

Influence of customer relationship management in optometric practice

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Abstract

Faced both with the current context of the vision care services' market (high qualification of eye care practitioners, specific technologies for eye examination, highly-customized optical equipment) and the social trends (consumers' behavioural change, demographic growth and population aging, increase in the rate of technological change, etc.), the eye care providers seek to adapt their methods in approaching and communicating with their clients through specific marketing techniques. In order to reach their medium and long term sales targets, as well as achieve a constant profit level, the retail players in the eye care services field need not only to generate the immediate satisfaction of the client but to develop and maintain long relations, based on reliability, stability and added value.

This is a line of business well-known for the co-producer role of the customers, whether referring to the optometric-ophthalmologic prescription or to frames or sunglasses selection or choosing the contact lenses – all these forming several complex linked processes resulting in a highly customized equipment: the individual optical equipment (IOE). In this context, the adoption of the customer relationship management (CRM) principles particularly targets the customer retention strategy, making use of informational platforms able to ensure continuous, flexible and efficient interactions with all the customers of the organization, in all stages of contact. The importance of the CRM is emphasized also by the fact that the cost of acquiring a new customer is five to ten times higher than maintaining an existing one.

This paper attempts to identify the factors determining a long-term relationship on a vision care services' market which uses direct marketing techniques, one-to-one or relational, offering a relevant competitive advantage for the consumer: the successful management of the eyesight capital. Thus, CRM becomes an essential tool for a sustainable business growth in a highly competitive climate, difficult to anticipate.

Keywords: customer relationship management (CRM), customer loyalty, individual optical equipment (IOE), eye care services, CRM software.

JEL classification: 31.

1. Introduction

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has outlined since 1986 that health is much more important to be left only in the hands of the practitioners from the medical field; health education and the elaboration of health policies should be considered by the appropriate government institutions as priorities at individual, community and national level. Therefore, in today's conditions, the eye health matter needs a multi-sectoral approach involving both government organizations and specialized professional associations – ophthalmologic research or educational institutions, ophthalmologic centres or clinics, optical and optometry providers, as well as humanitarian associations (SNSPMS, 2006). Taking into account that a healthy eyesight is based in part on the periodical examination of the visual acuity, and the fact that “the corrective eyeglasses represent the most predominant tool for correcting visual impairment” (Acuité, 2016), this paper will seek to emphasize that an efficient implementation of the CRM principles can lead to both an improvement of the quality of life of the IOE wearers, as well as an increase in the loyalty of the eye care services consumers and, therefore, turning into a successful business as a specialized visual care store or ophthalmologic centre.

No.	Statistical parameter	Unit value	Value	UM	Observations
1	Romanian population on 1st of January 2015 (INSEE, 2015)		19,800,000	persons	
2	Need for visual correction		11,880,000	persons	1st position x 60%
3	Population wearing visual corrective devices		8,316,000	persons	2nd position x 70%
4	Sunglasses users		5,000,000	persons	estimated
5	Contact lenses users/ Refractive surgery		166,320	persons	3rd position x 2%
6	Corrective glasses users		8,149,680	persons	3rd position x 98%
7	Ready-to-wear corrective glasses users		1,222,452	persons	6th position x 15%
8	Made-to-measure corrective glasses users		6,927,228	persons	6th position x 85%
9	Renewal rate of corrective glasses		4	years	
10	Estimated value of corrective lenses for glasses market (annual turnover - excluding the ready-to-wear glasses)		3,463,614	pieces	(8th position/4 years) x 2
11	Estimated value of eyewear frames market (annual turnover)		1,731,807	pieces	8th position/4 years
12	Estimated value of sunwear (annual turnover)		1,250,000	pieces	4th position/4 years
13	Corrective lenses market (annual estimation)	23 Euro/piece	79,663,122	Euro/Lenses	23€ x 10th position
14	Corrective eyewear frames market (annual estimation)	20 Euro/piece	34,636,140	Euro/Frames	20€ x 11th position
15	Sunwear market (annual estimation)	10 Euro/piece	12,500,000	Euro/Sunglasses	10€ x 12th position
16	Contact lenses market (annual estimation)	120 Euro/set	19,200,000	Euro/Contact Lenses	120€ x 160,000 persons
17	Total value of eye care devices in Romania (annual estimation)		145,999,262	Euro	

Table 1. Romanian population with refractive problems and the volume of the optical market in Romania

Source: Romanian Association of Optical Business Owners, 2015

As a result, the need to raise the awareness of the population in the importance of the eye health and the increase of the individual responsibility in an efficient management of the eyesight capital throughout the entire life become essential to our endeavour.

