



Back Office Automation

Starter Kit

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YOUR
PERFORMANCE





Back office automation

Whether you are just starting out with automation, or your current RPA project has stalled, looking in the back office for 'everyday' processes is a simple way to reinvigorate your strategy. While these day-to-day tasks aren't likely to set the world alight, or catch the imagination of your peers, they'll generate some fast return on investment and give you the foundation you need to be successful with automation.

However, searching for ideal automation candidates in your day-to-day operation can feel overwhelming. Either teams become caught up in the excitement around automation and you're bombarded with requests or quite the opposite, with employees being unsure whether their process fits the criteria for automation.

The good news is that you're not alone. Whether you are experiencing radio silence or organizational-wide noise, we're here to help you go back to basics.

In this starter kit, we'll share with you our experience of back office automation and give you pointers on where is best to get started.

Why is the back office a good place to start out with automation?

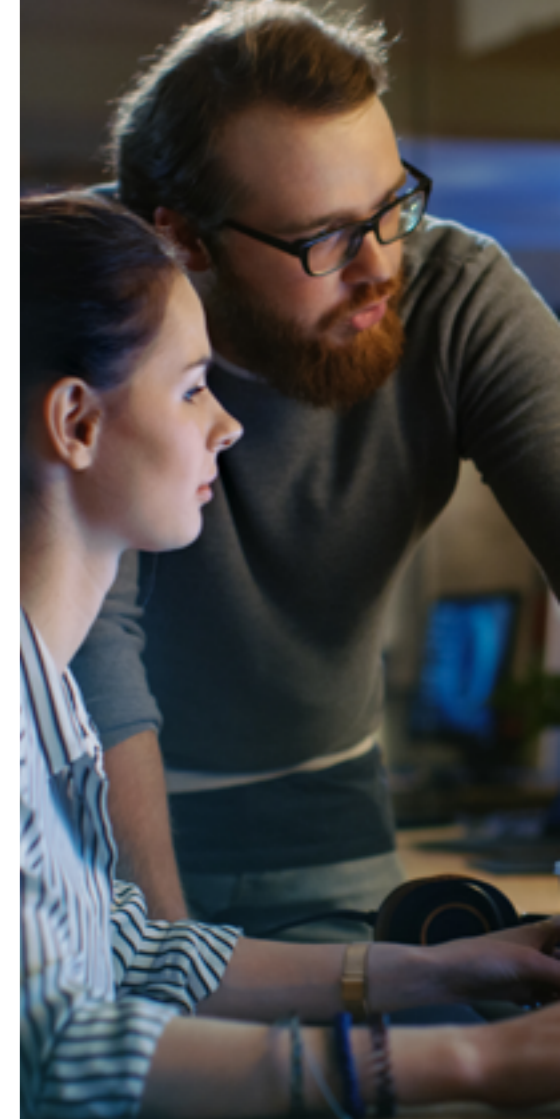
Robotic Process Automation and the back office are a well-suited combination. If you think about the many tasks undertaken in back-office departments, they are typically repetitive and follow a set template, such as data entry, payroll and HR administration. What's more, the majority of these tasks typically aren't customer-facing so there isn't usually a need for subjective decisions or to use human traits such as communication, empathy or creativity.

Now if you turn your thoughts to RPA. It's been designed to mimic human inputs and connect digital systems - replicating human tasks such as inputting data, opening applications and communicating between systems, only faster and more accurately. RPA typically thrives with tasks that have key characteristics such as:

- High data density
- Highly repetitive
- Electronically triggered
- Electronic start and end points
- Communicating between systems

The clear compatibility of back office processes and Robotic Process Automation makes them a good fit to power up your RPA program, or as an ideal starting place for intelligent automation. Usually, we find these processes fall into what we refer to as the first wave. In this initial phase, you typically look for efficiency gains, looking for easy wins to hone your skills with RPA and capture the value you need for future intelligent automation applications.

