EMBEDDING RPA: THE HONEYMOON IS OVER
DELIVERING ONGOING VALUE FROM RPA ACROSS YOUR ORGANIZATION

LANSHORE WHITE PAPER

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Let's stop talking about the early adopter phase of RPA.
We've moved beyond that on the technology life cycle graph.

If you're a smart, forward-looking, and profitable business with a dependency on effective processing, you'll already be on the journey. You'll already have seen the opportunity to make best use of your human capabilities by automating repetitive cross-system tasks. You'll have deployed RPA in the areas of your business where it's a clear win and in doing so, informed your views about the value of the technology for your organization.

So where do you stand today? Has your deployment experience created reservations about RPA? Are you forging ahead with a wider roll-out as part of a business critical transformation program, or waiting a while to see what the payback looks like in reality?

> **"Maximizing the impact of RPA requires a committed shift in mind-set and approach from experimentation to transformation. In making this change, organizations must make the right strategic choices."**
>
> *The robots are ready. Are you? Untapped advantage in your digital workforce, Deloitte Consulting*

We've been on the journey ourselves, over the past five years since RPA first emerged. We've ridden the roughs and smooths of getting to grips with emerging and fast-evolving technology and applications, hit the highs of delivering extreme outperformance and felt the pain of projects that veered off-course.

What's critical is what we've learned from the experience. In this short paper, we share with you the reasons why we are fully convinced that RPA is a foundational technology, and what our project experience has taught us about best practice deployment.
We'll set the scene by explaining the most common current use cases. We'll explain the key considerations in planning and delivering the next phase of roll-out. Lastly, we'll set out the next steps we recommend for your organization to fully exploit RPA to keep abreast – or even better, ahead – of competition in your competitive marketplace.

SECTION 1:
THE STORY SO FAR: RPA IN DEPLOYMENT IN THE REAL COMMERCIAL WORLD

In our experience of numerous RPA consulting engagements, deployment programs and ongoing service management, RPA use amongst our clients falls into three categories today:

1. Using RPA to handle interactions between legacy systems to create digital process flows

The low-hanging fruit for RPA is in connecting and smoothing processes involving older systems. RPA can automate them at UI level, extending their useful lifespan and effectiveness by "patching up" the gaps in existing processes with bot activities.

For business leaders and IT heads, this is a great way to overcome issues with older systems and get more value from them. It's particularly easy to make the business case when it defers major systems investment.

Legacy systems that don't effectively integrate with newer technology tend to demand a lot of manual intervention, so there's also an excellent time saving and efficiency gain in automating multi-stage human-system interactions that can be both tortuous and error-prone.

> **"The ability to integrate legacy systems is [currently] the key driver for RPA projects. By using this technology, organizations can quickly accelerate their digital transformation initiatives, while unlocking the value associated with past technology investments."**
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> *Fabrizio Biscotti, Research VP, Gartner*

Without a doubt, this is an excellent use case for RPA and a good way to demonstrate how it can work to deliver immediate benefit. But it can under-deliver in some instances due to the lack of bot flexibility. For example, minor changes to a front-end user interface (UI) are easily absorbed by a human operator. But RPA bots require precise instruction to carry out a chain of actions in a consistent environment. Even a tiny change to a UI or a security update can halt an RPA operation.

Of course, with good RPA management practices, IT teams can maintain systems appropriately and update the RPA to ensure continuous, effective operation. But it does require ongoing attention: an RPA bot cannot adapt by itself to seemingly trivial changes in the same way that a human can. We have seen some RPA deployments abandoned because expectations were over-set and it was seen as a one-time fix.

2. Automating interactions between newer applications

The second common application of RPA is in connecting newer applications, where it's possible to automate at the API level. Technically, this is a more resilient approach. Because of the nature of API architecture, bots that interact at this level are able to accommodate some minor variations at UI level without management intervention.

Organizations that are using RPA in this way can drive more strategic value from it, even though the immediate pain relief, payback or freeing up of operational resources may not be as impactful. Rather than creating a workaround, IT teams are building RPA into their operational and development plans, to improve the productivity and efficiency of processes that are working effectively but sub-optimally, rather than dramatically fixing something that's broken or on the brink of collapse.

