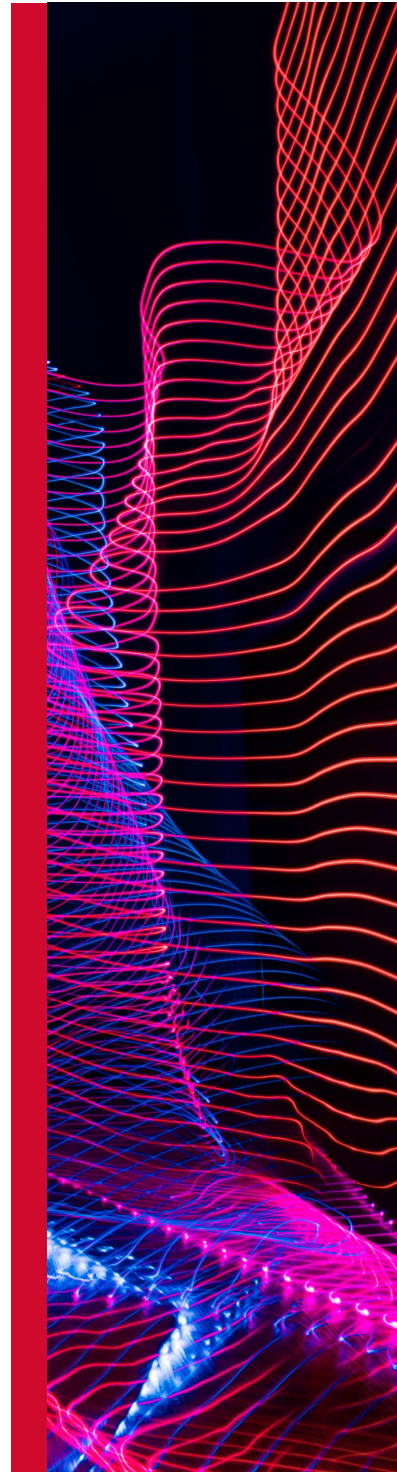


What is Robotic Process Automation?



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This point of view will be looking at Robotic Process Automation (RPA) - What is it? What are the benefits of automation technology? How relevant is it compared to different industries? And, how to start your RPA journey.

Robotic Process Automation (RPA) is the use of software bots to automate mundane, repetitive, rules-based processes. Bots are used to free up staff and resources for more important and valuable tasks.

RPA technology is a platform that enables the user to build, deploy and manage software bots that can imitate human action by interacting with digital systems using interfaces designed for people. Actions include navigating systems; understanding what is on the screen; completing keystrokes; extracting, inserting and manipulating data and performing defined actions.

PwC estimate that 45% of work activities could be automated.

To put this into context, RPA can manipulate and communicate data across various systems, perform transaction processing and fill in forms/applications using any type of structured data. Essentially, RPA provides a way of speeding up repetitive tasks whilst improving the accuracy, with PwC estimating that ['45% of work activities could be automated'](#). In addition to this, Gartner have predicted that ['85% of large organisations will have some form of automation by 2022'](#). This highlights just how many opportunities organisations have to implement RPA and thus increase productivity and efficiency, and how many large organisations have recognised these opportunities and are willing to invest in them.

Basic, Mid or Full Automation

RPA tools can be executed to varying degrees: basic, mid, and full automation.

Automation technology can, put simply, perform certain administrative repetitive tasks as a human would do. This includes routine activities such as data retrieval, file uploads/downloads, write to file, button clicks, document processing, and many more.

'Middle-ground' automation is the stage between full and basic automation. With this level of RPA, you can integrate with other automation software or middleware to increase basic capability. You also have the opportunity to employ artificial intelligence (AI), business rules, workflows, and data capture technologies to increase the value of the automation solution.

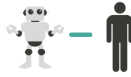
Full automation is the stage where you go all out. It requires purpose-built automation systems and services in order to carry out fully automated processes. This level of RPA has potential benefits that far outweigh the other levels but needs more commitment and architecture to maintain and run.

RPA Bots

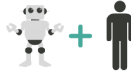
RPA can also have attended or unattended software robots (RPA bots). This means that some processes will require a human worker to check in at certain points in the process before it can move onto the next activity.

Attended or unattended bots?

