

What you need to know about Robotic Process Automation (Part 1)



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Major South African enterprises are fast embracing Robotic Process Automation (RPA), and mid-size and even small businesses are set to follow suit, but, what is RPA, how does it work and what can it do for enterprises?

Drew Sonden, solutions consultant and Peter Walker, who represents the CTO office in EMEA at Blue Prism, provides further information, clarification, and insight to demonstrate the power and value of connected RPA.

■ **What is RPA (Robotic Process Automation)?**

From an operational perspective, RPA (Robotic Process Automation) provides businesses with a digital workforce, that can carry out business processes currently delivered by human workers, but more quickly, efficiently, reliably, and accurately, freeing employees up to spend more time on activities that add real value to the organisation such as engaging with customers, creating propositions, and setting strategic direction.

From a technical perspective, RPA is a software tool that can engage with any software application or service, typically through the same front-end as a human would use, without the need to develop IT-heavy integrations.

Using graphical workflows, it can be configured to execute business processes, engaging with multiple software products and applying logical rules to deliver novel outcomes. Through a graphical management interface, it allows administrators to control how and when that automation are delivered, setting rules and priorities to reduce the amount of human effort required as much as possible.



Peter Walker represents the CTO office in EMEA at Blue Prism

In short, RPA is a powerful solution that has a position influence on how businesses are being conducted, as examples, it has allowed UK Energy firm, Npower to return over 2 million hours back to the business; it has allowed banking giant, Lloyds to reduce the time taken to deliver one business process from over seven hours to 30 minutes; and has also helped deliver a 700% ROI to global telecoms provider Telefonica over a period of three years.

Of course, there are now numerous companies who sell under the RPA banner, even though their products only offer limited automation, or that rely on humans to manually initiate automated processes. When Blue Prism talks about Robotic Process Automation, it's in the context of a scalable, enterprise solution, which offers the ability to schedule and control that digital workforce, and which ensures that clients can rely on industry-standard security and audit capabilities.

■ **How does RPA work?**

RPA gives users the ability to create flexible interactions with applications. Whilst each automation tool operates slightly differently, with Blue Prism, a user shows the platform an application interface and we automatically retrieve the commands that allow it to operate that application. Every command that Blue Prism learns contributes to a model of the application.

Through a control room, users can provide any number of digital workers. These work autonomously, guided by Processes which are made up of:

- Logical steps (calculations, decisions etc.)

- Application interactions, guided by one or more Models
- Interactions with artificial intelligence or cognitive services

Each process describes a business activity, for example, invoice reconciliation, meaning that digital workers become multi-skilled employees who are able to work on any business activity, 24/7, never getting bored, never making mistakes, and always doing exactly what they are told without exceptions.

Within the control room, RPA managers can also create priority rules, schedules, and to-do lists, ensuring that the digital workers are always working on the tasks that provide the most business impact at any given time.

▣ **What does it mean for businesses?**

Many commentators have expressed concerns over what RPA means for the human workforce. Will its undoubted capabilities mean that jobs are lost?



Drew Sonden, solutions consultant at Blue Prism

Among our customers, we've consistently seen RPA releasing employees from boring or repetitive tasks to improve working conditions. In the case of one of our customers, our digital workforce was tasked with helping to reduce the regulatory burden on fund management staff.

Regulators demand strict time limits on management activities. For example, if a client dies, their funds must be closed by 11am the next working day. This put a significant strain on the team, with staff often staying after hours, or arriving incredibly early to clear backlogs. By allocating the task to the digital workforce, the customer eliminated the need for overtime, reduced turnover, and improved staff mental wellbeing.

In many cases, utilising the digital workforce has a direct impact on the bottom line.

As another example, luxury car manufacturer, Jaguar Land Rover (JLR) has a parts inventory of over 20,000 separate components. Their professional buyers spent a significant amount of their time and effort in updating this catalogue to reflect the changing cost of raw materials.

Using RPA, they were able to automate this process, allowing buyers to spend more time negotiating contracts with the JLR supply chain. This contributed to a net saving of £3.5million in the first year of operation.

The benefits of RPA run much deeper than this, however. The efficient, accurate, and tireless digital workforce can contribute to improvements in customer satisfaction through quicker response to requests; reductions in the costs associated to human error when manipulating data; increases in the capacity as process bottlenecks are removed; and an increase in security as sensitive data is no longer handled by human employees.

▣ **How can we implement RPA in businesses?**

The phrasing of this question is incredibly relevant to the answer. To ensure success, the implementation of RPA should be considered as a business transformation; it is where organisations view it as simply a technology project that challenges arise.

Ideally, RPA should be considered as a specific business function, with a team that sits in between the Chief Operations Officer (COO) and Chief Technical Officer (CTO).

Whilst this is often a novel way of working for customers, the Robotic Operating Model (ROM) offers a framework for

success, which guides new users through their RPA journey. Based on over a decade's experience of delivering Connected RPA, the ROM has allowed organisations including Siemens and Ernst & Young to build ecosystems that include hundreds of digital workers that offer value across the business.

The ROM provides guidance on seven key aspects of a client's business landscape that need to be considered when implementing RPA for the first time, including aspects such as People, Delivery Pipeline, and Governance.

Crucially, the ROM provides the tools needed to establish a centre of excellence within a business that can manage RPA sustainably moving forward, ensuring appropriate IT governance whilst maintaining business ownership.



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It was this structured and supportive approach that has allowed Old Mutual to establish RPA as a key business function that enhances its ability to deliver market-leading asset management and banking.

■ ***How does it affect the way businesses run?***

A key measurement of success for any business is its ability to respond to change – in demand, in technology, or in size and scale.

For traditional businesses, effecting change means adopting one of a number of unpalatable or high risk approaches: perhaps increasing headcount to satisfy an increased number of customers; undertaking large-scale IT programmes to introduce or integrate new technologies; or carrying out extensive consultancy engagements to shift business focus. Organisations empowered with Connected RPA are able to avoid many of these challenges by employing the digital workforce.

For example, when Coca Cola wanted to transform the quality of its HR services, rather than simply increasing headcount to improve response times, they introduced Blue Prism to automate many of their existing internal activities, from simple tasks like managing holiday requests to undertaking large-scale HR audits. This allowed human workers to spend more valuable time engaging with employees, helping them to resolve their issues and questions. Ultimately, there was an increase in HR's productivity without needing to take on any additional staff.

Similarly, when a major global shipping company wanted to find a better way to manage the procurement of replacement parts for their extensive fleet, they turned to us. On identifying new requests, the digital workforce automatically identifies

the cost and scale of the requisition requirement, routing it down the appropriate procurement path. By leveraging Artificial Intelligence (AI), the digital workforce is even able to autonomously run simple tenders, soliciting the best price from suppliers before providing a decision for human approval.

The ability for connected RPA to seamlessly interact with third-party cognitive services is a major benefit for many organisations. Another customer was looking to reduce the time and effort required to process personal medical claims. These claims included free-text medical reports and whilst the insurance company recognised that they could use a Cognitive Sentiment Analysis tool to extract meaning, integrating this with their core internal systems would have taken many months.

The connected RPA platform allowed such interactions to be achieved in weeks or days, however, and by engaging the digital workforce, the company was able to reduce claims processing time from 50 minutes to a mere five seconds.

Check back for [Part 2](#) of this article where Drew Sonden and Peter Walker to share some advantages and disadvantages of implementing RPA into your enterprise...

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