For an optical and optometry services provider, focused on the increase of his/her business profit, the active role of the CRM implementation is best described by a responsible behaviour towards the visual care offered to his/her clients. According to Kotler (2004), the satisfaction is measured through the pleasure or disappointment felt by the individual when comparing his perception to the performance of the purchased brand. On one hand, the *respect* proved by the services provider represents a differentiation factor and determines the customers' satisfaction degree. For example, even on a mature market, the customers' relationship can be improved on one of the most basic methods: the follow-up call after a sale offering assistance and measuring the customer satisfaction. An online survey published at the end of February 2015 and carried out by GfK in five European countries – the UK, Germany, France, Italy and Spain – on a sample of 6,029 respondents, aged over 16, revealed that the satisfaction level of more than 40% of the customers was below the expectations because the opticians failed to question them a few days or weeks after the purchase to ensure that they are satisfied with what they bought (Eyewear Intelligence, 2015).

On the other hand, there is the *respect* reflected in the wearer's care for his/her own health, best illustrated by an increased rate of renewal of the IOE. The average renewal rate for corrective eyeglasses (corrective eyeglasses average life cycle) is 4 years in Romania (the 9th position in *Table 1*), situating our country under the European average calculated to 2.5 years. (WMido.com, 2015).

In conclusion, the eye health statistics and behaviour and a good CRM practice are interrelated and therefore, they shall be equally analysed in this paper which shall be structured as follows:

Chapter 2 will emphasise the relevance of the literature chosen as statistical and theoretical reference to our study.

Chapter 3 will present the methodology used for our analysis of the influence of the CRM in optometric practice.

Chapter 4 will analyse the data obtained and, finally, Chapter 5 will present the conclusions to our findings and further recommendations.

2. Literature review

The references used to document this paper were selected to support both the presentation of the theoretical concepts mentioned throughout this study (relationship marketing, CRM, customer loyalty, satisfaction level, perceived value, etc.), as well as to clarify specific elements from the eye care sector and its players' role.

It is important to specify here that there is no specialized literature in Romanian on the chosen topic, the only scientific papers covering the optical-optometric subject being obtained as a courtesy from Mrs. Mihaela Baritz, University Professor PhD at Faculty of Product Design and Environment within Transilvania University from Brasov.

For updated statistical data and the elaboration of more comprehensive conclusions regarding the implementation of the CRM techniques in the above-mentioned field, both the *collection* of data from the territory and the *analysis* of the current data to be published by the Centre for Information and Statistic in the Optical and Ophthalmological Field (CISOOF) would be necessary. As concerns the first aspect (the *collection*), the e-CRM platforms are still too expensive to be acquired at national level and there is only a small number of private ophthalmological centre able to implement and manage such a software – approximately 15 – 17 companies have succeeded in acquiring the Appsmart Ophthalmology EMR Solution over the last three years. In terms of the *analysis*, the data from CISOOF shall be published at the end of June 2016 (to be accessed at: <http://cisoromania.wix.com/snoo2016>) and they shall comprise a summary of the results of the first survey ever conducted in Romania and seeking to increase the performance of the managers from the primary eye care field.

3. Methodology

As we established in a previous chapter, the eyesight health is very important for a long and productive life and the CRM practice is equally important in developing a successful business satisfying both consumers and contributing to their health and business owners.

Therefore, we will describe in short terms what the eyesight means for all of us and the importance of maintaining it healthy throughout our entire life, we will use statistical data regarding the eye health of the global population and the impact of the current life style on our eye health, and also information regarding the optometric and ophthalmologic market.

Also, we will give a basic description of the CRM system and principles and its implementation in our specific field, the optometric practice.

We'll use information obtained from studies and surveys conducted by health associations and institutions, articles from optometric newspapers and magazines, references from specialty books both in the optometric and CRM field.

