

[GUIDE] The Customer Service Pulse for Robotic Process Automation 2017



Business Systems (UK) Ltd
462 London Road, Isleworth, Middlesex, TW7 4ED, UK
T: +44 0800 458 2988, E: contact@businesssystemsuk.com
www.businesssystemsuk.co.uk

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THE CUSTOMER SERVICE PULSE FOR ROBOTIC PROCESS AUTOMATION - 2017

INTRODUCTION

As consumers, we have come to expect immediacy and accuracy for our typical dealings with companies, for example seeking an answer to a question, placing or changing an order, or just updating our details. On the contrary, when faced with a more complex issue, we look for empathy and understanding and, it is on these occasions that we tend to seek human assistance. Finding the perfect balance between the two represents a big challenge for Customer Service, while at the same time it offers a significant opportunity to improve not only customer satisfaction but the bottom-line as well. And this is where automation can help.

Robotic Process Automation or RPA has become the new technologically driven revolution and, as with all revolutions, it has its supporters and its critics. From major IT companies to large consultancies, they are all experimenting on new ways that Robotic Process Automation will help transform high volume, resource intensive processes that are repetitive and manual. Supporters highlight among the benefits of Robotic Process Automation improvements in quality, operational efficiencies and cost optimisation. Critics rave about the potential impact on the labour market.

THE SURVEY

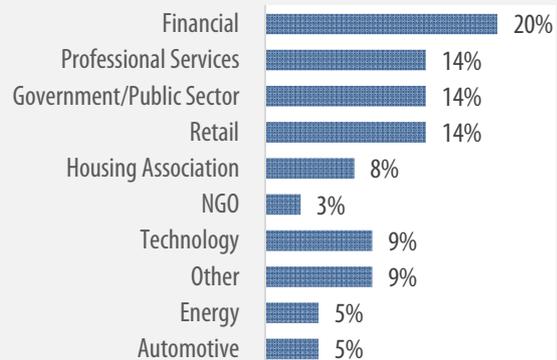
With major research companies predicting that in the next few years the vast majority of customer relationships will be run without human intervention, we wanted to find out how familiar customer service professionals are with Robotic Process Automation and whether it is gaining momentum as an integral part of the customer service strategy.

WHO ARE WE?

Business Systems - the UK's largest independent workforce optimisation specialist.
We help contact centres implement the technologies that can boost agent performance, improve customer interactions and transform efficiency.
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SURVEY RESPONDENTS BREAKDOWN

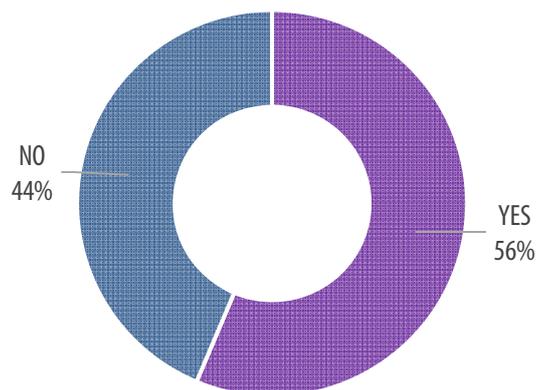
We targeted professionals and organisations with a passion for customer service. The responses came from a wide range of customer service operations and related professionals across different sectors.



Q1. ARE YOU FAMILIAR WITH ROBOTIC PROCESS AUTOMATION (RPA)?

In the past couple of years or so, there has been a lot of talk, research and articles on robotic process automation and how this technology will affect consumers, workers and businesses alike. Despite the extensive coverage however, our survey shows that a good number of customer service professionals are not yet familiar with the topic. In fact, we had quite a few comments asking for additional information on the technology.

Are you familiar with Robotic Process Automation (RPA)?



SO WHAT IS ROBOTIC PROCESS AUTOMATION?

Robotic Process Automation uses sophisticated computer software to automate processes. It uses software ‘robots’* or ‘virtual workers’ to eliminate repetitive manual tasks and deliver greater consistency and control over systems, data and processes, with unparalleled accuracy and speed. What does this mean for an organisation? A recent study from the London School of Economics found that the major benefit of robotic process automation was a high return of investment, from 30% to 200% in the first year. Longer-term benefits included better customer service, increased employee satisfaction and better workflow.

Examples of customer service related processes that can be automated with the use of robots, include:

Automate routine desktop activities such as application launch, field population, information copy/paste, template auto-fill and calculations

Streamline self-service processes

Integrate new/updated data into fields across all associated front- and back-end systems with only one entry

Trigger automated processes and events based on certain call outcomes

Record processes and tasks in a customer’s ticketing or CRM system

Compare, validate and process data from online form submissions, print forms, documents etc.

