Automation using Software Robots
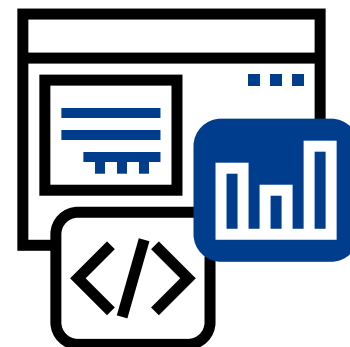
Briefing for Directors

Purpose

Automation of office staff activities is a business improvement opportunity.

Background

The use of software robots that can **simulate** a user **reading** from a computer screen, **typing** on a keyboard and **clicking** a mouse, enables the automation of repetitive activity in business processes. This is known as "Robotic Process Automation" (RPA).

The technology has emerged in the last few years mainly from use at global companies in Financial Services. The three main vendors are U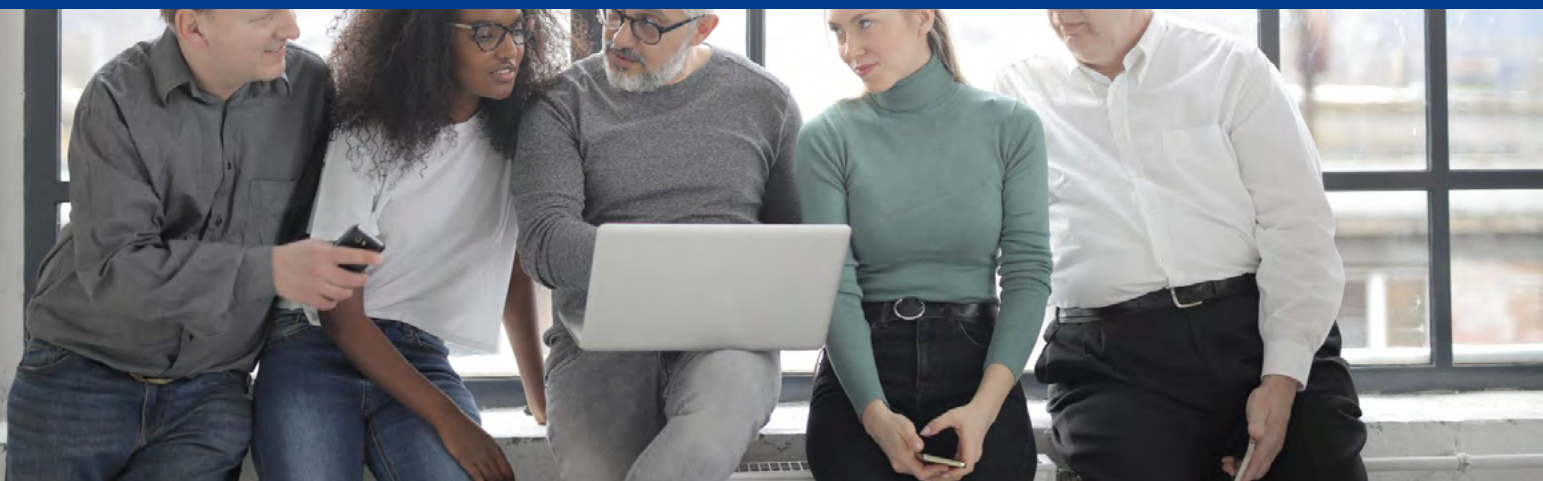iPath, Automation Anywhere and Blue Prism. Microsoft has recently entered the market by acquiring one of the lower ranked vendors.

Software robots are used in most of FTSE 100 and usage is spreading across other companies.

Benefits

Productivity is gained by software robots performing the routine repetitive tasks, allowing people to focus on the more complex, the exceptions and other tasks. Software robots perform with predictable accuracy which avoids the effort to correct human errors.

As software robots can operate 24 hours, 7 days a week, a single robot has the capacity to perform a lot of work compared to a person. Typical ROI is less than 12 months.

Risks

Like all emerging technology there have been project failures. Avoid unrealistic expectations. Software robot implementation working on 80:20 rule.

Use the experience of Ether Solutions as an implementation partner, while building internal skills. Where un-structured documents / emails are involved, AI may be required as part of solution.

Who / What / When / Where / Why / How

Companies using software robots include: Admiral, AXA, DHL, Equifax, JLT, Ladbrokes Coral, LexisNexis, Lombard, Morrison Utility Services, Royal Mail, UK Government

Software robots are being used to automate: Email triage, Password Resets, Invoice posting to accounts, Supplier web site interaction, Excel spreadsheet creation, file copying / moving, Claims processing, KYC, Credit Checks, GDPR compliance, data cross check, supplier costs charge allocation.

Software robots can be effective when there is a repetitive task, the volume is high, the process is rules driven, the process is performed by qualified staff, there are workload peaks, computer applications cannot be customised in-house (e.g. Cloud Hosted).

Software robots can be used on any part of a business process where the activity is repetitive, rules based and occurs frequently enough to justify automation.

Software robots can take the "Robotic actions out of the human activity", enabling staff to add more value. This alone could be the Why, but the additional capacity for processing to deal with workload peaks can be significant benefit.

How do software robots work? By simulating the user actions with computer screens. There are no new interfaces required. Only doing what a person could do. [Note, software robots can make use of other software interfaces but that is optional].

Recommendations

Allocate an internal lead for a "Proof of Concept".

Engage Ether Solutions to deliver a "Proof of Concept" using UiPath software.

Review the results of the "Proof of Concept" to determine any justification for wider usage, any need for software review, options for in house skills development and use of an external partner.