4. Data analysis & Findings

4.1. The visual health

4.1.1. The importance of the eyesight

The eyesight represents a vital sense for our orientation in space, being a long term ally in our integration to the environment. For any individual, the importance of the eyesight is essential in the development of the entire body and the acquiring of the adaptation skills – over 83% of what we know comes from eyesight (Golu, 1985, apud Crețu Tinca, 2009). The eyes comprise more than 2 million component parts, ranking as second among the most complex organs of the human body, the first place being occupied by the brain. The primary function of the ophthalmologic system is the eyesight, considered the most important and, therefore, the most useful human sense. The eyesight is polyvalent, being at the same time a *means of integration* of the human body into the environment, and a finite and non-renewable ability.

4.1.2. Visual care – a major public health problem

In the current socio-economical context, the quality of the eyesight and the visual health have

become factors of major interest for their implications at both individual and global level. A recent study published in the Ophthalmology magazine (Daen, 2016) reveals the fact that the myopia will become a public health problem, with the risk that, in 2050, five billion persons being affected by it, meaning half of the worldwide population. Comparing to the beginning of the 3rd millennium, the loss of the eyesight caused by myopia will be seven times higher in 2050, this disease becoming the main cause for permanent blindness at global level (Bretan, 2016).

The importance of the eyesight is emphasised not only by the increase of the number of people with abnormal refractive condition and the aging of the population at global level – in 2050, one of five persons will be 60 years old (Popa, 2016); correlated with the proliferation of visual displays emitting blue light (also known as high energy visible light) – PC monitors, LED screens, mobile terminals, etc. (Enache, 2014), but also the low vision or the failure to correct the refractive error. From the information provided by the Vision Impact Institute from Dallas, the annual economic worldwide loss due to visual impairment is of 243 billion Euros. Annually, Germany loses approximately 4.38 billion Euros; Japan loses 6.13 billion Euros, while USA loses 19.26 billion Euros (Smith et al, 2015).

4.1.3. The volume of visual corrective devices on the global eyewear market

According to a study elaborated by Exane BNP Paribas (Mellery-Pratt, 2015), the size of the global eyewear market, comprising *visual corrective devices* – i.e. corrective frames, sunglasses and contact lenses – is totalling approximately 90 billion US dollars. Until 2020, it is estimated that this market will grow with more than 55%, to app. 140 billion US dollars. In 2015, the frames and the sunglasses represented 36 billion US dollars, almost 40% of global eyewear market in visual corrective products.

4.1.4. The corrective eyeglasses – the most predominant tool for correcting visual impairment

As optometric and optical services are concerned, the offer covers two categories of products: *ready-to-wear articles* (plano sunglasses, contact lenses and accessories) and *made-to-measure products* (the corrective glasses made according to the ophthalmologic prescription).

An article published on Acuité.fr portal (2016) and based on a study conducted by GfK Institute, on the demand of Club Inter-Optiques, shows that the French optical services market reaches annually 6,680 million Euros, being dominated by the sales of corrective ophthalmic lenses (60.9%), followed by the spectacles frames (25.3%), the two components forming the so-called *Individual Optical Equipment (IOE)* or the pair of eyeglasses, totalling approximately 86% of the turnover. The statistic also outlines the dominant role of the corrective eyeglasses among the entirety of the means for visual correction. In conclusion, in the primary eye care sector, a large part of the optical and optometric services result in the execution of a made-to-measure personal object, the corrective eyeglasses encompassing the entire process of personalised examination and consulting.

Taking into account the relational grounds as subject for our paper, it has to be outlined here that the eyeglasses play an important *socio-relational* role, their mission being ensured by the stable *relation* between the frames structure and the optical system they support. Moreover, the choice of eyeglasses is based on complex selection criteria – medical, esthetical, psychological, emotional and social – thus the eyeglasses acquiring multiple roles. Strictly *functional*, they correct defects of sight; *anatomically*, they improve facial traits; *psychologically*, they emit stimuli and express feelings; *socially*, they define and introduce a certain social standing.

4.1.5. Particularities of the visual care services (optical and optometric)

Optometry deals with the examination of the visual system and the integration of the individual in the social environment, having at the same time a *preventive* and *curative* role. The optometrist should be able to prescribe to each patient the appropriate IOE that would suit and solve his/her visual needs. According to a study conducted in the five most important European countries (Wmido, 2014), the optometrist or optician is perceived as the “eye care professional”, his role being essential in disseminating the information regarding the primary eye care, the configuration, adjustment and maintenance of the IOE

following the ophthalmologic prescription. The way in which the visual care *services* are carried out, based on an optical aid device, is closely correlated to the unforgettable experiences that these interactions generate during the direct communication with the customer.

