The Last Mile of Digital Business Automation

RunMyProcess.
a Fujitsu company

www.runmyprocess.com
There’s a paradox at the heart of digital business.

The better technologies become at automating standard business activities, the more frustrated we become at the daily workarounds that defy automation and slow everything down.

Worse, automation most frequently grinds to a halt when it hits the processes that make our business unique - processes which can never be bought ‘off the shelf’.
On one hand, on-demand systems make it easier than ever to deliver automation that streamlines business operations.

- Cloud-hosted applications are available on demand, with low risk to get started
- Frequent updates to functionality keep automation fresh
- Applications support customization within their specific domain
- Templates and best practice libraries shorten preparation timescales
- Online communities and app stores promote sharing of pre-built components

But on the other hand, the limited functional scope of each on-demand system - e.g. for sales, customer service or IT service management - leads to an explosion of disconnected islands of automation spreading across the enterprise, improving individual functions at the expense of the end-to-end processes that ultimately govern the quality and efficiency of the digital experiences we provide to our customers and employees.
Whether it’s overlooked manual tasks, unavailable data or a lack of integration with other systems, these ‘last mile’ gaps break processes, undermine customer experiences and hamper workers’ daily routines.

Worse, the 20% of business-specific knowhow represented by these gaps is the source of 80% of your value, meaning that the resulting delays, errors and user frustration directly impact your most valuable activities.

Understanding how to eliminate these crucial last-mile gaps is therefore key to successful digital automation. Bringing easy, business-specific automation to these critical in-between steps will improve collaboration, transform efficiency and give teams the freedom they need to reshape their working practices for the fast-paced digital environment.
Process, interrupted.

From the very beginning of IT, business automation has centered on individual applications that each handle a specific set of transactions.

At the borders of each of these islands of automation lie troublesome ‘break points’ that individual applications don’t handle well – undermining the automation needed to connect silos and successfully manage end-to-end digital processes. In our experience these gaps in automation occur during four types of transition, shown in the figure on the right.

When we examine each of these patterns in the context of specific applications, we frequently observe their effects in destroying the smooth flow of digital automation.

Let’s explore each in turn, examining the way in which leading organizations have bridged each automation gap without resorting to cumbersome and expensive integration and workflow technologies.

- Application to person
  Enhancing automation with timely and controlled human insight and input

- Application to application
  Automating the flow of data from one application, device or role to the next, in support of lean, efficient processes

- Business unit to business unit
  Extending automation beyond transactional systems to create or amend important data as it moves from one business unit to the next

- Business to business
  Doing any of the above across organizational boundaries to unlock valuable upstream and downstream digitization opportunities
Often the specific working practices of an organization cannot be easily implemented using the customization capabilities of off-the-shelf applications. Worse, their cost model frequently makes it uneconomical to provide access to everyone who needs it. As a result messy and uncontrolled manual solutions spring up to handle critical business-specific workflows outside the application.

People management is a great example of a function where putting information in front of the right person remains a huge automation challenge. The need to capture and share information with people from an increasing array of locations and devices complicates many otherwise routine actions such as booking holidays, lodging sickness reports, booking training courses or on-boarding staff. In each case proper approvals must be sought from a range of 3rd parties before the transaction can finally be recorded in the core system. Achieving this in a controlled, secure and efficient way requires easy to implement human workflows together with straightforward integration with core systems.

Application to person automation gaps occur most often around important business systems such as CRM, ERP or SCM.

With procurement running on SAP, one global pharmaceutical company had long been using paper-based processes for purchase approvals. It was in dire need of automation, but any solution had to be flexible enough to adapt to different countries’ regulations while still complying with corporate security requirements. Developed and rolled out globally in less than a month, the new automated RunMyProcess solution was fully integrated into SAP and accessible on mobile devices - enabling staff and managers to engage with key workflows while on the move.
Efficient automation needs to ensure that data flows seamlessly across the full range of applications involved in a process.

But for each function in an organization there is often a separate application with its own distinct database and roles - especially in cloud where a move back to ‘best of breed’ applications is common. To create smooth digital processes we must therefore ensure that data and tasks move seamlessly from one system to another, minimizing friction as work proceeds from one step to the next.

A classic example of this is in the area of spend management, where employees may need to engage with purchase order, travel booking and expense management systems in order to complete a single process. Such last-mile gaps frequently obstruct efficient automation, causing unnecessary effort, delays, rework and error as data is repeatedly entered or copied from one place to another. Successfully resolving such issues requires end-to-end digital process automation that can capture information once before ensuring that all relevant systems are securely and reliably updated as appropriate.

Example

With over 100,000 permanent and contract staff, a highly federated global organization and a complex web of cloud and on-premise applications, a major global utility was finding it challenging to ensure appropriate governance over staff access to data and systems. To address this the organization used the integration capabilities of RunMyProcess to automate the process of assigning appropriate access rights to people as they join, leave or change roles within the company - automatically provisioning, modifying or removing access to systems in order to ensure consistent governance and data security across the global organization.
Business unit to business unit.

This transition type happens when responsibility for the next step in a business process moves from one part of an organization to another.

The natural boundaries between different parts of today’s businesses mean that cross business unit automation is often non-existent - relying instead on emails, ad-hoc databases or paper forms. But from a customer perspective it is the end-to-end process that ultimately determines the quality of experience. Automation that integrates across business units is therefore key to success.

Although this class of breakdown is found in many places, the prospect-to-fulfilment process - at the interface between sales, administration and customer service - is a common example. While the automation provided by online CRM, Finance and Service systems has vastly improved the efficiency of customer-facing and back office teams individually, these efficiencies often cease at cross-functional integration points such as generating contracts, preparing purchase orders or creating service requests. Successfully resolving such issues requires fast, collaborative process automation that helps business units work together to connect their people and systems while maintaining control of local workflows.

