THE ROBOTS ARE COMING

Robotic Process Automation in UK Enterprise, 2018

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Practical application of robotics and Artificial Intelligence (AI) has moved from Sci-Fi to the boardroom in just a few short years. Companies are now intelligently optimising processes by using software robots to assist human workflow; automating tasks, streamlining processes, improving productivity, and providing a better customer experience. This Robotic Process Automation (RPA) is delivering real business benefits to companies.

Take as an example the large pension planning and pension administration specialist looking to make a number of improvements within their business. Their aim was to improve internal processes; increasing revenue by offering a better customer experience, therefore higher customer retention, and more upsell opportunities. To achieve this, Robotic Process Automation was used to display all customer information held internally on disparate systems in one single view. After implementation, staff were able to respond to customer enquiries much more quickly, reducing call handling time by 15%, and achieving stated goals by providing a far better customer experience, leading to greater customer satisfaction.

Another large company using a legacy mainframe application to manage timesheets and payroll for over 60,000 people, were at risk of missing deadlines and had to regularly correct manual errors. Restrictions in the systems meant that the 70 admin employees often resorted to running individual Excel spreadsheets, creating a complex manual process that was non-compliant. By adopting Robotic Process Automation and deploying software robots the average job processing time was cut from 20 minutes to 2 minutes and human error effectively removed. The organisation has achieved productivity improvements of over £1 million and an ROI in less than two months.

Robotic Process Automation (RPA) is a software solution where a software robot, rather than a physical machine, replicates human actions when using a software program. The software robot uses the same software and same user interface that the human uses. This is different to typical software integration, where Application Process Interfaces (APIs) enable machine to machine communication on a layer below the User Interface (UI).

The software robot in this case can be considered a worker in so far as they need to have their own virtual workstation. The actions the software robot takes mimic that of a human worker, using the same mouse clicks and keyboard inputs to execute the actions but at least five times faster than a human, and 24/7/365.

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Software robots interpret the UI of a company's software applications; they are configured to replicate the exact same steps as a physical worker. The configuration of a software robot is akin to the training of a new member of staff. It is not about replacing software and coding a solution, rather it is about providing a relatively simple non-technical solution that can be deployed quickly by business units.

Robotic Process Automation does not require coding skills in order to be deployed, so deployment can be managed by the people who understand how processes work within a department or business, rather than by software development teams. This can result in faster, more successful outcomes. Non-technical employees can use the Robotic Process Automation graphical interface to graphically Drag and Drop process steps into place, and can therefore be trained to automate processes within weeks.

Because Robotic Process Automation replicates the inputting behaviour of a human worker, using the same software and user interfaces that are used by physical workers, there is none of the large-scale disruption that is normally associated with a technology roll out. A company may have spent years selecting and deploying software throughout their business and then adding layers of security to these deployments, Robotic Process Automation allows for all this to remain in place. It does not require the opening up of systems to third-party APIs and the resulting potential security risks.

The relative ease of adopting Robotic Process Automation over traditional software rollouts allows for focus on immediate benefits such as cost reduction, operational efficiencies and reducing errors. RPA automates existing systems rather than replacing them.

The IT resource requirement for an RPA rollout is low as there are no new IT platforms or services to be deployed, and the benefits are faster to be realised which makes Robotic Process Automation deployments easy to justify economically.

Businesses are keen to harness the potential of Robotic Process Automation because of its capacity to reduce costs, reduce errors, improve compliance and automate work in a fraction of the time and cost of typical large scale IT software deployments.

A software robot can be deployed for as little as one fifth of the salary of an onshore full-time employee in a high cost location like the U.K. And Software Robots have a tolerance to work 24/7/365.

Robotic Process Automation has the potential to automate some stages, or even the entirety, of all of the manual rule based processes that have not yet been successfully fully automated. With this, expectations for Robotic Process Automation are very high, not least because it is commonly grouped with full Artificial Intelligence products in the marketplace, leading to potential misunderstanding of technology, terminology, aspiration and reality.

The initial step on the Robotic Process Automation journey is to identify processes and use cases that might be best solved by the introduction of RPA. A company can then start to match requirements with the Robotic Process Automation software available and to assess the suitability and experience of potential vendors and partners.