The *three services* delivered by most of the optical and optometric centres are: *examination* of the visual acuity, *fitting* and *maintenance* of the IOE. These services emphasise the *three essential roles* of the optical services consumer, i.e. the *consumer-patient* (active during the visual assessment and the examination of the visual acuity), the *consumer-co-producer* (active during the configuration and the selection of the future IOE) and the *consumer-wearer* (active during the wearing of the actual IOE).

The consumers are *active co-producers* of the IOE (Cetină, 2009) because they participate directly in the selection and the configuration of the proper device (corrective glasses or contact lenses) according to their specific *visual* parameters (refractive error and visual behaviour), *anatomical* parameters (various physiognomies), *psychological* parameters (personality, life style, individual drives, etc.) and specific *conditions of use*.

It is important to state here that the long period of economic recession started in 2008 led to a more pragmatic and cost-efficient approach from our customers. They became more sophisticated and informed, seeking services with high added value, as well as personal objects – corrective eyeglasses or plano sunglasses – which satisfy rather the functional aspect than the emotional or simply, the esthetical aspects (B2Eyes Magazine, 2014).

4.2. The customer relationship management – a component of relationship marketing

4.2.1. Approaches of relationship marketing

According to Bruhn (2009), the relationship marketing is based on the quality of the customer-provider relationship, a variable influenced directly by the customer's satisfaction, commitment and trust in the company, and indirectly by the value perceived (in our case, the satisfaction is considered an intermediary variable), further determining the commitment.

The relationship marketing comprises those marketing activities which target the customer's loyalty by offering added value to all parties involved in the exchange (Țichindelean, 2014). It collects the data and information needed for the understanding of the consumers' needs and in order to create with their help a certain value. The achievement of this goal comprises the functional integration of the marketing persons, operations and processes, an integration which can be determined by information, technology and computer programmes (Țichindelean, 2014).

Conceptually, the relationship marketing is based on the following complementary theoretical approaches: the *behavioural*, the *networking* and the *managerial* perspectives (Pop, 2006).

The *behavioural* approach deals with building and developing long-term relationships between the company and all its stakeholders – resource providers (financial, material and human resources), consumers, employees, public or private organisations – generating trust and preference towards the company, its products, services, brands and image. The preference encompasses various stages such as business partners' retention and loyalty through behaviour that generates mutual benefits.

From the *networking perspective*, the company's connections with the providers and the beneficiaries work within the network, focusing on the interactive aspect of the specific marketing relationships. Based on the informational systems collecting data from the economical activity and analysing databases, the decision factors can evaluate the relationships' level and the interactions between the organisation and its business partners.

The *managerial* approach comprises the complex perspective of the top management in adopting an internal marketing policy having as effect the development of long term relationships with the other players on the market and resulting in a managerial vision oriented towards partnership and collaboration with the customers (Pop, 2006).

4.2.2. The Customer Relationship Management (CRM) – conceptual aspects

CRM deals with managing the company's strategies in customer relationships, making use of the informational technology. Unlike it, the relationship marketing targets the strategic management with all categories of important stakeholders – including the customers – of the company (Bălan, 2007). The

strategic nature of CRM means developing and maintaining long-term and mutually beneficial relationships with the strategic customers of the company. It is relevant and profitable for the organisation only to the extent of contributing to the achievement of the organisation's goals, generating value both for the customer and the organisation.

CRM is a *business strategy* based on the data obtained through the informational technology, its results optimising the organisation's profitability and incomes, and the customer satisfaction, by organising the databases focused on categories of users, stimulating the behaviours which satisfy their needs and favouring the implementation of the processes generating superior experiences in all contact stages with consumers.

According to the experience economy principles developed by Pine and Gilmore (2010), the experience represents a new stage in the economic offer, superior to goods, products and services. It is a business vision which brings to the brand-consumer relationship an element of sensational, memorable, the company searching more and more creative methods involving the customer in making the service unique and unforgettable (Pine and Gilmore, 2010).

Figure 1 emphasises the transformation of the goods in activities based on the progression of economic value theory, illustrating the direct proportional relationship between the perception of the relevance of the service, the quality of the service delivered under staged conditions and the competitive differentiation level. In this train of thoughts, it is important to outline that all optical devices are objects generating experiences, the optical or optometric services providers being given the chance to transform the visual examination session into an event staged especially for the customer.

