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Taking an intelligent automation program from vision to reality with IDP and RPA

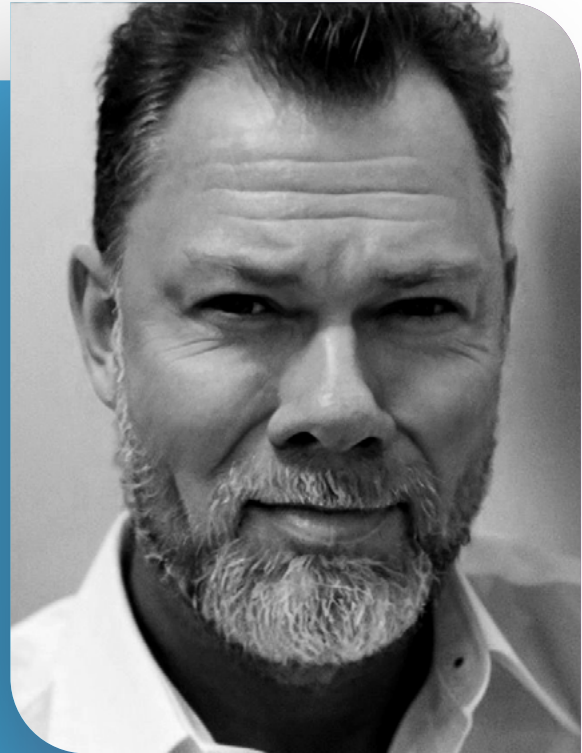
The lines between robotic process automation (RPA) and Intelligent Document Processing (IDP) are likely to continue to blur and drive consolidation in the market. However, the Holy Grail of a complete software suite that offers a single solution spanning advanced automation, artificial intelligence (AI) and Capture and IDP is likely to remain elusive for the foreseeable future.

That's according to Nathaniel Palmer, CEO of intelligent process automation company Infocap. Palmer was the Chief Architect at Serco responsible for overseeing the implementation of the platforms that Serco uses to process tens of millions of documents and hundreds of millions of data records to verify the eligibility of millions of American consumers for health insurance coverage through the

Affordable Care Act (informally known as Obamacare).

Palmer says that the reason for the growing overlap between the worlds of Capture and automation is that process automation depends on technology for quick and accurate extraction, validation and contextualization of information from sources such as paper-based documents. IDP is thus a key leverage point for automation and digital transformation.

Navigating the convergence of RPA and IDP



Nathaniel Palmer CEO: Infocap

The clear synergies between IDP and automation mean that vendors from these two worlds are increasingly butting heads. Although vendor mergers and acquisitions are inevitable, the industry is still a long way from a single product or vendor strategy, says Palmer, who is in favor of taking a modular approach to building automation solutions.

The Serco solution used to perform eligibility support for the Affordable Care Act (ACA) program involves ingesting millions of paper and electronic records. By applying automation at key points, Serco is today able to triage casework components into parts that can be fully or partially automated, separating parts which require more highly skilled knowledge workers. This capability has allowed Serco to drive far greater efficiencies without compromising quality or accuracy.

The implementation comprises three major capabilities - IDP for classifying and extracting key data needed to perform person association and eligibility verification; business process management (BPM) for task sequencing and end-to-end process workflow; and decision automation, to determine who

should do what and when.

When Serco started to build this solution, the vision wasn't merely to find piecemeal "moments of automation" based on single, discrete units of work, but to focus on business outcomes. The intelligent automation strategy removes any distinction between what supports a task and the task itself – as well as who performs the work.

Humans and robots following the same rules



As such, the goal was to create a human and robotic workforce that follows the same rules and instructions. Robots and humans log in to the same core systems, ensuring the same rules and controls are applied, with the same level of reportability, while allowing the same quality assurance to be performed, ensuring that program integrity is maintained.

Such an approach enables Serco to ensure more scalability, consistency and accuracy in processes, as well as to avoid many of the antipatterns that creep in when human and robot workers aren't governed by the same framework. RPA software is assigned tasks and performs each step as would a human worker, delivering greater efficiency and reducing subjective rule interpretations.

Robots are doing more of the less desirable work, and they are doing this repetitive drudgework without making mistakes, says Palmer. Serco has also automated some of the more complex case work for ACA by 70% or more end-to-end—but getting to this point has taken a long, multiyear journey. Higher complexity issue resolution is still handled by experienced knowledge workers for a personalized touch.



500% efficiency gains and a
20-fold cost reduction

To date, Serco has achieved compound efficiency gains exceeding 500% and 20X reduction in operating costs while accommodating seasonal bursts and lulls through its automation strategy. It adjudicates around 5 million cases a year. The efficiencies enable Serco to profitably offer the US government a fixed unit price, where there is no financial risk to client and performance is both consistent and transparent.

The goal remains to enable robots to handle ever-more complex transactions, with the ability to understand how different pieces of data fit together in a case as well as when to seek more information. AI and generative AI may support these more advanced use cases in the future; Serco is already using AI for applications like identity resolution with pattern matching to resolve consumer name variances.

While Serco and Infocap are prototyping generative AI for such use cases, Palmer is skeptical about whether gen AI and large language models trained on large sets of generalized documents and data can deliver the accuracy and demonstrability necessary in highly regulated sectors such as healthcare. He remains optimistic about the potential for the tech to evolve in the years ahead—but notes that the major roadblocks to innovation lie in cultural resistance and change management rather than technology.

DOCUMENT IMAGING REPORT

Business Trends on Converting Paper Processes to Electronic Format

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