A Guide to Robotic Process Automation
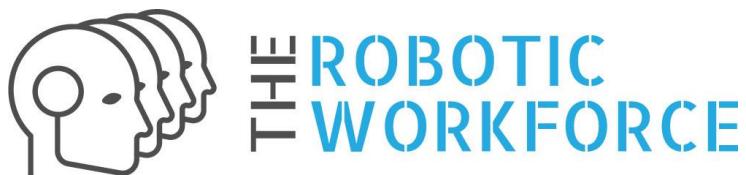
THE **ROBOTIC WORKFORCE**

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Introduction

Robotic Process Automation may sound like futurist science fiction, but for many organisations, it's an essential part of their everyday operation and is already delivering significant benefits. So exactly what is RPA and what does it mean for your organisation?

What is Robotic Process Automation?

Robotic Process Automation (RPA) uses 'robots' to complete tasks and transactions across applications, just as human workers do. RPA is designed to help primarily with desktop type functions which require the ability to do several types of repetitive, rule-based tasks in order.

Although for some, the term Robotic Process Automation will conjure images of factory production lines or suggest physical robots wandering around offices, the 'robots' involved in RPA aren't robots in the physical sense. Rather, RPA is a software-based solution with a robot automating routine business processes.

In effect, a robot acts as a 'digital assistant' by undertaking onerous, simple tasks that can eat up labour-intensive parts of many office workers' days. Multiple robots can be seen as a 'robotic workforce' - a back-office processing centre that works alongside the human workforce. The robots operate within a virtualised desktop environment with access to the same set of local and remote applications required for a human worker to complete the same set of processes.

A single robot can complete different tasks and is not restricted to specific functions. It could carry out some Finance admin tasks overnight and then be ready to carry out some password resets first thing on a Monday morning!

What Can RPA Do?

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> Imagine a different kind of workforce that you can teach countless skills. The more it learns, the more efficient it becomes. It works without ever taking a vacation. It can be small one day or large when your business hits a spike. And it frees up your best people to do their best work on your highest priorities.
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With RPA, software robots can be programmed to complete workflows with multiple steps and multiple applications, such as receiving forms, sending standardised receipt messages/replies, opening and checking forms, flagging any errors or omissions, returning to the sender for resubmission and/or forwarding to other departments for further action. The possibilities are potentially endless. Ideally suited for processes with repeatable, predictable interactions, RPA software robots perform routine business processes by mimicking the way that people interact with applications through a user interface and following simple rules to make decisions. Entire end-to-end processes can be completed by software robots with very little human interaction: the humans typically managing any exceptions or process escalations.

The Benefits of RPA

The financial and nonfinancial benefits of RPA are far reaching. The typical benefits that RPA can provide include:

Strategic Deployment of Resources

The tasks and processes suitable for automation are typically the most repetitive, onerous and least enjoyed by employees. With RPA taking on these routine, mundane tasks, your skilled employees are freed up to focus on more complex responsibilities - those requiring human strengths such as intuition, reasoning, judgment, and interaction with the customer. Which leads nicely onto…

Employee Retention

RPA represents a synergetic relationship between human and robot, with the robot tackling the mundane and error-prone tasks that humans often dislike. With your employees refocused on more challenging, more rewarding activities, those individuals who were once 'bogged' down by mundane tasks, can now feel more valued, more able to think strategically, more fulfilled in their roles... and ultimately more likely to want to stay with the organisation.

Increased Efficiency and Performance

RPA can provide far greater efficiencies than a purely human workforce by increasing speed and accuracy, reducing processing times and decreasing the need for ongoing training. Unlike humans, robots are able to work 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 52 weeks a year. According to the Institute for Robotic Process Automation and Artificial Intelligence, a typical robot can do the work of two to five FTEs.

Improved Customer Service

Believe it or not, the use of RPA can actually have a positive impact on the more human side of customer service. If your organisation receives a similar pattern of inbound enquiries, a robot can be programmed with a bank of FAQs with the ability to immediately respond. A company that receives a high volume of customer enquiries can use RPA to automate the more routine responses, leaving staff free to deal with more complex queries (or complaints) in a timelier manner, increasing customer satisfaction all round.

Cost Savings

RPA can obviously deliver significant costs savings. Process automation enables 24/7/365 execution of particular tasks and processes at a fraction of the human equivalent cost. A software robot can cost as little as one-third the price of an offshore full-time employee (FTE) and as little as one-fifth the price of an onshore FTE.

Improved Accuracy

As the saying goes, "we're only human". Mistakes are inevitable, especially with repetitive, onerous tasks. Even on a good day, we humans will have a certain expected error factor. Robots are programmed to follow rules to the letter (and they don't make typos). Consistent and tireless, they can perform the same task, the same way, every time, without error.

Flexibility and Scalability

RPA allows you to scale your operations in minutes with additional robots being applied to a process to address peaks in demand. Once a process has been defined as a series of instructions that a software robot can execute, as many robots as required can be quickly deployed to perform that process. Additionally, robots can be easily reassigned when more important processes arise, since each robot is typically capable of performing many types of different process.