The informational technology contributes to the elaboration and the implementation of the strategies able to achieve the organisation's goals regarding *maintaining* the customer relationships and *developing* their loyalty. At the same time, the CRM solutions aid in measuring the performances and the results of the relationship marketing strategies and programmes.

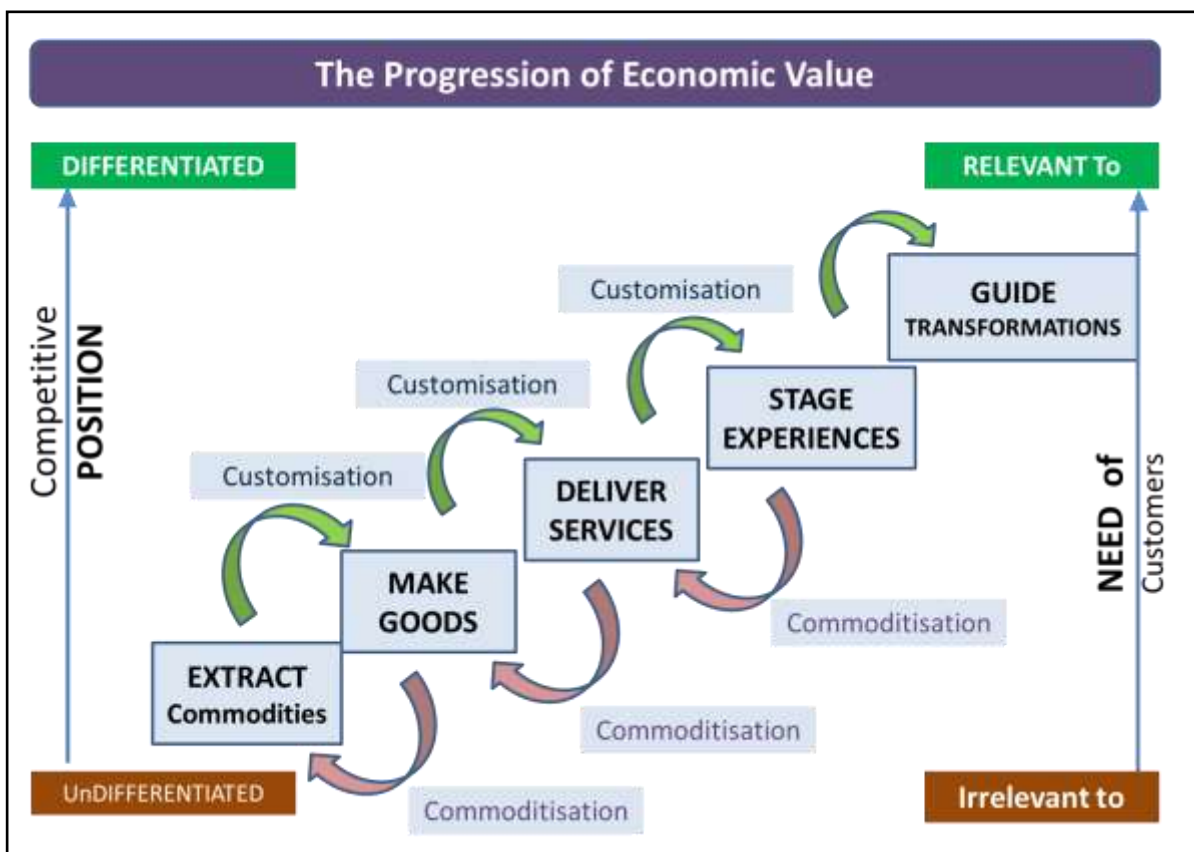


Figure 1. The progression of economic value

Source: Pine B. Joseph, Gilmore H. James, 2010. *The Experience Economy*, page 311.

The elaboration and the implementation of the strategies for increasing customer loyalty and developing a provider profile suitable to the organisation have as major goal the creation of value for both partners of that relationship, the provider and respectively the customer. In order for the value to be acknowledged and adopted by the customer, the organisation must provide it with enough significance and relevance (Bălan, 2007).

4.3. The customer relationship management in the optometric practice

The marketing specialists approach CRM from three perspectives: strategic, operational and analytical.

