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Five Problems Business Process Automation Can Solve

by Kaitlin McCloughan, in Automation Strategy, posted 1/13/16

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You've heard all about business process automation (BPA) and how it can save enterprises time and money. But how do you know if your business has a need for BPA software?

There's really no limit to the benefits that business process automation can bring to your company, but there are a few things that come up especially often. Here are six common problems you might be facing that can easily be solved with the right automation tool.

1. Your legacy systems won't talk to your newer applications

One of the biggest benefits of business process automation software is that it can consolidate automated processes across your enterprise under one, overarching solution.

Modern businesses tend to have a complex environment with a variety of disparate applications. As an enterprise grows, the complexity increases—new technologies are adopted, mergers and acquisitions occur, or custom code is written to meet new challenges. One solution for getting all these applications to work with each other is point-to-point integration, meaning a unique connector is implemented for each pair of applications involved. However, this type of integration isn't scalable. The more applications you have, the more work is involved in integrating them with each other reliably. The right business process automation solution will offer a simple way to integrate all your business-critical applications under the same umbrella, whether they are legacy programs, new applications, on-premise or cloud-based solutions.

Enterprises dealing with a variety of systems and legacy applications can also benefit from automating terminal emulation. Terminal emulation provides access to remote terminals from your current system. For example, an administrator may have to log into and pull data from a program on a mainframe legacy system, then paste that data into a report and distribute it, a process involving many manual steps. A robust BPA tool will manage the entire process automatically.

2. You are manually compiling or distributing reports

Keeping your enterprise running smoothly and making informed business decisions about future operations requires a high volume of data. That means reports—lots of them. Employees can lose hours to compiling spreadsheets or manually creating reports in your ERP system or General Ledger. Not only is this tedious, it leaves room for human error.

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Business process automation software can automatically write reports in a variety of useful formats. It can also integrate reporting with other related actions. For example, you might set up the software to scrape data from email attachments, write the data into an Excel document, and email that document to stakeholders.

3. File transfers are taking up too much time

File transfers are something almost every enterprise deals with, and larger companies often transfer thousands of files every day. Clearly, you don't want these transfers to require any manual intervention. You probably also have some advanced requirements, like the ability to handle secure transfers or complex file names.

Business process automation has a clear advantage over other file transfer tools; namely, that it allows you to incorporate your file transfers into larger automated processes. You might generate a report, compress it, encrypt it, and transfer it—all without lifting a finger. Streamlining file transfers has huge time-saving potential. Take a look at these case studies to see why:

- A financial services firm saved 36 hours per month

- A health care organization saved 5-10 hours per week

4. Your onboarding and offboarding processes are complex

The good news is that your company is growing and new employees are joining all the time. The bad news is that your HR department is drowning in paperwork. Onboarding processes tend to be time-consuming because they span multiple departments and applications. HR, IT, Payroll, and the new employee's department all have to receive information. Applications need to be provisioned, possibly with different permission settings for each new hire. Forms need to be downloaded, completed, and verified. And when an employee leaves, it's just as complicated.

Imagine this: when a new employee is hired, an email is sent with the person's information. Your BPA software extracts the data from this email and uses it to create user accounts and passwords in Active Directory and other critical applications. The temporary account information is then automatically sent to the new employee's hiring manager.

Pretty easy, right? Now your HR staff can get back to the important business of hiring more great talent.

5. You need to comply with internal and external regulators

These days businesses usually have to comply with some kind of regulations, like Sarbanes-Oxley (SOX), PCI, HIPAA, or others. Compliance can put a strain on IT resources, especially if your business needs to meet multiple regulations.

The processes involved in providing information to auditors can be streamlined using a few of the business process automation solutions we've already discussed. Application integration allows for automated database queries, and encryption at every level of automation can help make your company compatible with data protection and security regulations. Quarterly or annual reports can be generated in the required formats. Just set up the software to create reports or perform tasks based on your specific regulatory requirements.

Looking for some inspiration for what problems business process automation could solve in your enterprise? Take a look at

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