Unattended RPA bots automatically complete their processes with minimal human intervention or attended bots that have been triggered by an employee or another process. Unattended bots are where many companies choose to start their RPA journey due to their quick ROI and the fact that employees do not need to intervene so can work on other tasks.



Attended RPA bots require human intervention at various stages of their processes. This does not mean that they are less capable than unattended bots, but the processes you choose for them to automate have different conditions. Having human and robot teams - as the Institute for the Future says - is one of [five 'super skills' for the new workspace](#).



In a report by Gartner, they found that ['83% of customers adopted unattended RPA, 46% adopted both, and only 17% adopted solely attended RPA'](#). These statistics show that there is no copy and paste way of choosing the type of bots to use in your RPA solution.

If you are unsure which to choose, Responsiv can give you the solution best suited to your organisation and business needs.

What are the Benefits of RPA?

RPA provides the technology and opportunity to improve the efficiency of workflows, thus increasing the profitability, flexibility, and productivity of organisations.

- Accelerated digital transformation;
- Considerable cost savings;
- Increased resilience - match workload peaks;
- Increased accuracy - error reduction in manual tasks;
- Increased compliance;
- Increased productivity;
- Frees up staff for more valuable work;
- Happier employees - no more repetitive, manual tasks;

One of the main benefits of RPA to focus on is the freeing up of staff.

Whilst this is one of the priorities of RPA, it can be misinterpreted by people who may consider automation as a way of putting people out of work. It is important to note that this is not the case. Robotic Process Automation gives staff a break from repetitive administrative tasks that take up time best spent on more complex, essential jobs that would normally have to wait for the still important day-to-day processes to be complete. Understanding this key benefit is important before starting your automation journey.

Return on Investment (ROI) for RPA is weeks or months instead of years.

The benefits of automation can be seen upon implementation. With a Return of Investment (ROI) of weeks or months instead of years, the bots free up staff for more valuable work whilst they themselves work around the clock with no down time.

RPA can also be sold as a Solution as a Service (SolaaS), meaning a one-off annual cost is paid for installation, licences, hosting, support etc., reducing the chance of surprise costs down the road.

Research by Capgemini estimates that automating business processes has the potential to ['drive 25-50% cost savings'](#). This supports the fact that the ROI for RPA is quicker than most other software solutions, as it highlights

the amount you could save through executing automation. In addition to saving costs through the use of RPA, you are also improving the accuracy and speed of your internal processes, making it an all-round upgrade.

RPA can be used cross-departmentally to run analyses, keeping the whole company integrated where it needs to be. When looking at financial departments for example, RPA can help by generating reports across departments (sales, operations, procurement etc.) to monitor where costs are accruing and where savings can be made. This will aid in keeping budgets across the business controlled and allow for further savings to be created.

With automation, there is no need to create a whole new infrastructure - no hardware is necessary. This may appeal to more companies due to the ability to implement RPA on legacy systems and other existing systems.

Legacy systems that have either simple or no APIs or lack database access are still eligible for RPA. The low-code nature of RPA adds to this appeal because of it's easier to use capabilities.

Industry Specific Applications of RPA

RPA has many applications within a business, in both front and back office, making it an all-round business transformation tool.

RPA can be applied in any industry. All companies have to run base level business operations in order to function. These may include operations, human resources, procurement, sales, customer services, and finance.

On top of this, organisations have to ensure they comply with government regulations such as GDPR, PSD2, Health and Safety regulations, etc.. Once more, this is a way in which RPA can help across industries - mainly in the confirming that companies are being compliant and by running/generating compliance reports as required.

Local Government

There is a large push for local government to implement RPA. Research by T-Impact in association with UiPath found that ['nearly 85% of local authorities recognise the need to plan for RPA, with 75% having no clear sense of where to start'](#).