Essentially, it's by automating these rules-based and repetitive back-office tasks that your business captures early return on investment and builds lasting efficiency. With that in mind, let's outline what constitutes an ideal candidate for automation and have a look at a few examples of tasks that are ripe for automation.



5 Characteristics of ideal back-office candidates

We've already looked at a few defining features of RPA and where it is best suited. But if you are looking for an at hand checklist for deciphering whether the back-office process you are looking at suits RPA, then below we've provided a list of identifiers to look out for. Of course, this list isn't exhaustive and if you start to think about scaling up your RPA program with intelligent skills for business-wide transformation, then there are certainly some broader applications to add which we discuss elsewhere in the power-up series.

DEFINED WORKFLOW

Have you created a defined workflow for a task, or created an instruction manual for an outsourcing team? This documentation isn't key for picking an automation candidate, but it can help speed up the process. Because as RPA mimics human actions these defined workflows are simple transferable steps straight into an automation.

HIGH VOLUME/LOW TO MEDIUM COMPLEXITY

Common advice when you are first looking at automation is to look for processes which are high volume and uncomplex. These are your base processes for return on investment as well as ongoing savings on your deployment. Typically, these fall into the back-office categories of automation, so keep a sharp eye out for these processes.

MULTIPLE APPLICATION USAGE

Digital workers don't just mimic human actions, they also can connect systems. If you have a back-office process which spans across multiple applications or departments, then this is likely a good candidate for automation. Even if it isn't a complete end-to-end process, digital workers can part automate and expedite the process.

SCALABILITY

Is there a process which only peaks at one point of the month? Do you have to keep looking at hiring new people or outsourcing to deliver the work? Processes and tasks like this can often be assisted by automation, or in some cases automated in full. Especially with certain leading vendors whose technology can flex with your business demands.

STRUCTURED

Imagine a new employee starting and they've been tasked with a specific process. Could this process that you are considering for automation be easily explained to the new employee? If so, it is likely an ideal candidate for your back-office automation roadmap.

What back-office tasks are ideal candidates for automation?

As discussed earlier, investigating ideal candidates for automation isn't always straight forward. But now we've discussed the basic criteria it should be easier to see why some of these fit. By the end of this section, you'll hopefully be able to reflect on your own business and pinpoint some candidates for automation.

In order for you to have a breadth of areas to consider, we've divided up the categories into four groups: Finance, HR, Operations and Procurement. The majority of these will be common occurrences in every back-office, and if they aren't, then they'll be easily transferable with a touch of lateral thinking.

Finance processes

INVOICE MATCHING

When you are invoice matching, you look at three key pieces of information; vendor invoice, purchase order number and product receipt information. Within any finance function, this information is likely to be held within either finance software or perhaps in some situations an ERP.

Because RPA works as a human would, the process follows the exact same steps. Finding

the selection of invoices to process, matching the number between the systems required and reconciling them. In the rare occasion an exception is found, digital workers will automatically flag it to a human member of staff to resolve so all invoices are precisely matched.

ACCOUNTS PAYABLE & RECEIVABLE

Speed and accuracy are everything when processing accounts. From sales outstanding to Procure to Pay, time quite literally means money in this situation and it isn't uncommon for finance teams to be stretched at particular times of the month. With this burden heavy on many finance teams' shoulders, it can mean that payment runs happen later than ideal or even that accounts are not chased for receivable slips in a timely fashion.

However, because the process involved — while time-consuming — is usually structured, it is ideal for automation. Either by picking up the whole process from end-to-end or part of the process, digital workers can save finance teams time and make existing processes more efficient. On top of that, RPA has the added benefit of having a secure full audit trail so you needn't worry about not being able to check back over your books.



HR

ABSENCE MANAGEMENT

Keeping absence records up-to-date is notoriously challenging in HR, especially in larger organizations. Whether it's that your personnel have forgotten how to use the system, are unaware of the procedure, or it slipped their mind, systems which record absence are often not reflective of reality. Often the onus can fall upon the managers of that department, but for some reason or another, this still doesn't reconcile. The problem is discrepancies in real-life absences and your records can have potentially serious ramifications.

