

Destination automation

*As the business world evolves, your business needs to evolve too.
Here's how automation can help.*

 Joanne Carew  Karolina Komendera

Automation is the next stage of digital transformation. According to Forrester Research, savvy technologists are already leveraging the scale and speed of automation to do a wide range of things – from delivering new levels of customer value and speeding up time to market to streamlining broad business processes. The research firm describes automation as ‘the tip of the digital transformation spear’ in 2019, set to have an impact on everything from infrastructure and customers to business models. How modern businesses respond to these changes will be the difference between success and failure.

As modern businesses attempt to make automation work for them, it's not uncommon for there to be a few stumbling blocks along the way. Businesses, and entire industries, will experience widespread resistance when changing business processes, says Pommie Lutchman, CEO at Ocular Technologies. Particularly because the tools that enable automation come in so many shapes and forms – from robotic process automation, AI, machine learning and IoT, to business process management, cloud, blockchain, cognitive computing and intelligent process automation. Industry 4.0 is here and businesses need to adapt, he says.

The right solutions have the power to transform the most manual and resource-

intensive tasks, adds Lutchman. This results in processes that are easier to monitor and measure, which makes everything more efficient and ready to be replicated and reused in a multitude of different environments. There's no denying that automation has already had a massive impact on individual enterprises, but just imagine the possibilities across industries and even beyond borders.

The scale of the impact these changes will have is entirely dependent on the level of implementation, the industry and expectations, adds David Slotow, MD at Trackmatic. Within the supply chain industry, for example, improvements in automation and customer communication can actually produce too much information. Customers are bombarded with messages notifying them about deliveries, timing and driver information. It's not a bad idea for an organisation to keep the customer informed, but in doing so, they must be careful that they don't inundate customers with information they don't want. In this situation, we've gone from a lack of insights to a total information overload, he notes.

“Organisations that fail to evolve face extinction,” Lutchman says. They will either die a slow death or be swallowed by larger, more agile and forward-thinking entities. In many areas, these technologies are making our working lives better, with more mundane and time-consuming and repetitive tasks no longer handled by humans, changing how

business is conducted, says Kumar Sharma, enterprise architect at In2IT Technologies.

The Fourth Industrial Revolution amplifies the need of automation, but Shakeel Jhazbhay, business unit manager for enterprise information management at Datacentrix, believes that there must be a balance. Automation should enable organisations, but must also afford people the freedom to improve their capabilities within their current jobs

Streamlining processes

Former IBM CEO and chairperson Lou Gerstner once said that changing business processes is a bit like setting your hair on fire and putting it out with a hammer. Neither scenario is attractive but which one is worse?

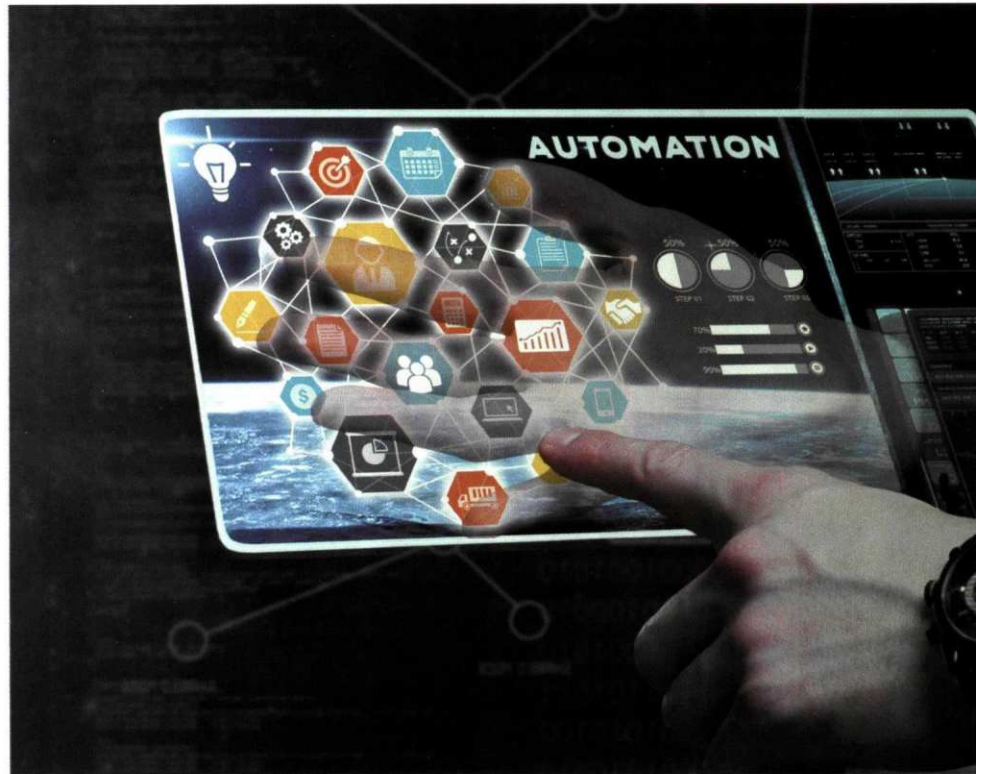
There are millions of people doing dreary, repetitive tasks at their desks every day. For many modern workers, administrative processes (such as entering orders, allocating invoices to accounts) have a negative impact on productivity. Automation carves out time that could be better spent on strategic tasks, says UiPath's head of sales for South Africa, Lenore Kerrigan. When employees are freed up to get involved in higher-value tasks, they derive an increased sense of accomplishment and satisfaction from their professional lives. She believes that every worker should prepare for the era of one robot for every person. This era will see each of us having our own digital assistants.

