telephone number | Before customer touch point, to be updated when necessary | The Marketing- and Communication Assistant |
| Contact person details | The contact person’s name, the conforming job title, the contact person’s telephone number, the contact person’s e-mail address | Before customer touch point, to be updated when necessary | The Marketing- and Communication Assistant |
| Customer character details | The main characteristics of the customer in comprehensible key words – both for business (e.g. a stakeholders meeting) and personal (e.g. a birthday card) touch points | After customer touch point, to be updated every 6 months | The Marketing- and Communication Assistant |
| ABC-categorization | Define the customer as an A, a B or a C customer – based on their yearly financial input –what is the customer’s yearly financial input | After customer touch point, to be updated every year | The Business Development Assistant |
| Business details | What business is the customer in, what is the customer specialized in, in what market segment does the customer operate in, what are the current happenings in that business | Before customer touch point, to be updated every year – current happenings to be updated every month | The Marketing- and Communication Assistant |
| Strategy details | What are the customer’s (personal) preferences, what is the customer’s activity history, what are the customer’s (business) interests | After customer touch point, to be updated every 6 months – activity history to be updated every month | The Marketing- and Communication Assistant |

*The Microsoft Office Access 2007 Implementation Scheme*

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2. De Looff & Jumelet, 2012, p. 6 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. De Caluwé & Vermaak, 2004 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Bezem, 2012, p. 9 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Referring to appendix Ia [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Referring to appendix IIa [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Referring to appendix V [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Gupta & Malik, 2005, p. 295 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Buizert & De Rooy, 2005 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Dyché, 2004a, p. 26 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Dyché, 2004b [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Blythe, 2009 [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. International Virtual Assistants Association, n.d. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Russer, 2007, pp. 139-143 [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Referring to appendix IV [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Referring to appendix Ib [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Referring to appendix IIb [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Referring to appendix III [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Dyché, 2004c, pp. 160-161 [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. IBM Corporation, 2011 [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Database, 2013 [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
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23. Kirk, 2013 [↑](#footnote-ref-23)