You can apply automation in a couple of ways here. You can set up the digital worker to cross check absentee reports against time logged in corporate networks, or you can set them up to fill out the forms by simply clicking a link unique to them. Either of these automations will have the potential of bringing down processing time and reducing manual effort.

ONBOARDING AND RESTRUCTURING

According to Glassdoor, the average U.S. employer spends about \$4,000 and 24 days to hire a new employee.⁽²⁾ This significant cost isn't really surprising when you take the many aspects of a new employee into account. From being setup on multiple systems, given access to facilities, trained how to perform their new role and provided with all the equipment they

need to succeed, both onboarding and restructuring teams requires multiple processes across a range of departments. While there are often attempts to integrate these systems, automation is a more effective tool in this situation, especially with the way in which RPA can mimic human interactions.

Coca Cola has applied Blue Prism Automation to over 50 HR processes⁽¹⁾

Operations

INVENTORY MANAGEMENT

In any organization shipping or receiving goods, it's essential to keep inventory reconciled. But often this process takes place across multiple systems because it is too difficult to have one place for all the requirements around inventory management. It is indeed possible to create links between these systems with the use of APIs or by using people to feed the information between systems. The problem with this approach is that people make mistakes, they don't mean to, but they do, and using your IT team to build links between the two systems is time-consuming and requires precise mapping to make sure there are no errors.

1. <https://www.blueprism.com/resources/blog/coca-cola-reinventing-hr-as-a-strategic-business-partner/>
2. <https://www.glassdoor.com/employers/blog/calculate-cost-per-hire/>



VENDOR DATA UPDATE

You have a new client, or a client that you are no longer working with, so their information needs to be logged in all of your business systems. At first look, this would appear to be a task that is neither time consuming nor error-prone. But tasks of this nature can in fact be both of those things. The multiple windows required for the disparate systems and the repetitive nature of the processes, means human errors often crop up. And, as vendor data is often very sensitive a mistake can cause many issues further down the line.

Automation can not only keep your data clean but do it in a fraction of the time. By checking across multiple repositories and new incoming data, digital workers can ensure that every department has their vendors in order. What's more, it can relieve your team of this admin work so they can concentrate on managing vendor relationships.

Walgreens boosts HR shared services group efficiency by 73%⁽¹⁾

1. <https://www.blueprism.com/uploads/resources/case-studies/blue-prism-Walgreens-case-study.pdf>



Benefits of applying automation to back-office processes

We've already touched on a few of the benefits of automation but it's important to look at all the benefits in detail as this can form the basis of a business case.

BOOSTS PRODUCTIVITY

In both developed and emerging economies, productivity rates have slowed. The reasoning for this is complex, with a multitude of factors coming into play. But one thing the majority of economists agree upon is the potential for automation to not only bolster but increase productivity.

The key to productivity with automation isn't the 'replacement' of human jobs. But rather a realignment of roles to what people are good at. Most people are certainly not designed to perform repetitive and process-driven tasks, and with automation technology like RPA able to effectively, rapidly and accurately perform these tasks — is it wise to pursue this approach? We'd argue not, especially when it suppresses inherent human skills such as creativity, empathy, problem solving and collaboration which can add much more value to the workplace. By harnessing the power of RPA, back office tasks can be automated effectively and efficiently, while your human workforce can pursue tasks they're suited

to, such as driving customer experience or guiding the business in a new direction. Doing so helps deliver a significant increase in productivity across your enterprise and with it, the wider economy.

REDUCE COSTS

It goes without saying that many organizations look to RPA to make cost savings within their business. This is reflected by both Deloitte and EY, with the former stating in their global RPA survey that 59% of respondents saw cost saving as a benefit to the business, and the latter stating they estimate a saving of between 20-60% of baseline costs. ⁽¹⁾⁽²⁾

Much of these savings will be brought about by boosting efficiency within the organization, an increase in accuracy of work performed and reduction in business risk. Delivering savings in your bottom line and a potential bolster to your profit margins.

