

database marketing

THE 'VALUE EXCHANGE' UNDER THE MICROSCOPE

Mike Fisher considers the value exchange that underpins all direct marketing activity

DRASTIC TIMES, DRASTIC MEASURES

Who has the courage to fire the bottom 25% of their customer base?

ADDING EMAIL TO THE MIX

Testing, testing and more testing is the key to integrating email into a multichannel marketing strategy

SOFTWARE REVIEW

CLICKSQUARED'S MULTICHANNEL MARKETING HUB IN FOCUS

BUYER'S GUIDE TO CLEANSING

GUIDE TO PROCURING DATA CLEANSING SERVICES & SOFTWARE

ADDRESSING SOLUTIONS

WHAT NEXT FOR THE NEWLY CONSOLIDATED MARKET?

Crossing the channels made easier than ever

ClickSquared's newest cloud-based cross-channel marketing platform offers great power and detailed control of direct channel marketing for more experienced techies but with an easy to use, intuitive interface it is also ideal for non-technical users, finds **James Lawson**.

ClickSquared's latest cloud-based marketing platform, the Cross-Channel Marketing Hub, majors on integration and ease-of-use. This high-end application is all about service, both in its SaaS delivery model and in how the package is supported by ClickSquared's many other marketing services. How does it measure up?

KEEP IT SIMPLE

In-house installations are not an option with the Hub, with all the spade work handled by the vendor or its partners in a similar way to the traditional MSP-hosted database model. Managing the underlying (extremely fast) IBM Netezza database is a good example of this.

ClickSquared and its partners use the hygiene and ETL tools in the background, and the end users don't see anything except a clean database, though they can still export data and upload their own lists. Many other facilities are on offer from variable printing, data integration and analytics to email fulfillment and even packaged loyalty schemes.

Ease-of-use was obviously one of the main goals for the software development team. The interface is extremely intuitive and consistent across all functions and modules. There's no sign of a bought-in piece of software being hastily shoehorned into the package: it's all very organic. Extending the package simply means switching on and configuring other modules, a simple task with SaaS software.

At the heart of the Hub's base module is an elegantly-executed version of what is now the industry-standard approach to planning, a versatile and beautiful, drag-and-drop, object-based campaign builder which will delight novices and pro users alike. This is used to construct everything from a multi-stage direct mail, telemarketing and email campaign to a single web-hosted survey.

The planning process starts with scheduling the campaign and runs through segmenting and

selecting the audience. Only then is it time to work out which channels to employ and to decide how to allocate offers and creative treatments to each channel/segment combination.

The user simply drags the tools for audience selection onto the palette, then links them together in the required order. A task like adding a suppression or filtering stage to the selection process takes seconds. Managing the channels and their content uses the same method via a second set of tools.

At each point, double-clicking on an object on the workspace gives detailed access to the rules and other functions under the bonnet with various other interfaces relevant to the task in hand popping up as required.

That might be to build out a more sophisticated query using the various parameters and operators on offer there, to create derived fields, modify the logic used for variable email content selection or to trigger the selection of certain customer types based on date or any other relevant variable.

ClickSquared has a long history in email marketing and this shows in the state-of-the-art functionality offered via the built-in email editor and in the fine control available for the use of variable text and other content. "Logic blocks" are a good example. Constructed in the campaign builder and saved as re-usable objects, the email designer only needs to drag the logic block into the HTML code to drive dynamic content.

It's as powerful as scripting but a lot easier to use. The email test and optimisation facilities are also robust, as are the overall campaign approval

and validation facilities.

Other channels explicitly supported by the package include direct mail, telemarketing and mobile. The first two have little dedicated functionality as work simply involves setting up campaigns and then exporting lists.

It's possible to link in via the Hub's API to look up customer details and offers from a call centre application. A dedicated mobile module has a full range of options including coupons, barcoding, SMS polling, MMAS compliance and short code management.

The base package has more than adequate content management tools, with collaborative capabilities for review and approval, and the ability to restrict the editing of templates to maintain company design guidelines.

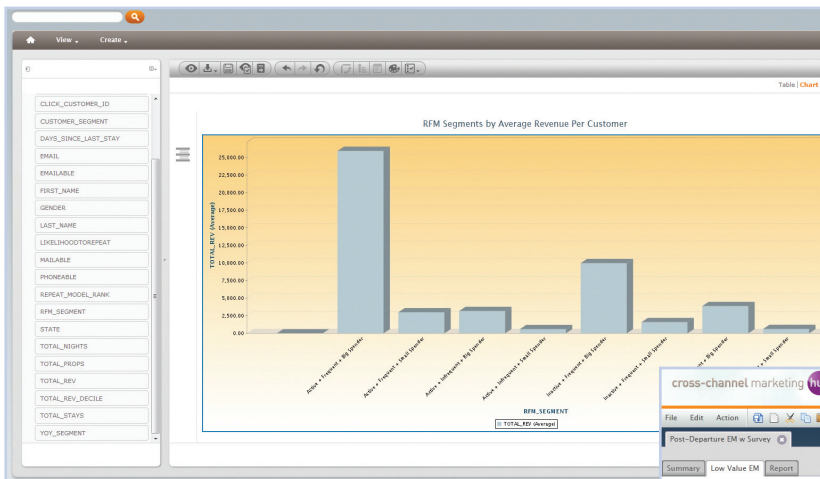
More generally, this user access control can restrict privileges in other areas like campaign planning.

