

The Ultimate Guide to BPM

Your guide to Business Process Management and Automation

Jump to Section:

1. [Introduction: What is BPM?](#)
2. [Chapter 1: How does BPM work and why do you need it?](#)
3. [Chapter 2: Getting started with BPM](#)
4. [Chapter 3: Business Process Management tools and software](#)
5. [Conclusion](#)

Introduction: What is BPM?

What is a business process?

A business process is any set of tasks, which done in a specific order, accomplish a business goal. This is a fairly broad definition, which can encompass a lot of different tasks – anything from paying an invoice to getting approvals – and all businesses have processes, even they're not identified as processes.

Many of those processes may be done manually, and they often begin efficiently enough: perhaps when a company is small, requests are simply handed over to the next desk for approval. Over time, however, as a company scales up and technology changes, those processes grow organically, and they don't always grow in a way that makes sense.

For example, maybe the company now requires multiple approvals for a request, or maybe a different set of approvals is required for different kinds of requests, and there's a set of separate actions that must happen if the approvals are declined. Perhaps this approval process is still being handled manually, and all of the people whose signatures are required are now in different locations.

This once-efficient process has now spiraled into a time-consuming, cumbersome process.

If this sounds familiar, you're not alone. All organizations have some inefficient processes; tasks that eat up employee time and company resources.

What is business process management?

Business Process Management (BPM) is the management of business processes. Using one or more technology tools, BPM allows businesses to automate those processes, enabling faster decision-making and improving an organization's ability to respond to challenges quickly and efficiently.

Essentially, BPM allows organizations to take a closer look at processes have been allowed to grow on their own for years or even decades, consider how those processes can be redesigned so that they work more efficiently, and use technology to automate those processes.

What is business process automation?

Business Process Automation (BPA) is simply the automation of business processes. Automation is important because it allows organizations to do more with fewer resources and because it creates a log of the steps in a process that have already been completed.

What are the benefits of BPM?

Maybe your organization has always handled paper purchase orders or inventory manually and there's never been a problem. Why change now?

The old ways aren't necessarily better. While your existing workflows may seem to work fine, they're chewing up your employees' time and your company's budget. And it may be true that they haven't given you a problem: yet.

Here's how business process management pays off:

1. Visibility

With business process management, you get visibility into process status. You can see where an item is in the workflow. That can be particularly useful for capacity planning and deadline management. Need to know if your team is on track to deliver on time? Check your workflow software.

2. Accountability

With visibility comes greater accountability. There's less opportunity for mix-ups, lost files and finger pointing. By automating your business processes, managers can see who's responsible for what and where processes are getting stuck. Managers can even get alerts when a certain step in the process hasn't occurred according to schedule.

3. Document Management

Skip the paper chase. When combined with a document management system, BPA reduces the time employees spend filing and retrieving documents. It also cuts down on lost documents and search time. Plus, customers enjoy better service when employees have immediate access to information and process status from any location.

4. Efficiency

Business process management helps your employees do more with less. Processes can move ahead faster because no one is waiting for files to be transported from desk to desk and no one has to remember to notify the next person in line. Alerts and task reminders can be generated automatically. On a management level, team leaders can get a macro-view of the process, allowing them to be more proactive about addressing and correcting potential bottlenecks. That high-level visibility means teams can reduce the time they spend in update and review meetings.

5. Business Insight

A good business process automation tool will include analytics capabilities, which allows managers to analyze business trends, identify repeat bottlenecks and track response times. Which processes triggered the most missed deadline alerts? When are new process requests most likely to initiate? When processes terminate without completion, what's the most common failure point? Check your workflow software. Perhaps of equal importance, some BPA software will calculate whether automation is saving you money in terms of employee time, paper, less product returned or any other number of metrics. If you can measure the cost savings, it's easier to justify the upfront costs of automation.

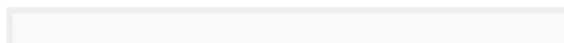
Chapter 1: How does BPM work and why do you need it?

How exactly does BPM work?

A company running without business process management is essentially running its daily operations without rules. Which step comes first is not clearly defined and there are no rules about exactly which task needs to happen at which time.

