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POINT OF VIEW

Why You Should Consider Process Automation in Retail

Process Automation in Retail

How can process automation in retail benefit the industry? Well, before we get on to the detail, let's take a look at the benefits of Robotic Process Automation (RPA) in any industry.

What is Robotic Process Automation?

Robotic Process Automation (RPA) uses software bots to automate business processes. RPA technology is a platform that enables you to build, deploy and manage software bots that can imitate human action by interacting with digital systems using interfaces designed for people. Actions include navigating systems; understanding what is on the screen; completing keystrokes; extracting and inserting data; and performing defined actions.

> RPA bots mimic human interaction with computer interfaces to make processes more efficient.

The use of bots removes the need to spend time on routine, repetitive, data-heavy processes that impact staff workload. By removing the need to do these tasks, staff are now able to focus on the more important, productive tasks that may have been put aside for administration.

PwC estimate that 45% of work activities could be automated. This shows RPA is an opportunity to improve the accuracy and timeliness of nearly half of the business processes within an organisation, why not take advantage of RPA?

On top of the base level business processes, process automation in retail can be utilised in various ways. Retail is built on processes designed to give the best experience to the consumer - where improvements can be made to increase satisfaction, they are, or should be, optimised.

Processes within retail span not only the business itself, but past the point of sale and down the supply chain. Managing the processes that take place is no easy feat and is completed traditionally by staff in an office. RPA can make the managing of various aspects of retail more efficient.

How To Set Up Effective Process Automation?

By understanding the business pains of your organisation, you can see if RPA is the solution you are searching for. If you are looking for problems RPA can solve, you are doing it the wrong way - you will not get the most out of the capabilities RPA provides.

Are customers complaining about slow returns or long waits for customer services? Is your supply chain disjointed and uninformed? These are all areas where RPA can help boost internal operations and improve customer experience.

By finding out the business needs first, organisations can evaluate how efficient existing processes are and where improvements are possible or necessary. This itself is beneficial, as it ensures that you aren't just papering over the cracks but that a fully realised solution is being implemented.

> Responsiv offer free process discovery workshops as a way to help businesses assess their existing processes and improve upon inefficiencies.
>
> Building on this, we also help identify the processes that fit the criteria for automation and run through how this would be done. To find out more, contact us today!

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What Is RPA Used For?

Here are a few examples of scenarios where process automation in retail can improve efficiency:

Top 3 Use Cases of Robotic Process Automation in Retail

Some of the classic examples of where process automation in retail can streamline operations and reduce costs include returns and refunds, compliance and business reporting, supply chain and inventory management, and workforce management.

Returns, Refunds, and Exchanges

Looking at returns, refunds, and exchanges, RPA can automate the process from start to finish. Should a customer request an exchange online, a new order can be automatically created and processed.

Refunds can be triggered upon customer request, pulling all the necessary aspects of a refund (credit refund, product return etc.) into one process that needs to be monitored to ensure it is completed. If a product is not sent back to the distributor, then the credit refund is not processed to the customer as they have not completed their part of the return.

Once the customer has sent the product back, they can also receive updates on where in the process their return is - seeing whether it has arrived at the distributor's warehouse for handling and when they should expect to get their money back.

A lot of online retailers already have paperless return systems where customers apply online for their return, making the process a lot quicker once the product has been sent back. This improves customer experience and satisfaction as they get their money refunded quicker than if an employee had to monitor and authorise the return.

Inventory and Supply Chain Management

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> The ROI for RPA is weeks or months rather than years

RPA can even help in identifying and contacting potential suppliers. This is done by searching companies that provide certain products - the bots having been set with specific conditions (cost, location, etc.) - and sending quotation requests if the supplier fits the criteria. Once a quote is received, the bots can review the documents and approve or decline that option. At relevant times in the process, the bots can alert humans for intervention, i.e., for exceptions to criteria, or for issues with the supplier's correspondence/performance.

Workforce Management

The management of workforces is a way RPA can help in the front of house functions of retail as well as back-office. This is due to the trend predicting capabilities of RPA, bots find trends in consumer habits and staff are allocate according to demand.

This also applies to back-office such as customer services or in the warehouse, again to ensure that staff and resources are allocated as and when needed so that there are no shortages or overallocation of resources. RPA therefore can optimise the way retailers utilise their resources in a way that is tailored to individual demands.

What's Next?

To conclude, Robotic Process Automation in retail can be utilised in a variety of beneficial ways. The applications go beyond those for general business, being specific for the industry with certain ways RPA could optimise the organisations based on their business needs.

To find out how RPA can benefit your organisation contact Responsiv.