Automation is already becoming part of



UNDERSTANDING THE ACRONYMS

- ✓ **Business process management (BPM)** focuses on a specific function via a workflow.
- ✓ **Business process automation (BPA)** makes processes simpler and faster, ensuring everything operates in a smarter fashion.
- ✓ **Digital process management (DPM)** is the evolution of BPM and is borne out of a business need to be more agile and to rapidly automate processes as part of an organisation's digital transformation efforts.
- ✓ **Robotic process automation (RPA)** is applied to processes with obvious patterns, such as customer enquiries and other basic response situations.
- ✓ **Intelligent process automation (IPA)** is similar to RPA, but adds machine learning to the mix. This means that there's a level of intelligence and understanding behind the process. Essentially, IPA can learn and improve.



our everyday working and personal lives, notes Barry Hatfield, Dimension Data's CDO. Improved customer experience, customer analytics and better business intelligence are seen as the top three benefits of AI and robotic automation. "Automation will remove the mundane from our employees' work days, allowing them to focus on the more creative and value-adding aspects of their roles."

It all comes down to 'taking the robot out of the human', says Kerrigan. BPM, for example, is all about taking a critical look at a company's existing business processes and then using this analysis to streamline ways of working in an attempt to achieve maximum agility and productivity, she adds.

For Jhazbhay, automation not only provides us with greater efficiencies within the workplace, it also offers more accountability and traceability of work streams.

Automation delivers quality to the modern workplace in two key ways, says Richard Firth, CEO of MIP Holdings. Firstly, it removes human error and frees humans

up to review the quality of output, rather than doing the manual, time-consuming work. Secondly, automation drives socialisation of systems and processes, meaning that consumers are connected to automation via IoT.

The opportunities that lie within automation are boundless, particularly in terms of the customer engagement industry, notes Lutchman. We're already seeing so many interfaces being built in an effort to simplify and enhance the customer experience. One way of achieving this is using IPA to make technology far more inconspicuous and unobtrusive. Technology really should just blend into the background. Wynand Smit, CEO at INOVO, agrees. If you've ever called a contact centre and had to listen to terrible music while you wait for your call to be answered, you'll understand how important it is that issues are handled promptly. If virtual agents can offer the desired results with less frustration for the customer, it would be foolish not to embrace them, he notes.



“Your business must always be objective-driven, not swayed by technologies.”

Richard Firth, MIP Holdings

Most of us understand how process automation fits into an organisation's broader digital transformation journey, says Ryan Falkenberg, founder and co-CEO of Clevva. But getting this right isn't that easy.

Going fully automatic

If digital transformation is the end-to-end transportation of a business from old ways of working to more efficient and automated processes, the right solutions are the key enablers of this journey, says Jhazbhay. Sharing this sentiment, Sharma notes that BPM is about shifting our perceptions about business processes. The aim of BPM is to view processes as important assets to the organisation because these ways of working are an essential part of any business' ability to deliver products and services to clients that are of the best standard.

According to Firth, success comes down to socialising your technology. This means making sure that a process is defined, documented, automated and then shared or socialised with an employee, consumer or customer through a layer of technology and


devices. Automated processes only provide value if they're accepted and used by the entire organisation, notes Hatfield. But don't automate for automation's sake, he says. Automating inefficient or unnecessary processes adds little or no additional value. A systemic approach involving people, process and technology needs to be embraced.

A considered approach

If you ask any board or executive team in a company what they understand by digital transformation, you will get a different answer, says Firth. And yet businesses often make their innovation decisions based on what the company next door is doing. For example, there's big hype around robotics and AI, but too often businesses are diving in without closely examining two core aspects around investment. These include: do you have a use case for new tech implementations? And, will the tech implementation be effective when working with your existing processes?

“Your business must always be objective-driven, not swayed by technologies,” Firth says.

Many companies don't understand their processes well enough to change them, believes Riaan Bekker, force solutions manager at thryve. Think of business processes as being a bit like a big plate of spaghetti. From the top down, it's a complex mess of different strands going in every direction, adds Bekker. But if you're able to zoom in and focus on select strands, everything makes more sense. This is where the right digital tools can help.

Smit says that as much as businesses will change, some things will still stay the same. People will always buy products, owe you money and need some kind of service from you. How you go about handling these different requirements is where the transformation will happen. Introducing chatbots, automation or other forms of AI, for example, might sound like a great idea, but only if there's a clearly defined business case that proves its suitability and effectiveness in solving existing and future business challenges. 



THE DRAWBACKS

According to Pommie Lutchman, of Ocular Technologies, robotic process automation and intelligent process automation face the following challenges:

- ✘ Security and privacy, as data snatching is possible;
- ✘ A lack of company spend on new technologies;
- ✘ Employee skillset requirements will have to change.