Does that mean that every business without BPM is running like the Wild West? No – of course not. Sometimes things run just fine. However, in organizations where business processes have grown organically, those processes can become chaotic for various reasons: the original process owner leaves the company, the organization is restructured or steps are added. In the worst-case scenario, there's disorder, things get messy and things get lost.

That's why BPM is important. With a BPM process in place, you have clearly-defined and regimented rules for each step in your business process. You know exactly what needs to happen and at what time. This keeps processes moving forward in an orderly fashion and makes sure that nothing important gets lost in the confusion.



To visualize how BPM works, watch this video.

[HOW DOES BPM WORK? LET OUR HOLIDAY VLOG SHOW](#)

[YOU.](#)

The ROI of BPM

Measuring the ROI of anything can be tricky. In the case of business process management, it's hard to assign a unit of measurement to the unhappiness of an employee who has to complete an intricate or inefficient process.

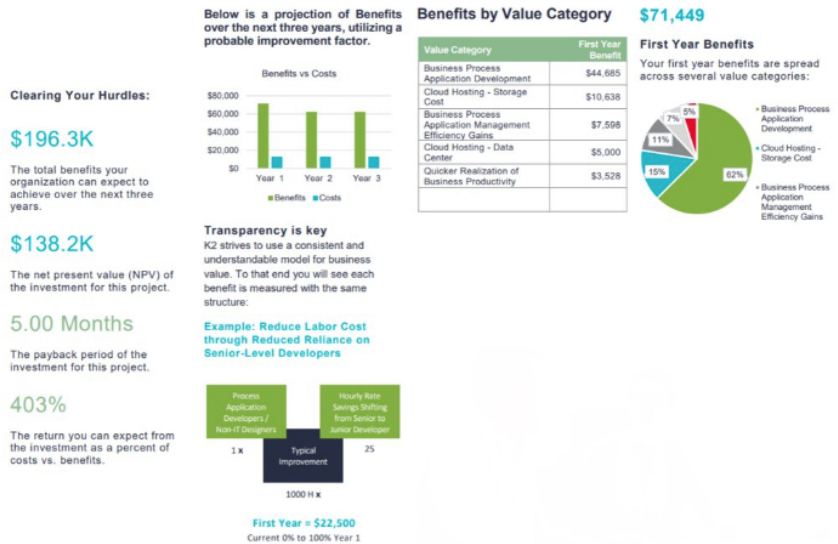
However, there are some things you can measure:

- Employee frustrations
- Customer experience
- Manual hours

Employee frustration and customer experience are hard to measure but technology consultant can take stock of them – by finding out during a consultation how many times an employee has to enter the same information into different systems, for example, and how they feel about that. They can also learn how much a client-facing process would improve if emails to clients about orders were automated.

The easiest unit to measure, the one that most readily converts to dollars and cents, is manual hours. In other words, how many hours does it take an employee to complete a task that could be automated?

An IT consultant discovers this information by walking the client through their existing processes, finding out how long each stage of the process takes when it's done manually. Once the walk-through is complete, the consultant calculates how many hours – and how much money – would be saved by automating those processes. That information then goes into a tool called an ROI tear sheet.



The ROI tear sheet is a one-page document that shows a client's investment in a BPM project, as well as the net value and percentage return on investment the client can expect from the automating their processes and when they can expect to see that ROI.



Business Process Management Examples

How are businesses using BPM to make operations easier?

By using automation in accounts payable

Sometimes it takes a while to get an invoice paid; using BPM, however **some companies are streamlining Accounts Payable.**

Take GEFCO Slovakia, an industrial and automotive logistics company that was founded in 2004 but grew quickly. By 2009 the company had expanded considerably, bringing in annual revenue increases of 10-15 percent.

That success, however, meant that the manual process that worked just fine five years before were no longer cutting it. Manual approvals for invoices are one example.

"When we are growing we are purchasing more and when we are purchasing more, we are receiving more invoices," said Michal Bugar, head of IT at GEFCO Slovakia, in a **case study** for a business process software company. "Our invoice volumes were increasing so we needed a better, simpler way to process them."