Using RPA to optimise newer applications is a more robust approach to existing systems that have a reasonable shelf life. It's a way to harness the power of RPA as business as usual, looking for opportunities to apply it to current infrastructure throughout the business.

3. Designing and redesigning processes specifically to be managed by bots

This is the most forward-looking and strategic approach to RPA, adopted by industry and sector leaders who have a clear and realistic understanding of what RPA can deliver.

These organizations are building robotic automation into all future infrastructure, process planning and system development. They are exploring the potential to augment RPA with artificial intelligence (AI) to be more self-sufficient, creating machine learning that can continually review and enhance processes.

> **"By 2023, 40% of I&O teams will use AI-augmented automation in large enterprises, resulting in higher IT productivity with greater agility and scalability."**
> *Katie Costello, Gartner Enterprise Architecture & Technology Innovation Summit 2019*

In our view, this is where all successful organizations need to be in the medium term. But to deploy RPA strategically in this way requires experience, confidence, sector and operational understanding as well as strong technical expertise in robotics.

The early headline benefit of RPA may be to patch up creaking systems to make short term efficiency gains, but this can't continue indefinitely. For any organization that has more than a tactical IT support department, the future IT and digital vision and strategy needs to include RPA intrinsically. At a minimum, organizations must make RPA efficiencies integral to their ongoing systems development plan, as a priority for investment in new technology.

SECTION 2:
ONGOING RPA DELIVERY – THE NEW RULES FOR SUPPLY AND EXPERTISE

We're not in a brave new world of experimentation and pioneering RPA spirit any more. One lone voice on the management or IT team can't drive your progress single-handedly. You need to figure out what resources and expertise you need to deliver a sustainable and expanding RPA environment that's business critical in nature.

> **"The rapid adoption of RPA software has created a lot of hype in the market, leading many organizations to jump into RPA initiatives without proper analysis, planning, defined strategies and CoEs. All this elevates the risk of errors by failing to automate the right processes, identify the right guardrails, and focus on security issues and access rights."**
>
> *Gartner Predicts 2019: RPA Evolution, Stephanie Stoudt-Hansen*

Our most successful clients are looking at a range of options in context of their core business, current technology maturity and in-house capabilities. Very few have the internal staff-base to establish and support an organization-wide RPA program today. It's a strategic decision whether to grow your own in-house expertise, with the field of RPA evolving continually, or to seek trusted support outside the business.

1. Strategic partnerships

Using a third party RPA specialist to plan and implement your RPA roll-out and inform your strategy is an attractive option. The technology and associated concepts and applications are evolving at warp speed.

> **"Scale RPA by treating it as a transformation not an experiment and recognize that you will need to invest and to partner."**
>
> *The robots are ready. Are you? Untapped advantage in your digital workforce, Deloitte Consulting*

In choosing a partner, make a decision carefully, but don't take too long over it. With accelerating uptake of RPA, the best teams and experts are in demand. Keen as they are to capitalize on this buoyant market, their capability is finite. RPA firms are some of the fastest-growing in the digital industry, but there's a limit to the rate at which they can train and recruit high calibre people.

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Take a look at the track record and experience of short-listed partners. Find out how they're keeping abreast of RPA technology developments, through training and thought leadership. Ensure that you can contract with them to deliver what you need and that their approach is compatible with your business culture. Find out what they know about RPA in context of your business sector, or comparable industries.

Note that we're advocating a strategic partnership rather than tactical support. A business-wide approach to RPA means you'll need a strong working relationship with a specialist partner who can get close to your business goals, objectives, operations and processes and grasp how they contribute to your success.

If they understand your priorities and know what RPA is capable of, you can work with your chosen partner or partners to apply RPA precisely where it delivers most value both tactically and strategically. Together, you can develop long-term plans to support business imperatives and measure ROI.