- [1. <https://www2.deloitte.com/bg/en/pages/technology/articles/deloitte-global-rpa-survey-2018.html>](https://www2.deloitte.com/bg/en/pages/technology/articles/deloitte-global-rpa-survey-2018.html)
- [2. \[https://www.ey.com/Publication/vwLUAssets/ey-faas-finance-function-automation-ch/\\\$FILE/ey-faas-finance-function-automation-ch.pdf\]\(https://www.ey.com/Publication/vwLUAssets/ey-faas-finance-function-automation-ch/\$FILE/ey-faas-finance-function-automation-ch.pdf\)](https://www.ey.com/Publication/vwLUAssets/ey-faas-finance-function-automation-ch/$FILE/ey-faas-finance-function-automation-ch.pdf)



ROBUST COMPLIANCE

If you work in finance, insurance or one of the many other industries that faces strict regulations, then you'll understand the frustration associated with compliance. It is an ever-changing set of obligations that you must achieve, usually with substantial resourcing attached in order to achieve it. What's more, you face significant risks around non-compliance

Of course, automation isn't a silver bullet for compliance, but it may come as a surprise that it is effective in this situation. By using RPA, you can accurately and quickly take on a range of office compliance processes. But more importantly, as automation produces a full audit trail, you can reduce the risk to your organization. Meanwhile, your team can perform value-added tasks while the digital workers perform the heavy lifting.

DRIVES EFFICIENCY

As you might expect, digital workers are typically faster than humans at completing processes in the back-office. It's not just that digital workers don't have the inherent inefficiencies of their human counterparts such as needing breaks or becoming distracted, but also due to the fact they are usually faster at manipulating digital systems. By applying digital workers and their human counterparts where they excel, you can drive ever better outcomes.

ACCURACY

RPA is inherently accurate. As it follows a set of rules and guidelines, it isn't subject to any slips in concentration that a human is. In fact, the only real way of RPA making a mistake is if there's an error in the instructions provided, and therefore by making sure every workflow is precisely matched to the desired outcome, then every process will be accurately executed. Unsurprisingly, when many businesses deploy automation they see a dramatic rise in accuracy, with 90% of respondents to a report by Deloitte seeing remarkable improvement. ⁽¹⁾

- [1. <https://www2.deloitte.com/bg/en/pages/technology/articles/deloitte-global-rpa-survey-2018.html>](https://www2.deloitte.com/bg/en/pages/technology/articles/deloitte-global-rpa-survey-2018.html)





The first wave on an automation journey

Automation in the back-office isn't awe-inspiring AI, but by going back to basics with RPA, you can realize real value across your organization. From releasing your people to fulfil their potential, to reducing costs and meeting compliance demands, the combined power of your human workforce and a digital workforce is a firm foundation for the future of your business and expansion of automation into other areas.

As we've delved into the day-to-day of back-office tasks and the potential benefits automation can bring, we hope you can now find some ideal candidates for your automation roadmap.

Take the next step in your automation strategy and get in touch with us to see how we can help you power up your RPA program.

Get in touch

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About Blue Prism

Blue Prism's vision is to provide a Digital Workforce for Every Enterprise. The company's purpose is to unleash the collaborative potential of humans, operating in harmony with a Digital Workforce, so every enterprise can exceed their business goals and drive meaningful growth, with unmatched speed and agility.

Fortune 500 and public-sector organizations, among customers across 70 commercial sectors, trust Blue Prism's enterprise-grade connected-RPA platform, which has users in more than 170 countries. By strategically applying Intelligent Automation, these organizations are creating new opportunities and services, while unlocking massive efficiencies that return millions of hours of work back into their business.

Available on-premises, in the cloud, hybrid, or as an integrated SaaS solution, Blue Prism's Digital Workforce automates ever more complex, end-to-end processes that drive a true digital transformation, collaboratively, at scale and across the entire enterprise.

Visit www.blueprism.com to learn more or follow Blue Prism on **Twitter @blue_prism** and on **LinkedIn**.

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