Without going into too much detail on each pain, these are some of the common issues currently being faced by local governments that could be addressed with RPA:

Improve financial insights

- Manage your budgets easier by compiling reports from different departments to see where inefficiencies are straining the budget;
- Save money by cost-effectively assigning resources;
- Buy RPA as a solution as a service (SolaaS);

Social care

- Save money by cost-effectively assigning resources;
- Residents can be independent in handling their own care - data can become available as and when needed due to master data in a single system being called upon by bots;
- Integrate data across various care services - NHS, etc.;

Housing

- Automatically update rental changes;
- Council tax collection and tracking;
- Avoid data loss of duplication for things such as address changes or benefit claims;
- Process applications and forms;

- Invoice temporary housing/accommodation providers;

Customer experience

- Access to services at any time due to 24/7 bot capability;
- Real time information is available on services and personal data;

Data

- Create a master data system - tell us once data removes the hassle of entering and re-entering information and thus removes the chances of errors. This master data can be called on by various authorised systems;

Many councils included the need to introduce automation within their 2020 digital strategies, showing the broad acknowledgement of the benefits RPA would bring to the day-to-day running and service provision of local government.

General Business

Within general business, RPA has many benefits. Base level business processes such as employee onboarding and offboarding; financial report analysis; resource allocation, and many more could all be made more efficient with the use of RPA.

Here are a few ways RPA could be applied to different departments:

Finance

- Create financial reports across departments - live, relevant information;
- Order and invoice processing - documentation scanning and data input across systems;
- PO creation;
- Payment processing;

Sales

- Qualify leads before spending time and money on poor quality leads;
- Prevent data loss - automatically input data/documentation and communication in the CRM;

Operations

- Free up resources for more valuable tasks;
- Easily manage processes, resources, and staff;

HR

- Onboarding and offboarding of staff - synchronise various databases with the relevant information so that everyone is up to date;
- Recruitment;
- Education and training;
- Payroll management - accurately and quickly manage your payroll every month, and remove the time consuming, pressurising job from your staff and improve their work life;

IT

- Password reset;
- Email processing;
- Routine maintenance;

- Server and application monitoring;

To reiterate, RPA isn't intended to put people out of work, rather to improve their productivity and cost-efficiency by allowing staff to work on more efficient tasks requiring human interaction.

Retail

On top of the base level business processes mentioned previously, RPA in retail can be utilised in various ways. Retail is built on processes designed to give the best experience to the consumer - where improvements can be made to increase satisfaction, they are, or should be, optimised.

Returns, refunds and exchanges

- Track where in the return you are as a consumer, supplier, and retailer;
- Set alert for credit refund;
- Set up orders upon product return or exchange request;

Inventory and supply chain management

- Monitor the movement of stock through the supply chain;
- Manage stock - get alerts when stock is depleted or in excess;
- RPA can review sales trends to determine if a product is worth discontinuing;
- Demand and supply planning;
- Freight management;

Workforce management

- Optimise the way you utilise your staff in both back office and the shop floor - RPA can predict trends in customer experience and interaction so that you can organise your staff accordingly;

Customer support

- Account set up;
- Inquiries/Complaint management;
- Order management;

Processes within retail span not only the business itself, but past the point of sale and down the supply chain. Managing the processes that take place is no easy feat and is completed traditionally by staff in an office. RPA can make the managing of various aspects of retail more efficient.

Manufacturing

Much like in retail, RPA in manufacturing could have similar implications and uses. Whilst RPA may be no help on the assembly line next to the physical robots, it can help in the back office running the base level business processes.

Inventory management

- Reduce waste by sorting alerts for stock - know when replenishments are necessary or not and alert the relevant people (procurement, suppliers, etc.);

Procure to pay

- Acquire and pay for raw materials efficiently and cost-effectively - manage cash flow and maintain good relationships with suppliers - remove risk of documentation error, processing delays, reduce operational costs, etc.;

Workforce management

- Predict trends in consumer or supplier habits and plan your workforce accordingly;

Logistics and supply chain management

- Manage the various, sometimes complex, areas of your supply chain efficiently. Get information about shipping and production when you need it so you can prepare for delays or on-time arrivals;
- Manage freight vehicles - are any out of service, where are they currently, what shipments do they have, etc.;
- Reduce time to manually check shipments;

Report generation

- Reports can be created in any aspect of the organisation to ensure that real-time information is being shared with those who need it;
- Audit trails;
- Compliance reports;
- Health and safety;

Invoicing and billing

- Access the accounting systems to update what's coming and going and when - eliminate human error of data entry;
- Ensure that payments are done in a timely manner;

The day-to-day running of organisations within the manufacturing industry, as well as many others, can benefit largely from RPA. Maybe its time to move the robots into the back office too. Make your business work smarter. UiPath predict a [30-90% faster time to market, up to 200% higher factory output, and 10-40% lower operating costs](#) when RPA is implemented in manufacturing - just imagine how your business can benefit from this.