2. Managed services
To get optimal advantage from your deployed and expanding RPA estate, you need RPA bot maintenance programs and continuous system and process reviews for automation. In the short term, it's likely that, you'll be using RPA for a mix of legacy systems process connectivity and new capability development. RPA bots need checks and tweaks to accommodate process evolution – you need to keep up with this as well as focusing on future development.

> **"The speed with which RPA can be set up is misleading. Rigor and formal controls, with the full knowledge and support of IT, must come into play if scale is to be achieved."**
> *Ovum: 2019 Trends to Watch: Automation*

A managed services approach means you can concentrate on maximising strategic value and leave a trusted partner to make sure your systems and RPA bots continue to work in harmony. If you have an in-house team to skill up, it may be better to look to the future in terms and invest in the knowledge and capability they'll need to develop and manage the RPA environment, rather than training them to support your early tactical RPA projects for legacy systems. Leave that to your managed services partner, as the shelf life of these projects is limited: it may not be worth a long-term training and development investment in short-term management and niche technical skills in-house.

3. Centre of Excellence (COE)

The RPA sector is rapidly evolving, so testbeds and best practice are emerging all the time. If you're planning to own and deliver RPA in-house, you need to devote development time to this and cultivate your own COE internally. This could give you competitive advantage from exclusive innovation that will keep you ahead in your market, in speed and quality of service delivery. But it's likely to be an expensive option, with RPA evolving so fast and industry cross-pollination revealing new and more productive applications. Unless you're in a related technology business and can leverage the benefit for your own clients, you may not have the appetite or the funds to support that level of R&D.

> **"A common challenge in scaling RPA is establishing a Center of Excellence (CoE) that does not break the business case."**
> *2019 Trends to Watch: Automation, Ovum*

If you partner with an RPA expert that has a COE or lab environment and an iterative learning approach, they can bring their innovation to you. As RPA and AI converge, there will be a wealth of scenarios to test, to demonstrate the security and reliability of sophisticated machine decision technology. Few mainstream commercial organizations have the deep pockets and core business synergies to do this in-house, let alone the will.

If your COE partner has a focus on your industry sector, it could be to your advantage to learn from their work with other clients. This approach reduces the financial risk to your business. To maintain a practical level of in-house knowledge, a third-party COE may offer focused training and updates for your team.

4. Bot as a Service

Emerging as a supply option is the concept of offering bot hours as a service. Software, storage and server capacity can all be procured in this way, avoiding wastage and maximising value. BaaS (Bot as a Service) is likely to become a familiar acronym. Your organization could lease some or all of its bots, upgrading and exchanging them as needed to keep up with fast-evolving technology.

This service model is only just entering the market, but like everything in the RPA world, it's likely to gather momentum rapidly. You need to be in a position to decide where, when and how you might capitalize and how it affects ROI for your RPA investment.

CONCLUSION:

What this means for you - next steps for your organization

As a switched-on, performance-focused business, you know that RPA is a critical technology for future success.

If you're not already advanced in planning for roll-out, it's time to put automation high on your executive agenda. Here are the steps to take now:

- Put RPA and AI on the executive agenda for action, not just as an IT or innovation topic for the future

- Champion RPA as an organization-wide approach and build a transformation program to embed it. Get every functional head to investigate how RPA could enhance their current and future activities and work with them to create a business case.

- Ensure that operational planning always includes RPA, recognizing the opportunity to focus resources and enhance your business performance and competitiveness

- Consider your in-house resources and external partners. Do you have the skills, training plan and budget you need? Have you identified the right people and technologies to work with? Do you have a trusted expert partner who can advise on strategy, applications and priorities for your sector and business?

> **"It is imperative that sourcing, procurement and vendor management leaders stay ahead of RPA use and trajectories to ensure sourcing efficacy and business agility."**
> *Gartner Predicts 2019: RPA Evolution*

ABOUT LANSHORE

We are an automation consultancy company with an established Robotic Process Automation (RPA) practice. From our heritage in HR and Sales Operations, we've developed a wide range of services across all business areas, with a scalable and agile delivery model. We are a global company supported by our Robotic Operations Centre (ROC) in Costa Rica.

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