At the time, the company allowed a week for invoices to be validated, then between one and two days for the invoice to be processed in the accounts department. In the meantime, the invoice had to travel between sites to be approved by as many as three managers.

This was unwieldy, so GEFCO turned to a local partner to help them implement an automated solution, which integrated with its existing electronic document system and Microsoft applications. All the company's employees can access the system, so approvals are no problem. Now, rather than sending a paper invoice rocketing around the company, invoice validation can be accomplished in just one day. Contractors receive their payments in days, not weeks.

By using automation to improve customer experience in call centers

Call centers were invented to save money – banks adopted calls centers in the 1980s, in order to free bank branch employees from basic transactions like balance inquiries and enable employees to concentrate on activities that turned a profit. That hasn't worked. Call centers are now experiencing the same problems as bank branches in the '80. Customers are avoiding self-service to call customer service about basic issues, which costs the company money and clogs the phone lines, meaning that the 10 percent of customers with complex issues that require a conversation with an agent are on hold for a long time. Additionally, some of companies' own practices and mistakes generate calls to customer service.

How should businesses fix their contact centers? Not by starting with the representatives answering the phone. **Instead, they should look to the back office, and the cumbersome business practices that have evolved there.**

- Customer service organizations need to direct easily-handled or preventable calls to online channels.
- Inefficient back-office processes need to be better managed, preferably automated, to eliminate the problems that cause some of the angry calls.

By automating time-consuming processes in Human Resources

Tedious and time-consuming manual processes have no place in HR. You don't want your employees waiting on your staff for important forms or approvals, and you don't want your HR staff to be bogged down with busywork instead of doing the important and complex work of managing your workforces. **There are many HR processes that can be automated to remove steps and remove room for error:**

1. Onboarding

Few processes have so many steps and so many interactions for a company as the onboarding process. Filling job requisitions, canceling a job posting, setting wage levels, orientation, contract signing, new hardware and software assignments and on and on. So many steps delay the process and open up room for errors - not the way you want to start with new employees.

2. Offboarding

Not the most fun process to talk about, but it's a business reality. What is your process for when a job ends? There are exit interviews, termination documents, continuation of benefits programs, returns of equipment and access cards, taking security precautions with sensitive systems and more. Ensure all exiting employees are handled in a consistent, compliant and secure way through automation.

3. Grievance Processes

You likely have a formalized grievance filing process already. A grievance can end up being part of a termination or lawsuit. Either way, ensure your company is diligent and consistent about tracking grievances by using a digital system and not just paper.

4. Training

Ongoing training is important for a happy and relevant workforce. Use an HRIS system to ensure you are offering your employees training opportunities consistently. A system that integrates into your overall HRIS stack will help you track your current offerings, see where your employees are in their personal development plans, see what opportunities are most popular and plan for future training needs.

5. Job Postings

Staffing a company of any size is a never-ending fitting of pieces into a shifting puzzle. Jobs come and go as technology changes and businesses refocus. The only way a modern HR department can keep up is by using an automated system for job postings and applicant submissions.

6. Benefits

Between gas stations, ATM machines and grocery store checkouts people are used to self-service these days. Ensure your employees can be self-reliant with benefits administration as well. Offer them an employee-facing benefits administration system and let your team be there to act as consultants rather than paper pushers.

7. Time Sheet Approvals

The days of tracking a paper time card and getting a supervisor sign-off are long gone. Implement a digital time and attendance program to help ease the flow of paper through your company. Minimize payroll issues in the process.

8. Vacation/Leave Requests

Vacations are important - especially for us Americans who tend to overwork ourselves. Ensure your employees stay healthy by taking their time off. And ensure vacations are used and not over-used. Automate the process of requesting and approving vacation and personal time requests.

9. Tracking Safety Hazards/Incidents

Stay compliant and improve your safety record by automating how hazards, incidents and post-incident follow-ups are managed in your company.

10. Promotions/Demotions

An employee status change requires tracking other changes - wages, vacation, bonus amounts, training requirements, reporting duties and more. Ensure consistent and error-free administration of promotions and demotions by using an HRIS for the task.