Regulatory Compliance

Particularly valuable in highly regulated industries such as financial services and insurance, RPA provides greater adherence to business processes and legal compliances. The tasks performed by a software robot can be monitored and recorded at every step, producing an audit trail that can help with regulatory compliance as well as supporting further process improvement efforts.

Non-Invasive

RPA is not a digital transformation project. None of your legacy systems need to change in order to deploy RPA - the robotic workforce follows the same mouse clicks and data entry processes as your existing human workforce. Once you've determined which processes are appropriate for RPA, software robots can typically be deployed in weeks. With the robots in place, processes can then be assigned to them in about the same amount of time.

RPA in Action

RPA can deliver benefits across many functional business areas. Just a few of the more typical areas where RPA is starting to provide significant benefits for a wide range of organisations are:

- HR administration
- Claims processing
- Report generation
- Sales and invoice processing

- Customer relationship management
- Inventory management
- Data migration and entry

Taking the first of these, HR administration, below is a typical scenario with RPA implemented.

For a HR specialist in charge of on-boarding new employees for a large company, the on-boarding process will undoubtedly entail numerous repetitive, rule based tasks that could be just as easily be completed via RPA.

Enter the robot. The robot in question can be configured to receive emails from new starters, open these and check for the successful completion of required forms. Should the robot identify any mistakes or omissions, it will send an automated email back to the new starter, requesting correction and resubmission, repeating this process until the correct information is received. The robot can then log into the relevant systems, just as the HR specialist would have done, in order to 'process' the new starter, setting them up with payroll, email, office furniture, computer equipment, a parking permit and their security pass…

Multiply that process by the thousands of employees potentially on-boarded each year in large organisations and the number of extremely repetitive tasks required to be completed is, quite literally, mind-blowing. This is where RPA really comes into its own. RPA software can be configured to complete all of these routine tasks just as the HR specialist would historically have done but faster, more efficiently and much cheaper than its human equivalent.

But far from putting the existing employee at risk, in most cases, the employee can be freed to focus upon other tasks requiring more 'human' skills such as working with business units to create job descriptions, suggesting appropriate recruitment channels, dealing with queries from recruitment agencies and potential applicants, reviewing applications and verifying references. The HR specialist would also handle all the non-routine exceptions that the RPA software could not process.

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> RPA is here to stay. The virtual 'robotic' workforce will continue to become an extension of the human workforce providing wide reaching business benefits.
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Can RPA Work for Our Organisation?

To get a feel for whether RPA would be right for your organisation, consider a few basic questions:

- ✓ Do you undertake highly manual and repetitive processes?
- ✓ Are these processes rule based?
- ✓ Do the tasks within the processes include readable electronic input types (such as Excel, Word, email, XML, PPT, readable PDFs etc.)?
- ✓ Do the tasks have standard inputs?
- ✓ Do you have high process volumes?

If the answer to these questions is yes, then Robotic Process Automation could be the solution you need to increase the efficiency of your workforce and your organisation.

Conclusion

Any company that has a need for high-volume, highly transactional process functions, can boost their capabilities and save time and money with Robotic Process Automation software.

Repetitive, manual tasks are monotonous for humans and cumbersome (and costly) for businesses. Robotic Process Automation helps to automate processes, allowing organisations to not only achieve cost efficiencies but also become more reactive and competitive. At the same time, quality increases whilst employees are freed up to perform higher-level tasks and analysis.

A final caveat…

The advantages of using Robotic Process Automation are clear. However, as with any technology solution, software robots are not 100% fool proof and are dependent on the process design and programming implemented by us mere mortals. Sound process design up front is paramount. The importance of therefore working with a professional partner who not only fully understands the world of RPA but will also take the time to understand your unique business model cannot be underestimated.

Next Steps

What can you do with RPA? And what does it mean for your business? How can you implement this technology to better serve your customers, whilst also running a leaner organisation?

If you're looking to start your RPA journey or simply want to learn more, contact The Robotic Workforce on **0333 005 0321** or email **info@theroboticworkforce.com**.
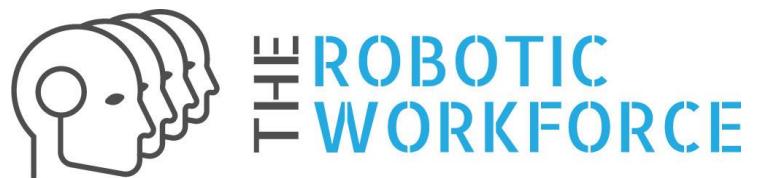
The Robotic Workforce specialises in working with businesses to automate processes, eliminate costs and enhance productivity and efficiency through the adoption of Robotic Process Automation. We will work with you to scope, implement and develop your robotic or 'virtual' workforce and provide on-going support and maintenance at every stage of the process. Partnering with some of the world's leading RPA vendors, we're able to provide you with preferential rates on RPA software and tools and are here to guide you on your journey into the exciting world of Robotic Process Automation.

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