Financial Services

RPA in the financial sector, like other industries, has a number of possible uses. With the application of RPA being as broad as it is, there are many areas of financial services where it could be used to improve services.

Loan and Mortgage Processing

- Quality check, compare finances, and process documentation to see if a person qualifies for a loan/mortgage or not without human intervention;

Report generation

- Speed up the creation of compliance reports;
- Monitor fraudulent and suspicious activity;
- Report on the organisation's own department positions;
- Create audit trails;

Master data

- Store customer data in one system that can be accessed when needed - ensure the data is not duplicated, misused, or splintered across systems;

Customer support

- Bots deal with applications/requests through online or phone services;
- Account opening/closing;
- Customer onboarding/offboarding;

RPA can improve customer experience and employee satisfaction by saving time by eliminating the time-consuming processes that go into approving accounts, loans, and mortgages. Implementing RPA goes beyond just saving money.

Things Are Going Alright, Why Do We Need To Change?

To conclude, RPA can be applied within any industry by automating standard business processes or the more industry specific cases as shown above. These examples barely scrape the surface of the true capabilities of RPA - which could be seen as limitless. There are many more applications of RPA within these industries that have not been explored here, read more by following the links above.

The purpose of automation is to improve human productivity by freeing up resources.

At first, many organisations struggle to see where they may benefit from RPA - things are working alright at the moment so why do we need to change? This may be the case, but the fact is that you could become more productive and cost-effective by introducing automation to your organisation.

RPA is on the rise and your competitive standing could depend on it. Once you find how RPA could apply itself to your business, you may realise how revolutionary it really is.

With discovery workshops, you are likely to find more organisation specific use cases that will be unique to your way of doing business. It is worth exploring your processes to see where these may be hiding and how RPA may be of particular benefit.

It is important to again reinforce that the purpose of automation is to improve human productivity by freeing up resources for more efficient work, not to remove people all together.

With Covid changing the way people work, RPA can make it easier to maintain and control business processes remotely. Collaboration in an office is easier than remote collaboration, but with RPA, you can still access information you need as and when you need it without having to be onsite or asking a colleague.

Business Outcomes

It is important to think about the long-term RPA implementations. Think about how your competitive landscape will change as it becomes automated - where will you be placed? Are you willing to let yourself become lost in a sea of bots?

Education is an important stage of the automation process. If people aren't aware of how automation is beneficial or how to maintain your automated processes, then the use of RPA will not be nearly as successful as it could be. This problem can be solved in a number of ways, mainly concerning training staff on the benefits and the ways automation will be changing business processes going forward.

It is up to you where you start your automation journey - will it be large scale or small? Again, discovery workshops or trials may be the best way to understand the direction you want to go. There is no harm in starting small and seeing how well you get on with RPA and the advantages it brings to your business, you can easily add to your projects with swift execution.

How Do I Get Started With RPA?

The idea of RPA adoption within your company may be daunting for many - where do you start? How do you identify business process automation opportunities?

Just as a starting point, the idea of RPA software may give you the opportunity to analyse your existing business processes to see if they are as efficient as they can be before even applying automation tools. This would be beneficial for a number of reasons, such as: finding obsolete or inefficient processes and high volume tasks that may be dragging your day-to-day running down and thus changing or eliminating them; refamiliarizing yourself with different processes within the company and the human workers who are in charge of them, etc.

As Joe Kaeser, the CEO of Siemens, philosophically said, '[automation technology applied to an efficient operation will magnify the efficiency...automation applied to an inefficient operation will magnify the inefficiency](#)'. Make sure your processes have been assessed end to end and are at their optimum state prior to automation.

Through this analysis, you can also start to identify the processes that fit the criteria for automation:

- rule based;
- repeated at regular intervals/pre-defined trigger;
- defined inputs and outputs;
- sufficient volume;

To summarise, the processes that are data rich and feature repetitive tasks are the ones you want for automation.

RPA may not be the solution for you, but by exploring the business needs and use cases specific to your organisation, you can establish what works best for you and possibly explore other options.

Ready to take the next step? [Book a discovery workshop](#) today!