4.3.1. The strategic perspective

The organisation's goals can be achieved by cumulating the CRM strategies starting from the information regarding consumers' needs, together with the creation of products and services different from those of the competition, and following the principles of total quality management.

Among the specific strategies in the optical and optometric field there are:

a. *Customised-sales* strategies for *existent* customers, as IOE wearers making *recurrent purchases*. From this point of view, the *direct marketing*, as well as the *one-to-one* marketing are useful tools for the implementation of such a strategy. During the personalised sale, the customer experiences and lives new situations under the guidance of the optician-optometrist. Whether we refer to the sensorial component, the emotional one or the social aspect, the delivery of unforgettable experiences represent a challenge for any eye care professional. The interactions between opticians, optometrists or ophthalmologists and their customers are based on the relational capital and are considered sources of experience and success factors in gaining the loyalty of the latter.

The corrective eyeglasses integrate perfectly the customised sales model, their execution being based on the precision of the optometric measurements and their correct transposition into the optical appliance. The parameters of the optical system which compose the IOE reflect a strong adaptation to the visual needs of the customer, taking into account *anatomical* elements (the oculomotor balance, the inter-pupillary distance, the physiognomic dimensions), the structural characteristics of the chosen *frame* (the height of the rims, the pantoscopic tilt, the vertex distance, the length of the temples, etc.), and the *behavioural* variables specific to each individual (posture, eyesight dynamic, etc.).

Most of the optical and optometric stores offer a range of products with similar characteristics. Here, the difference can be made by adding maximum value to *direct communication* with the IOE wearers, either by an efficient management of the database and by sending promotional offers, or using any element which impacts directly on the *sensorial* comfort of the customer (visual/thermal/auditive environment, furniture, personnel outfit, advertising elements, etc.). In other words, *the customisation of the made-to-measure device* is part of the marketing communication strategy, the personalised nature of the eye care services being reflected into the messages towards the target audience.

b. The strategy to *increase the traffic at sales points* functions perfectly for the stores provided with an optometric or ophthalmologic centre. They offer the ideal place for both *a visual assessment* and the customised configuration of an IOE. The direct contact with the customer and the one-to-one dialogue, the clinical visual assessment, the trying and fitting of the optical device represent the strengths of the traditional optical store. And the element reinforcing the stability of such a business is exactly the professional and personalised nature of a consultative sale specific to this store or the traditional optical and optometric centre. It is perceived as both a place where the customer can receive personalised services, specialised information, a dissemination and education centre, and as a place for presenting, promoting unique products which can be tried, fitted and purchased. Today, the online environment offers us a large range of spectacles frames, plano sunglasses or contact lenses which can be subsequently purchased, but the configuration process of a *made-to-measure optical device* remains

the job of a highly qualified optician, known as an “eye care expert” (Wmido, 2015), working in a properly equipped space.

4.3.2. The operational perspective

The operational level deals with the *automation of the activities* regarding the interaction with the company’s customers, not only by building a website but also by implementing software platforms or programmes meant to comprise all company’s functions related to the management of the customers’ data. The e-CRM software platforms implemented in the optical and optometric fields lead to a synchronisation of the activities from all the departments within the company, providing to the marketing personnel significant information to be used in the planning of the *sales and marketing* strategies. The most important effects of using an e-CRM system is the global increase in efficiency of all services delivered. The relevance of the message sent to the customer is amplified, the coherence is improved and the communication is more personal, all these actions impacting on the satisfaction level of the customers and creating memorable experiences.

The famous professor Philip Kotler (2004) outlines that, in projecting the database, the organisation’s management makes decisions regarding the *type of information* to be collected and the way in which they will be obtained, the *maintenance* and the *updating* of the data, as well as their *use* in order to bring benefits both to the company and to the customers.

A well organised database, doubled by a complete history of the patient (including both services delivered and the purchase of optical devices), helps in calculating the *customer’s life value*, allowing to the organisation to elaborate personalised marketing strategies. In conclusion, the techniques regarding the operational aspect of the CRM represent a capital to be used in order to increase the profitability of the company by individualising the approach to the customers and maintaining and developing long term relationships with them.

According to Total Soft, one of the most important software services providers in Romania, the main function of an e-CRM digital platform is the electronic recording and storing of the customers’ data, which then can be easily accessed on the occasion of a new interaction or when planning a sales or marketing campaign (Charisma-CRM, 2016).