Read these blog posts to find out what you should know before automating HR processes:

[WHY YOUR BUSINESS SHOULD CONSIDER AUTOMATING](#)

[HR PROCESSES](#)

[5 QUESTIONS TO ASK BEFORE AUTOMATING AN HR](#)

[PROCESS](#)

Chapter 2: Getting started with BPM

Questions to ask yourself before you automate a process

1. Is There Already a Well-Defined Process?

Does the process you are seeking to automate have a well-defined, well-used process already? The task of automating it will be easier if so. The more the process is completed in varied, non-linear manner the harder it will be to automate. The task of automation will have to start with more tightly defining the process and eliminating extra steps.

2. Can You Double Dip?

Will automating this particular process provide more than one benefit? Like getting data entered directly rather than on paper, and being stored in a more secure fashion once entered? Look for processes that net your

company the most value possible.

3. What's the Upgrade Process?

Technology never stands still. Software is revised. Hardware gets upgraded. When planning for a new automation project it's easy to focus on the immediate value the project promises. Think past that. Once you have the process in place how does it get upgraded? When can you upgrade it and not affect employees who want to use it? Are there other systems either feeding data into this new process, or grabbing data from it? What happens when those systems need attention?

4. Will the New Automation Improve Your Brand?

Not your public-facing brand. Your company also has a brand to applicants, new hires and existing employees - an employment brand. Will this new process improve that? Will it make employees happier, more engaged and less likely to quit?

Any BPM project begins with understanding what processes are already in place at an organization. There are a few steps an organization must take when getting started with BPM:

- Understand the process that needs to happen
- Find out what process is actually happening
- Identify the parts of the process that are causing inefficiencies
- Design a new, efficient, automated process using a technological tool

However, just because you have a tool that can improve any process does not mean you need to automate everything your organization does right this instant.

Start small. Chances are, since you've invested in BPM, you have at least one inefficient process in mind that you'd like to automate. If you choose to focus on that process you wouldn't be alone; a [recent study](#) found that most organizations tend to focus on one process at a time when they undertake BPM projects.

You may want to start there, or you might want to choose your process more strategically, in order to get an early success that will build confidence in your BPM initiative. If you choose to strategize BPM adoption, your first process should fulfill these requirements:

- It should span your whole organization (or at least more than one department) so all your employees can experience the automation and its benefits
- It should be fairly simple to automate
- Automating this process should require input from your staff

Getting employee buy-in for BPM

Change is always hard and moving from a paper system you and your company know well to an automated system that's new to you might seem like too much for you – and for your employees – to process. BPM is wonderful for streamlining your workflow, but it won't work until everyone is on board is using it.

- Your employees may balk. Ultimately, BPM will make all of their lives easier, but right now it's just another thing they have to learn and they don't know it well enough to trust it yet.
- Try to understand where they're coming from, because to successfully implement BPM, you've got to have employee buy-in.
- Here's what a full engagement strategy gets you:
- Participants are reassured that you'll be doing more with less, not replacing their responsibilities.
- An understanding of each person's role in the process, as well as individual technical aptitude and pain. The people directly involved with the process often have the most valuable feedback.
- The ability to design and introduce the system to accommodate many levels of technical aptitude. Users will not use a system if they don't feel comfortable with it.

There are a number of ways to get your employees on board:

Involve employees in process design: you know which processes are gumming up the works, but you don't know those processes as well as the employees who do them every day. Ask them for input on which processes need to be automated first, and how those processes can be improved. Chances are, they will have ideas. This will also allow them to retain ownership of the processes.

Ask for feedback after a process has been automated: Your first try is probably not going to result in perfection. Ask for feedback, and then use that information to fine-tune your process automation. If employees feel they're part of the process, they're more likely to embrace it. They may also see places where they'd like to duplicate that process automation.

Training: It's easy to underestimate training, but it is a critical piece of a successful business process automation project. If users don't understand the technical replica, feel it's unreliable or find it difficult to use, they won't use it. Technical processes are dependent on the users. If they don't use it, the buck stops there.