One of the main drivers for Robotic Process Automation is improvement in quality of work. Humans make errors, and mundane repetitive tasks are mundane and repetitive. It is wrong to expect a lower skilled or outsourced employee to find such work any less dull than you do, and however efficient people appear, over the working day errors creep in. A software robot does not get distracted or bored. It does not mistype and make mistakes. Its output is predictable. And it is predictable 24/7/365. As is its cost.

The cost of a software robot is typically between 1/10 and 1/5 of the cost of a physical worker. This can obviously deliver an immediate and significant reduction in expenditure. Robotic Process Automation not only completes the work faster and more accurately, but it works around-the-clock, resulting in a greater output for that lower cost, positively impacting the bottom line of a business.

Robotic Process Automation can remove the need to outsource, or in fact enable outsourced services to be brought back in-house, resulting in huge cost savings and reduced risk of data breach. Sensitive data can be processed without ever having been read by a human. This removes any potential threat to the data from employees who might share it outside of the organisation, deliberately or otherwise. All the software robot's actions are audited and remain compliant.

When a project is scoped and delivered by staff who fully understand their local processes rather than by an IT project team, an excellent success rate can be achieved. Cost is reduced by eliminating the need for any involvement of an expensive IT team, and control of the outcome handed to those who will directly benefit. Deployment is made dramatically faster and more efficient as there is no longer a need to transfer knowledge of the process and operations of an organisational unit to a technical delivery team.

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There is an excellent fit for Robotic Process Automation across most industries, and some where it is now commonplace. These include banking and financial services, insurance and manufacturing. Processes that are rule-based such as accounts receivable, accounts payable and general ledger are prime RPA candidates. However, industry specific processes such as fraud claims discovery in banking or claims processing in insurance are also great examples of areas where Robotic Process Automation has had a positive impact.

The case for Robotic Process Automation can be made almost anywhere that there are rule based decisions and repetitive manual actions. Here are some examples of where RPA can be deployed.

Customer Order Processing. Orders placed through e-commerce platforms often need to then be placed on multiple systems, internal and external. These processes may require different information than is on the original order and may also require manual intervention and rekeying of data. The process of ordering can be automated from end to end removing delays and reducing the risk of errors.

Customer E-mail Query Processing can be fully automated, with incoming emails classified and handled accordingly.

Transfer of Data between systems is an ever present issue within organisations, whether in handling legacy data silos or data held on multiple platforms because of mergers and acquisitions. These disparate data sources can be brought together.

Call centre operators can be given a single view of data to enable efficient call handling and improved customer experience thereby enabling greater problem resolution on the first call.

Payroll Processing, including extraction of data from hand written time sheets, can be fully automated removing manual processes right through to payment into the employees' bank accounts.

Form completion. Many organisations rely on forms to initiate triggers in their systems and in some instances this can still include paper based forms. These processes can be fully automated.

Generating Insurance Premium renewals. Insurance companies provide customers with premium renewal receipts when the premium renewals are paid online or offline. Website scraping could also be automated to build information of competitors pricing.

Claims Processing can be automated, including handling paper proof.

Underwriting Processing, the process of converting a prospect to a business customer can be fully automated. All enquiries can be stored and processed.

Policy administration and servicing throughout the lifecycle of a customer can involve a number of emails and calls. This process can be fully automated.

Exception Processing. RPA software robots can be used to classify the exceptions accordingly and also to process them without error.

Credit applications. Banks can deploy RPA software robots to handle a credit application, including gathering all required documentation from the applicant, carrying out the necessary credit checks, background checks, decision making, through to issuing credit, and arranging delivery of a card, if appropriate.

Member eligibility. Ensuring that customers are able to see the products that they are entitled to based on a large set of criteria can be achieved through RPA and can increase up-sales.

Compliance reporting can handle many things, from checking whether a company is compliant for licences used across their organisation, to ensuring that sensitive data is not being processed by humans.

Customer complaints processing can be handled 24/7/365 by identifying the category of issue and offering immediate resolution.

Data cleansing. High volumes of data on disparate systems can lead to risk of non compliance, automated processes can identify Personally Identifiable Information (PII) across all data stores.

Investigating the reasoning behind a company's adoption of Robotic Process Automation and at the specific outcomes of that adoption can help us to understand how RPA may be deployed in our own companies.