Manual processes were becoming stretched to the limit at one US-based home emergency provider. While quickly launching new products was key to growth, the existing paper-based processes were not providing the cross-departmental control necessary to minimize regulatory risks. A new RunMyProcess solution automated the product introduction process from end-to-end, with an overarching process flow and seven major subprocesses connecting 21 cross-functional teams. In this way the organization was able to transform the speed and accuracy of new product introductions, significantly reducing time to market while simultaneously reducing the risk of regulatory exposure.
By enabling information to flow across organizational boundaries, digital technologies are offering exciting opportunities to streamline joint operations, reduce waste and boost profitability. Even more importantly leading organizations are using digital networks to create differentiated business models via new sources of supply – and this trend is accelerating as digital startups create ever more innovative services for sale to enterprises.

But the differences we see in organization, technology and automation style when we start to integrate information across business units is frequently magnified many times when data and actions begin to flow across businesses. Yet in today’s increasingly connected environment, such examples are encountered in an ever increasing range of activities such as partner management, inbound marketing, supply chain management and cloud-sourced and outsourced resources. To take advantage of these new opportunities organizations need open, cloud-based automation that can easily connect people, systems and things across organizations at scale.

The biggest opportunities in the digital age come from extending automation beyond the boundaries of the enterprise.

Example

The paper based processes put in place by the maintenance provider of a leading Australian supermarket were no match for the scale of the task - but breakdowns of in-store machinery were a source of lost revenue and customer frustration. To address this a new RunMyProcess mobile solution was quickly put in place, equipping field engineers with geographical, equipment and job related information so that they could schedule, execute and report on maintenance tasks. Equally importantly supporting backoffice automation and reporting enabled both partners to share common data and KPIs – ensuring goals and outputs remained aligned across organizations.
Automating the last mile.

The automation gaps discussed have existed for many years, but they have not been easy to resolve.

Conventional integration, with its expensive BPM and EAI products, has always been slow and costly to even consider.

However repetitive and frustrating the daily inconvenience may be, it can never justify the cost profile and operational disruption associated with such technologies.

Instead, gaps in the last mile of automation have been bridged with an ad-hoc blend of manual paperwork, Excel spreadsheets and custom applications maintained in Lotus Notes, Microsoft Access or similar platforms.

But such ‘quick and dirty’ approaches are no longer sustainable; success in a digital environment rests on our ability to connect information and deliver automated processes which scale seamlessly in response to an increasing array of digital and mobile channels.

As a result the cloud has become the de facto location for introducing automation to these last-mile gaps without the heavy cost burdens and disruptive impacts of older technologies.
Automating the last mile.

Equally importantly, deployment in the cloud enables fast and non-intrusive business automation.

Cloud-based automation works alongside existing applications - connecting silos, reducing disruption & accelerating benefits.

But most importantly of all, once deployed, cloud-based automation is easy and quick to adapt as business requirements change, fundamentally transforming the business value of technology. While long, costly and tiresome deliveries are rarely changed, a rapid, lightweight deployment that is easily adapted encourages users to carry on refining and evolving the automation.

This light-touch approach means that last-mile automation can be done with very low friction for end users: for instance, the systems and data they’re already using need not be changed, but simply ‘plugged in’ to the newly automated process. The point is to improve rather than disrupt day-to-day operations. Successful introduction of last-mile automation should be done quickly, incrementally and without changing users’ habits when there’s no need to change them.
Closing the gap.

Business digitization is forcing every organization to rethink the way they deliver value.

In this rapidly changing world, the negative impacts of last-mile gaps are growing exponentially as they undermine efficiency & scale.

Even worse, critical new business capabilities for Digital Experience, Robotic Process Automation or Artificial Intelligence cannot function in a world of last-mile gaps; they must be built on a strong foundation of fast, timely connections and data.

But almost every organization remains afflicted by painful and disruptive last-mile issues - you’ll quickly identify them if you follow the flow of your organization’s customer journeys or take the time to enquire into any form of collaboration between departments on planning, reporting, controls or compliance.

In the past, manual workarounds have been the only option for resolving these gaps, especially in cases where there’s been any likelihood of variation in processes between locations or over time. Conventional software has simply been too inflexible to provide a solution. Instead, people have had to fall back on their own creativity, adaptability and brute force manual effort.
Closing the gap.

Now at last, cloud-based solutions offer the mobility, flexibility and economics needed to automate areas that conventional software could never reach.

Delivered in short, iterative projects, these new solutions provide easy-to-use automation that delights customers and helps people do their jobs better.

Equally importantly, online automation destroys silos, connects processes and gives organizations better visibility into the performance of their business operations – from individual process owners through to global oversight of what’s happening across the organization.

Addressing the last mile therefore does more than unlock the value of existing investments in business automation; it helps equip organizations to transform their operations as they embrace the future.
At RunMyProcess we love to solve digital problems. Small ones, big ones – we honestly don’t mind.

We believe that digital connections between people, software and devices can lead to wonderful new ideas – and open up new ways of looking at previously intractable business and social problems.

That’s why we’re passionate about solving digital problems and helping enterprises evolve using the power of connected technology. We want to help our customers make the world a better place, one rapid solution at a time.

To achieve this we operate a cloud platform for quickly and securely building applications that connect enterprise systems and processes to the people, clouds and devices of the digital world. By making connections our platform helps enterprises safely evolve towards new digital business models that make a real difference to the lives of their customers and employees.

Our unique platform enables organizations to:

- Deliver user experiences that seamlessly follow people across devices.
- Capture end-to-end processes that connect people, software and things.
- Accelerate the delivery and evolution of connected business applications.
- Empower business people to innovate at the edge of the organization.

To learn more please visit:
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