In fact, projects often fail when proper training does not happen. Training – whether it's led by an instructor, online training, or training provided by a consultant – is a good way to give your staff the time and space they need to get familiar with your new tools and comfortable with the process of BPM. Just be sure the training aligns with the breadth of technical expertise among the process participants. Automating some business processes introduces a number of new technologies to users, and they will need to be properly trained on all the systems.

Concerns about huge or overwhelming processes

The process of taming a chaotic business process is two-fold:

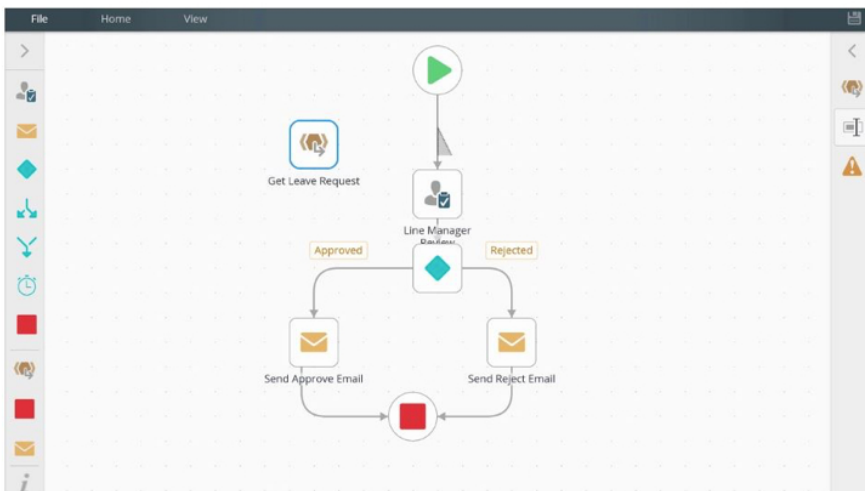
- Document your existing process
- Break down the big process into smaller chunks

A process may seem too big to get your head around, but you need to know what the process looks like, no matter how unwieldy it is. You can't manage it until you know exactly what you're dealing with. Some organizations might be worried about bringing IT consultants in to help because they feel as though they do not understand and cannot explain their processes. That's where a process flow – one of the tools of BPM – comes in. You can map a big process by creating a flow that shows you all the steps, in order.

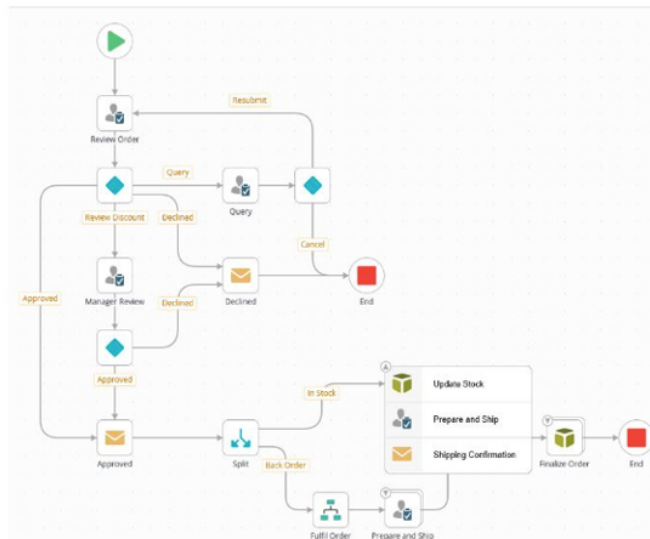
This might seem like a daunting task, but it's worth doing because once you map your process, you can start breaking it down into smaller pieces. Taking that big process a little bit at a time will help you drill down on problem areas, find pain points and adjust little inefficiencies will make a difference.

What does a process flow look like

Processes are mapped using process flows. Below is an image of a simple process – a leave request. As you can see, there are really only two options – the line manager can accept or reject the request.



Below is a more complex process flow. This flow – which represents the filling of an order – has multiple steps: the discount needs to be approved, and the process changed, depending upon whether the items ordered are in stock.