The information stored by an e-CRM system comprise the *contact details* of the customer (name, sex, age, date of birth, social security number, address, phone, e-mail, profession), based on which a *patient file* is generated. The file integrates both variables pertaining to the *medical profile* (refractive error, medical ocular history, appointments’ dates, etc.) and the *commercial profile* (purchased products, history of invoices and payments, customer status, etc.). The system allows also the introduction of additional data related to the customer: found out about the company on a friend’s recommendation or by searching online; comes from the urban/rural environment or data found on his/her social profile (for example, Facebook, Twitter, etc.).

The screenshot displays the 'Fisa pacient' (Patient File) interface. At the top, there are search and action buttons: 'Cautare pacient', 'Modifica pacient', 'Adauga pacient', 'Inlocuieste pacient', 'Comaseaza pacient', and 'Programare noua'. Below this is the 'Date pacient' section with various input fields for patient information, including name, address, contact details, and insurance status. A 'Generare nr fisa' button is also present. The bottom section, 'Istoric programari', contains a table of appointments.

Total		4550	100	4450		
Optiuni	Programare	Data	Valoare	Achritat	Rest de plata	Medic
Plataste	Biometrie, Operatie retina	15.03.2016	3950	0	3950	vasile elena
Proceduri	Consult oftalmologic adulti	06.02.2016	100	100	0	Fel Veronica

Figure 2. Patient's file – interface of Appsmart Ophthalmology EMR Solution platform

Source: Appsmart Software Solutions, Bucharest

For example, *Figure 2* represents the interface “Patient’s file”, a computer module belonging to Appsmart Ophthalmology EMR Solution, a local platform developed by Appsmart Software Solutions. This module contains all essential elements of an integrated system for the patients of an ophthalmological clinic. The modules defined in the e-CRM platform – medical information, patients’ data, scheduling of appointments, optical management and integration of equipments – facilitate the identification of the patient, the monitoring of the treatment, the elaboration of premium assistance programmes, the awarding of certain warranties or privileges, etc., thus contributing to the long term loyalty process, the consolidation of the organisation’s image and the business development.

4.3.3. The analytical perspective

The data collected determines the customers’ behaviour, the detailed analysis of the selection, purchase and use of the optical equipment, as well as the analysis of the appointments for the periodical examination of the visual acuity, representing key elements in the implementation of a customer focused e-CRM. Moreover, the *points of interaction with the client* must be also evaluated and analysed. They usually generate situations which attract the attention and the interest of the customer, encouraging him/her to get involved in the delivery of the service. The reference point is the *customisation of the relational strategies* based on the implementation of the e-CRM platform resulting in good services and customer’s satisfaction.

The analysis of the information regarding the purchasing behaviour (the financial value allocated, the rate of renewal, the typology of the optical device, etc.) and the analysis of the diagnostic specific to each patient (refractive error, low vision caused by aging or internal diseases, ocular diseases related to solar exposure, excessive use of visualisation displays, exposure to professional risks, etc.) constitute essential elements for an ideal CRM (see *Table 2*). The result is a series of actions focused towards the increase of the customer’s satisfaction level in answering to his/her needs and the achievement of total quality.

Aspects	Characteristics
One-to-one marketing	Individual assistance for the customers
Brand	The brand as a distinctive sign for reliability
Customers' loyalty programme	The incentives determine further relationships
Establishing partnerships with supply chains	The supply chain is based on the partners' mutual trust
Permission marketing	Opt-in systems, communication with the clients, community
Complete information and personalised consulting	Transparency, recommendations, objectives

Table 2. – Aspects of an ideal CRM

Source: Urban, G. (2010), page 140

For an eye care professional, the elaboration of the offer must be adapted depending on the visual needs of the consumers, first taking into account the *segmentation* of the database by using all the information provided by existent customers.

4.3.4. The market segmentation in the optical and optometric practice

The market segmentation can be defined as a classification of all distinctive elements, having as result the formation of sub-groups based on common characteristics (Holdford, page 231). The most usual segmentation criteria are: *demographic* (age, sex, occupation, education, income, etc.), *geographic* (country, region, urban/rural environment, etc.), *psychographic* (life style, personality, values) and *behavioural* (rate of purchase of certain goods and services, availability to try new products, loyalty to certain brands, etc.).

