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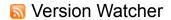
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Can a Small Business Benefit from Business Process Automation?

by Kaitlin McCloughan, in Automation Strategy, posted 1/18/16

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Automation is often seen as strictly a tool for large corporations. Small business owners and employees tend to believe that a more hands-on approach to managing business processes is simpler. After all, they've always done things this way, so why would they need to change?

The truth is, failing to automate business processes can hinder a small company's growth, whereas implementing business process automation software gives the company the edge they need to expand and to compete with larger enterprises.

Business process automation is good for growth

Martin Zwilling writes in Forbes that one of the keys to a scalable startup is to "automate to the max." He advises businesses to start looking at automating processes early on.

Manual processes often get the job done just fine when a company is new, and it's easy to assume that the same processes will always work. But businesses experience growing pains. As the enterprise expands, additional processes are put in place. More employees are recruited, increasing the chances of miscommunication. Extra reports have to be generated each day to keep everybody informed. New business objectives require implementing new technology, leading to a mixed environment of disparate applications and systems. All of this chaos is impossible for one person or even one department to keep track of. Hours are wasted every day, human error is rampant, and growth bottlenecks.

Business process automation software can streamline your processes and put an end to the disorder. With a centralized BPA solution, all of your business processes can be managed and monitored from a single interface. Human error is virtually eliminated. When you add a new application to your environment, you can automate it with the BPA software your employees already know how to use. Adding new daily tasks won't substantially increase the time required to complete your workload.

When a small business implements an automation solution, it not only makes current processes more efficient, it sets the company up to automate future processes they don't even know about yet.

Business process automation conserves IT resources

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As a small company, you probably don't have a huge IT team. The last thing you want is to have your minimal staff completely bogged down in hours of manual work just to keep the lights on (or to have to hire more employees for the growing list of tedious tasks). A BPA tool minimizes time spent on repeatable, daily, processes and frees up IT resources to support your business objectives. Furthermore, compared to other methods of automating, business process automation software is designed to have a simple, intuitive interface. That means your accountant or your HR manager can use it reliably, putting less strain on the technology experts.

When growing businesses first realize that they need to automate their processes, many fall into the trap of relying too much on custom code. It may seem like a good way to avoid investing in quality automation software, but it's very risky to your business. Custom scripts are prone to error, and when they fail, there's no support hotline to call to minimize costly downtime. Plus, if you're a small business with just one employee who understands the custom scripts, what will you do if that person leaves the organization?

BPA saves time for the things that really matter

People love small businesses because of the individualized, quality care they give to customers. But as a business grows, it can be hard to find the time and resources to maintain such a high standard. Automating time-consuming tasks creates more time to spend on personal interaction with customers. Moreover, automating processes like collecting customer data and generating reports will help you understand your customers better.

Business process automation also lets you devote more time to high-level strategy—important if you hope to grow your enterprise.

Don't be the last to automate

In 2014 the Computing Technology Industry Association (CompTIA) released a study that found that around three in four small businesses (less than 100 employees) were seeing a "significant" increase in using business process automation technology during the past two years.

Your competition—big and small—is automating. Are you?

Read more about the problems business process automation can solve.

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