Process flows can be even more complex than this, so mapping each process you want to automate is important.

The steps of automating a process

1. Process Champion - Identify a Process Champion

The person in the role of Process Champion must be someone with a vested interest in the success of the project. It doesn't necessarily matter what their role is within the company, but champions should have an understanding of the process, a clear vision of the company's initiatives and a vision for how automation of this process progresses those initiatives. The champion not only represents the process participants but must hold them accountable to any change.

2. Expectations - Decide the Outcome Expectations

What is the purpose of the business process? Is it cost-effective to try to automate? Here are some factors to consider:

- Evaluate the lifetime cost to automate the process in terms of:
 - Hardware
 - Software
 - Time
 - Resources
 - Process Management
 - Maintenance
 - Support
- Determine the return on investment schedule.
 - Continuous improvement of the process is probably where the most return on investment opportunities will reside. This encompasses business intelligence, process efficiencies, predictive analytics and machine learning.
- Identify specific, known efficiencies that should be realized in the base functionality.
Post go-live considerations:
 - How will we validate any efficiencies gained?
 - Where will the maintenance responsibility lie?
 - Where will the support responsibility lie?
 - Where will the continuous process improvement responsibility lie?
 - What are the data expense requirements in terms of reporting, KPIs, dashboards, BI, analytics and machine learning?

3. Requirements - Capture Business Requirements

Start with the physical process itself - it may not be efficient, but it serves a specific purpose and achieves a specific outcome

Use any number of technologies needed to capture it in a way that spans audiences and withstands time. In theory, you are translating the physical process into technology, so the end solution should be the best documentation. That's the true technical replica of the business process.

Good tools for capturing processes may include:

- Prototype
- Wireframes
- Storyboards
- BPMN 2.0 flowcharting
- Use cases
- Mapping physical locations with people and data flow
- Augmented reality

4. Base Functionality - Determine Base Functionality

Determine the base functionality needed to go-live and start the transition off of the physical process. The physical process can still be used to supplement the technical solution. It can also be used as a back-up measure, just in case the technical solution breaks or doesn't work for some reason.

Remember the 80/20 rule. The expectation is that on average, to more quickly realize the benefits of automating the business process, only 80% of the functionality and features need to be implemented before the first release because they meet the desired outcome. The base functionality will probably be a subset of the business requirements captured in step #3.

Make sure users understand that, unlike physical processes, technology-assisted processes can be more easily enhanced, adapted to user feedback and will improve with subsequent releases.

5. Engagement - Engage ALL Process Participants

Earlier, we talked about the importance of buy-in. Most business processes entail a multitude of technical skills

Earlier, we talked about the importance of buy in. Most business processes entail a multitude of technical skills, from the least technical to the most technical. However, the participants you engage must entail the multitude of the business process roles, which is usually just as extensive. If some participants aren't involved, the business process may not be replicated accurately in the technical solution.

6. Implementation - Feature Implementation

Start with base functionality and build upon it, breaking up the requirements captured in step #3, until the first release.

7. Testing

Testing is important to verify the end product aligns to the requirements and ultimately translates the physical business process accurately. Plan for extensive "role" testing and conduct the necessary training (#7) to facilitate robust, thorough testing. When appropriate, the physical process can be used to parallel test the solution.

8. Release - Go-Live, Plus

Go-live isn't the end of the project, it's just the first release. Plan for support, maintenance, DRP, change control and anything else necessary for the solution. Post go-live activities will determine the success of the solution. These may include continuous improvement efforts as well as auditing and accountability to ensure the tool is being utilized.

9. Measuring Success

Positive participant feedback and utilization are both obvious indicators of project success. But ideally you've been able to integrate other quantitative measurements (step #2) into your project plan.

What if your project didn't go-live? Not to worry – that doesn't mean it wasn't successful. Participants may determine that automating this particular process isn't justified anymore. Perhaps priorities changed, scope change impacted the outcome expectations or business processes changed. A discovery effort that leads to valuable new business insight may also be considered a success.