In the optical and optometric field, the customer segmentation can be achieved on the following specific criteria: *refractive error* (patients with myopia, hypermetropia, astigmatism, presbyopia, etc.), *typology of ophthalmic lenses* purchased (customers wearing spherical, cylindrical, progressive, bifocal lenses, etc.), the *optical equipment* selected (customers using sunglasses, corrective eyeglasses, contact lenses, etc.), *purchased brands* (sunglasses or contact lenses wearers repeating the purchase from the same brand) or *rate of repurchase* (wearers of contact lenses using daily maintenance solutions).

Following a close segmentation of the customers and knowing their particular needs, the organisation can transmit them the relevant information through their preferred media channel (phone, SMS, e-mail, direct marketing, social networking, etc.).

Glen Urban (2010) emphasises the fact that *permission marketing* offers to the customers the possibility of choosing the way in which to receive the information by accessing online the website of the company. The voluntary agreement of a customer to provide complete personal information means to the organisation a sign of trust. Used wisely, this information is very useful both to the company in elaborating a personalised offer and to the customer in reducing the searching time for the purchase of new products.

5. Conclusion

CRM plays an essential role in the eye care sector whether we refer to the periodical *functional exploration* of the visual analyser (comprehensive eye health and vision examinations) or the configuration, selection and use of an IOE customised to specific visual needs. The first puts the customer in the role of *consumer-patient*, while the second needs the *consumer-co-producer* role. The common aspect of these two situations is the direct contact between the services provider and the beneficiary, the 100% *personalised* nature of the service being reflected both through the optometric prescription and the optical corrective individual equipment.

As a result, the main objective of any relationship marketing strategy in the eye care sector is *maintaining and stimulating the customers' interest* in a healthy eyesight and the *periodical recurrence of the vision examination* at the sales point. The eye care practitioners – optician, optometrist or ophthalmologist – will focus especially on an efficient and individualised management of the *eyesight capital* in order to improve the quality of life of their customers.

An important indicator of the interest for a continuous monitoring of the eye health is represented by the rate of renewal or the average life cycle of the IOE. According to OMO – Optical Monitor, a survey conducted by GfK in five of the most important European countries and published in September 2015 at the eyewear trade fair in Paris, the corrective eyeglasses are replaced after approximately 2.5 years (WMido, 2015). With an average rate of renewal of 4 years, our country is significantly behind most of the European Union countries, the reasons being both of financial and educational nature. For example, the average value of a pair of corrective eyeglasses (66 Euros = 23 x 2 + 20, see *Table 1, 13th and 14th positions*), including a standard examination of the visual acuity (10 Euros) reaches 76 Euros, a value perceived by the population as a significant investment in relation to their monthly income; the average net salary in Romania was 450 Euros according to INSSE in March 2016 (INSSE, 2016). Also, the Romanian population with visual impairment does not benefit from national public campaigns regarding the need of a periodical preventive assessment of the visual acuity.

On the other hand, Romania does not have a health insurance system able to cover part of the expenses generated by the visual impairment needs of the population. The only exception is met in the Ministry of Justice. Actually, the only category of people benefiting from insurance coverage for purchasing corrective lenses for corrective eyeglasses are the public servants with special status working in the National Prison Service. According to the Order 1297/C of 8th of April 2016 (Judicial Monitor, 2016), the maximum limit of the compensation comprises three levels – 110, 200 and 300 Euros, calculated based on the refractive errors (dioptries of up to ± 4 or higher than ± 4) and the correction prescribed by the ophthalmologist (monofocal or multifocal).

The continuous monitoring of their own customers, the permanent information of the existent and potential ones, as well as the increase in public awareness are three other reasons which support the implementation of the CRM software platforms in the activity of the Romanian eye care practitioners.

Acknowledgements

The author thanks the Associate Professor, PhD at Marketing School Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Andreea Mihaela Barbu for her constructive comments and suggestions that were vital in improving the quality of the paper. Further, I would like to thank my supervisor, Professor of Marketing, PhD at Marketing School Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Valerică Olteanu for his advice, support and guidance that enabled me to submit this work.

Also, the author thanks to Mr. Adrian Artene, manager at Appsmart Software Solutions for the information regarding the functionalities of a digital e-CRM solution and the data on the implementation of the AppSmart solutions in several private ophthalmological clinics in Romania.

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