

Helping customers manage customers

**BY ERIC RUTH
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When Andy Atkins was a young salesman for Xerox, he watched as the innovative company took the lead in personal computers, then let its staggering potential slip away.

These days, he's working to make sure other businesses don't make the same mistake.

The Wilmington-born Atkins and his company, CRM manager, help firms utilize the full capabilities of their "customer relationship management" software -- essentially, a program that allows businesses to organize customer account data for sales and marketing purposes.

"To be competitive in today's world, you need to have information about your prospects and your clients, and it needs to be up-to-date and current," said Atkins, 48, who commutes to his firm in Malvern, Pa., from his home in Chadds Ford, Pa.

The capabilities of customer relationship management software come with enormous complexities, however, and some firms struggle to find the time and energy to train workers fully. CRM manager, which focuses on the popular Web-based program Salesforce.com, helps companies customize the program and migrate their data into the

system, then begins training workers in classroom settings.



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Andy Atkins had a background in the computer training business before founding CRM manager.

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www.crm-manager.net

www.salesforce.com

"We wanted a solution that allowed our users to access customer prospect information from their home office or a coffeeshop or a hotel room," said Jason Berstein, vice president of Nixon Uniform Service & Medical Wear, of Wilmington.

Atkins' firm helped Nixon customize the software, said Berstein, who noted that poor implementation can doom a firm's use of customer-relations software. "You're trying to add structure to the people that may not have been using it in the past," he said. "A sound implementation is critical to success."

Now that it's in place, he said, the company can more accurately track customers' status and quantify sales productivity. "Once configured, it's about as easy to use as Amazon.com," he said.

After six months in business, Atkins' company has close to 40 clients and is targeting an East Coast expansion.

"My goal was to develop the best" consulting company, said Atkins, who graduated from Wilmington Friends School and Pennsylvania State University. It helps to have hitched his fortunes to a company like Salesforce, he said -- it did \$310 million in sales last year, and manages customer information for approximately 22,700 customers, including America Online, Avis/Budget Rent A Car and Nokia. Earlier this month, Intelligent Enterprise magazine named Salesforce one of America's Companies to Watch.

"Salesforce has really revolutionized [IT training] by saying, 'Why don't we do this all online,' " said Atkins, who entered the field in 1989, when he started a Philadelphia franchise of ExecuTrain, which specialized in teaching such programs as Microsoft Word. By 2002, Atkins and three other franchise owners bought the entire ExecuTrain firm. Atkins served as chairman until 2004, eventually selling his franchise and moving on to his latest challenge.

"My goal was always to do something on my own one day, be an entrepreneur," he said. He sees a similar spirit in Salesforce, and believes CRM manager will continue to grow alongside it. He also believes that, despite the exponential growth of computers in business, that the best ways are sometimes the old ways.

"You want to be there for these folks," he said. "I want to meet and get to know every customer."

Contact Eric Ruth at 324-2428 or eruth@delawareonline.com.