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Chapter 3: Business Process Management tools and software

Flow

Microsoft Flow is a lightweight process automation software. It connects your applications to form simple workflows – linking Outlook with OneDrive to save all email attachments to a OneDrive account, for example. If you've used the free service If This Then That (IFTTT), Flow will feel familiar to you; it links applications with chains of commands to automate tasks.

Flow is business process management for small businesses or for organizations that might not have experience with BPM.

For example, Flow can be used to:

1. automate individual employees' manual tasks
2. create workflows that affect the organization as a whole
3. trigger a more complex process automation

For example, any employee in an organization with the Microsoft toolset can create a workflow to easily automate a repetitive manual business process, using the templates included with Flow. Here at Omni, for example, we use Flow to automate our payroll notifications and even to help our sales opportunities process.

AI DPA Machine learning

AI, RPA, Machine Learning

What would **Artificial Intelligence** mean for your workplace if it were directly and deliberately applied to your organization's business processes? For answers, let's look at the different kinds of machine intelligence available.

Robotic Process Automation (RPA)

Robotic Process Automation is probably the simplest version of a thinking computer. Using rules-based commands, RPA automates the sort of repetitive tasks that are performed the same way every single time. These are the sorts of dull administrative tasks that machines are better at than people because machines follow rules well and don't get tired, and the tasks never vary. RPA is used for validation, for example, or for diagnostics. Like assembly-line robots, RPA frees up human workers for more complex, creative tasks.

Machine Learning (ML)

Machine Learning is smarter than RPA, because it's a methodology in which machines actually learn. Under ML, software and machines detect patterns and adapt to the changes in those patterns. ML allows machines to do work that humans are not as good at; taking in hundreds of thousands or more of data points, gleaming meaningful insights and making decisions or suggestions based on that data.

Artificial Intelligence (AI)

That brings us to Artificial Intelligence, the most intelligent of the bunch. AI allows software to make decisions with a human level of intelligence. AI allows software to make basic decisions based on massive amounts of data, the sorts of decisions that would take time for a human to make. There's a lot of back and forth in scheduling a meeting, for example, especially if several people are involved and they're not all on-site. AI compares everyone's schedules, looks at conflicts, converts time zones, and can offer a range of meeting times that work for everyone. If everyone's schedules are updated, a long scheduling email chain is avoided.

Conclusion

Discussion of Omni's internal BPM expertise

Omni's BPM consulting team lets organizations reclaim lost time by ridding them of inefficient manual processes. We help organizations take stock of their existing processes and pinpoint the ones that eat up time, energy and resources. Then we work together to automate those processes and let your business run more efficiently. Our consultants can mentor your staff through the project, manage the project or execute the full project for you.

Omni's first step is always to understand your business; our consultants ask you to describe your problem, then ask targeted questions to reveal any additional details or challenges that might be bogging down your business. Our consultants' experience allows them to look beyond the presented process to see if your business is experiencing similar inefficiencies in your organization's other processes.

After we evaluate your needs, we come up with a menu of services, and walk you through every option on the table until we find one that's right for you and your budget.

We are Microsoft partners

Omni is a **Gold partner with Microsoft**. For 20 years, Omni has worked with Microsoft technologies to deliver hundreds of successful solutions that span application development, application integration, data & analytics, artificial intelligence and cloud technologies.

Gold certification means we've proven ourselves: we're delivering solutions at the highest level using Microsoft technologies, we hire staff who specialize in Microsoft's products and services and we offer the kind support to our customers that they can't get anywhere else.

Today, as one of Microsoft's Gold partners, Omni pushes the limits of digital evolution with a portfolio of cloud-first, data-driven applications that optimize operations, enhance customer service and transform service and delivery for our clients and their customers.

Interested in learning more about **business process automation** and how it applies to your industry and role? Check out our **vlog around all things BPM**. This series discusses the broad strokes and finer points of business process management.

Ready to automate your business process and reclaim your employees' working hours? Contact us to start improving your BPM today.

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Omni is an employee-owned technology consulting and software development firm. We listen to your technology needs and design a solution to help deliver your business goals.

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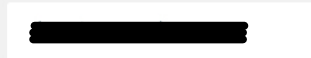


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