Within one of the largest insurance and financial services companies in the world, there is a need to continually look for ways to improve customer experience and ultimately retention and profit. In this case, the first challenge was to collate customer information into a format that provided teams with the right information at the right time. The company also wanted to achieve the provisioning of integrated application and CTI tabs, customer, policy highlight and search, and to introduce integrated messaging and alerts. They achieved this and more with £6 million per year in annual savings, improving handling times by 15%, reducing training time by 3 weeks and increasing the ability to upsell per interaction by spending less time looking for data and more time per call interacting with the client.

Within the technology sector even the largest companies still work with manual processes that are ready for RPA. One of the largest mobile communications providers globally, with almost 440 million customers, relied until recently on agents taking

handwritten notes due to the complexity of inputting data. Agents were requiring access to multiple systems and screens on every call. With the introduction of RPA, the company managed to reduce call handling times by more than half, from 20 minutes to 8, they reduced human error and slashed training times, also going from 40 screens to just 5.

A household name ecommerce retailer wanted quick effective results to grow their online business. They needed to pull together multiple backend systems to remove the need for rekeying and complex data searches. By doing this they enabled each agent to handle an additional 20 calls a day, while still allowing more time per call to upsell.

With GDPR on everyone's radar a recruitment company with over 10 million records needed to reduce administrative time and cost for the compliance of the 8 rights of GDPR. They used RPA to first identify candidate records and all additional elements of personal information, and then to remove duplication of records/ personal information. In addition, they used RPA to achieve GDPR compliance, removing the threat of a fine of £20 million or 4% of turnover.

But is it that simple?

The deployment of a Robotic Process Automation solution is straightforward and does not require high skilled IT resource, but there are a number of challenges that need to be addressed ahead of any project.

Underestimating process and organisational issues. A company should carry out a discovery process of its work flows, exploring where processes can be improved and greater efficiencies achieved, before engaging with a vendor. This study can be carried out internally or with a consultancy but without it, the engaged vendor may not have a clear understanding of the architecture of the internal business processes.

Not defining your need for training and support. While Robotic Process Automation is far simpler to deploy than traditional software systems, it will likely be deployed by employees from the departments that it directly benefits. This is a double edged sword. They will know the processes far better than anyone else but they may not have the skill levels to guarantee a successful deployment unless they are fully trained. The selected vendor should offer training and on-going support.

Underestimating the effort required. The driver for the whole Robotic Process Automation project may be to replace largely paper driven processes. This may require scanning of thousands of documents. Migrating this content may be time consuming and may require the vendor's support.

Not defining goals. Without clearly defined goals, there is no way to measure the success of the project. These goals need to checked at each stage throughout the project and the selected vendor should have a clear understanding of the goals and the implications of these being missed.

Selecting the right vendor. There are hundreds of Robotic Process Automation solutions available, including some that are simply repositioning of existing products and services so a company can take advantage of the growth in interest in RPA. Vendors have specialisations and experience in different solutions and different verticals but often present out a solution as if it will fit all industries.

Selecting the wrong vendor or vendors can be very costly and delay the project. Scoping out exactly what you need ahead of vendor selection is a starting point but wading through the numerous solutions to find, for example, a vendor with experience in insurance who has deployed a solution to automate claims processing can be a time consuming affair. Engaging with a consultancy can remove this burden and remove the risk from vendor selection.

Are you thinking of automating some aspects of your business? Robotic Process Automation and Artificial Intelligence will transform the way your business handles repetitive and mundane processes. Form and transactional processes and data input will become faster and more accurate.

Automation is changing the way we work. Rule based, repeatable functions such as form processing and data copying can be automated effectively and easily, freeing up your best people to concentrate on other things that bring more value to your company. More efficient and accurate processes will benefit your customers, your profits and your stakeholders and give you more control whilst allowing you to concentrate on the things that really matter. Is that all needed?

JifJaff is a specialised independent RPA consultancy. JifJaff can help you throughout your entire RPA project cycle. From initially accessing which processes will most benefit from automation and onto scoping the project. By helping you choose the right and relevant solutions and vendors for your business, we can reduce your overheads and increase your capacity, accuracy and profitability. We understand the difficulties you face and can advise on and implement an RPA system that will help your business embrace the future.

We can design, deliver and manage your RPA solution.

There are many RPA/AI systems, offering a multitude of functions. The breadth of choice can be overwhelming. Our consultants will bring their expertise to help you navigate the RPA minefield and advise you as to what is important and necessary for your company's specific requirements, whether that is for a stand-alone project or companywide deployments.

Before you start your Robotic Process Automation project speak to JifJaff, we can save you money, remove risk and ensure the success of your project.

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