VOYAGE OF DISCOVERY

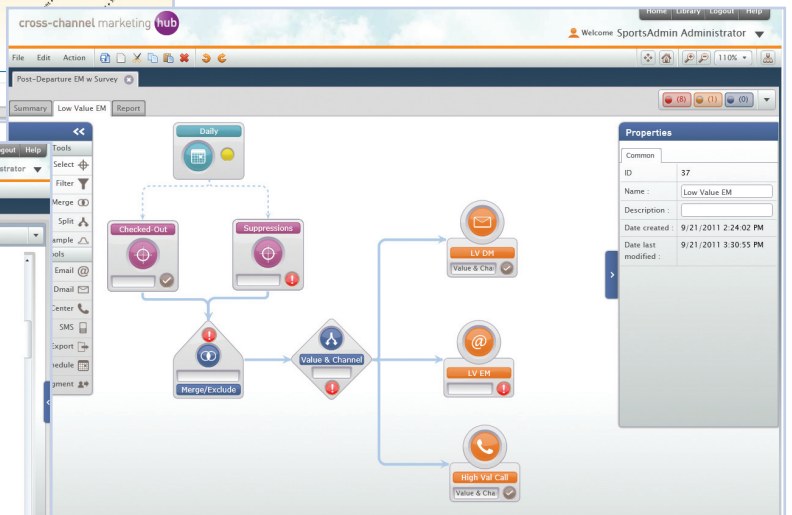
The Hub's spreadsheet-style Discover module offers more of a Business Intelligence take on exploring customer data. Here you can drag and drop variables into tables and charts, drill down to the detail, or pivot, sort, filter and cross-tab multiple dimensions against each other. This functions as another way to select and handily also serves to publish reports of counts and segments to a wider audience. Again the software balances power, functionality and usability nicely.

Reporting is fine, if not outstanding. There's a bank of standard templates covering testing, campaign results by cell and so forth but no report builder, which is in keeping with the

"Essential functions don't hide four clicks in, but are presented and linked logically, and in context with all other functions necessary to complete any given campaign task."



A real strength of ClickSquared's latest offering is the slickness of the user interface, while underneath it sits an exceptionally powerful suite of tools ideal for both experienced and non-technical users.



intended user base. The vendor will certainly be able to generate custom report templates for clients if required, and the Discover tool does offer some ad hoc reporting functions.

The social media module has an excellent set of features that link Facebook and Twitter with complementary channels like web and email. A white-labelled version of Offerpop's platform, it nonetheless fits well with the base and other modules.

Content like games and competitions can be hosted on the Hub and deployed from there to the corporate Facebook page where customers can click through to bring that content to their own wall. There are standard processes to get fans to opt in to your marketing database and dedupe their email address on entry too.

The vendor again takes the user-friendly route with modelling. Rather than the expert developmental approach of hardcore stats tools, there's a bank of proven descriptive (like RFM) and predictive (next best offer, response) models on offer. Again presented as a plug-in module, the models simply slot into the database and are ready for use immediately.

A dedicated digital tracking and reporting module offers the expected email and landing page metrics. It can track social media actions like "refer to friend" and "share with my network" too. Additionally, third party web analytics information can be imported and integrated into the Hub's database.

Other modules include a survey designer with

a good toolset and plenty of standard templates to work with. Once again, good integration means you can build a whole workflow in the Hub to manage survey responses and trigger further actions.

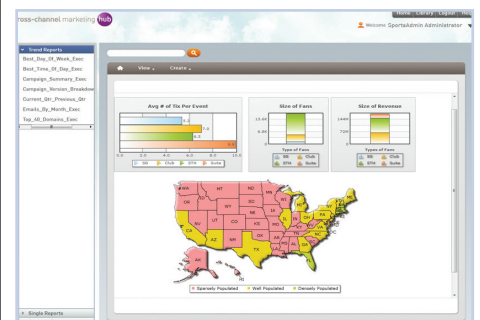
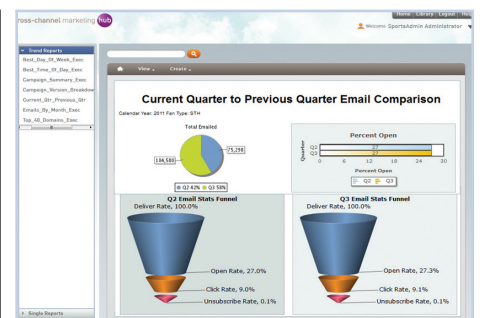
SHORT TIME TO VALUE

The development roadmap includes a collaboration module with document mark-up tools and workflow to automatically route tasks such as creative approval. Support for a raw SQL selection interface will arrive in a future release.

In summary, the Hub offers great power and detailed control of direct channel marketing, but still remains accessible for even non-technical users. Essential functions don't hide four clicks in, but are presented and linked logically, and in context with all other functions necessary to complete a campaign task.

ClickSquared ends up looking rather like the Apple of the marketing software world: a very competent set of features, beautifully packaged and delivered with a number of sector-specific versions – and no need to go elsewhere for anything from email fulfillment to database refreshes.

With its ability to connect to and work with external software, data and services, the Hub does thankfully stop short of Apple's walled garden approach. It only remains for potential clients to find out how pricing and the rest of the corporate package measure up to the competition. ■



Pricing and Specifications

The Cross-Channel Marketing Hub is a SaaS-only product; no installed version is available.

Beyond the set-up fee, monthly pricing for the base module is tiered by the number of records in the customer database. Similar charges apply to the Social (number of fans or followers) and the Survey modules. Message delivery for email and SMS is charged by volume after initial set-up.