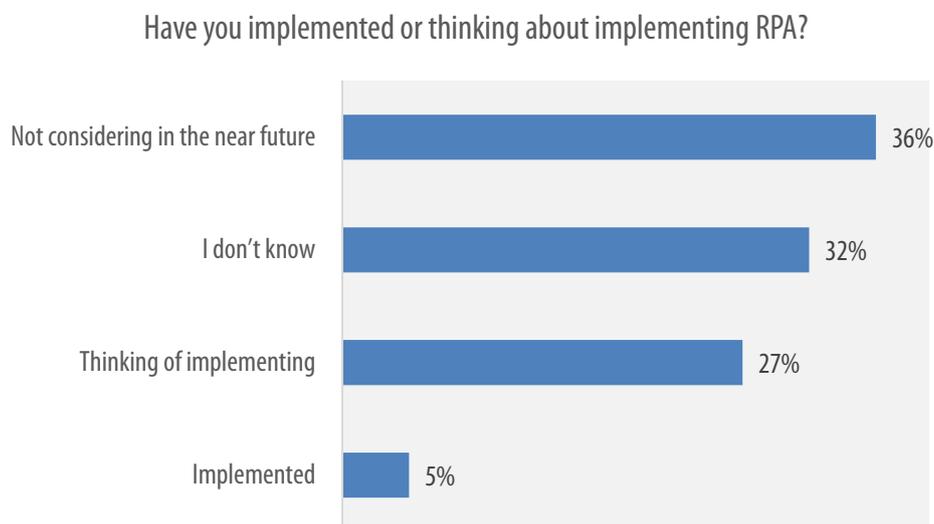
Review documents, facilitate user feedback and automatically move documents to the next step for approval

**according to Wikipedia a robot is defined as a software application that replicates the actions of a human being interacting with the user interface of a computer system*

Q2. HAVE YOU IMPLEMENTED OR THINKING ABOUT IMPLEMENTING RPA?

Based on the type of companies that have implemented robotic process automation or are currently at the scoping stage, it seems that there is no ‘overarching’ sector or company size, paving the way to automation. What is perhaps more important however is that 32% of customer service professionals are not aware whether their organisation has implemented or is planning to implement a robotic process automation solution.

Given the transformational character of this technology and the significant efficiencies it can bring not only in customer service, but also within other process intensive areas like Finance, IT and HR, it is essential that organisations consider all aspects in terms of people, processes and technology. Activities and responsibilities may change and people should be involved from the early stages in order to make the most out of robotic process automation.



Organisations that could benefit the most from automation have a high volume of processes that have some or all of the following characteristics:

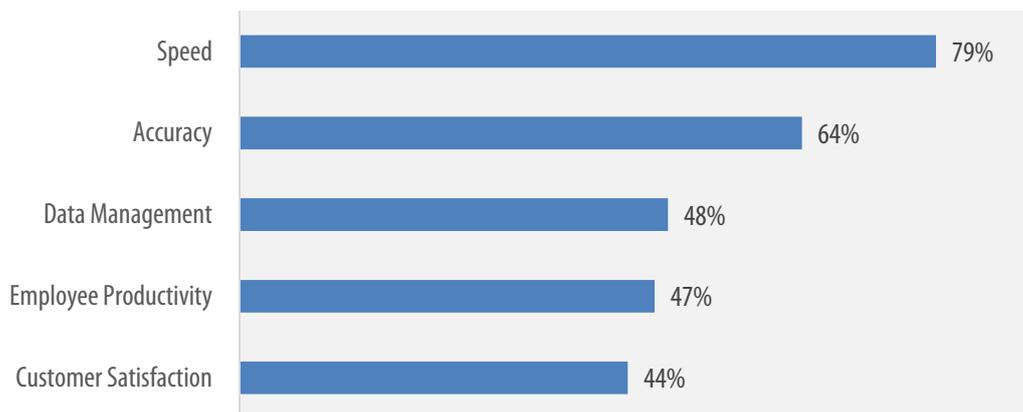
Data intensive	Involve manual calculation
Repetitive in nature	Prone to human error
Rules-driven	Sensitive content
Are electronically triggered	Can be performed out of office hours
Structured/standardised	Run across multiple systems
Need limited human intervention	

Q3. WHAT DO YOU THINK ARE THE BIGGEST BENEFITS OF RPA FOR CUSTOMER SERVICE?

The majority of the respondents recognise speed (76%) as the number one benefit of robotic process automation followed by accuracy (64%). Indeed these are the two main traits characterising this technology. Robots perform tasks upto 4x faster than a human worker would and with nearly 100% accuracy, ie no mistakes.

Respondents seem to be more sceptical over the potential benefits of robotic process automation with respect to data management, employee productivity and customer satisfaction. The point here is that, given a well thought out and well designed implementation of a robotic process automation solution, these areas are intertwined and any efficiency gained in one will cascade over the others.

What do you think are the biggest benefits of RPA for customer service?



Speed: Robotic Process Automation can reduce the process time of standardised tasks and workflows by up to 90%. What’s more, it does not need to take breaks so it will work 24/7/365.

Word of caution: processes automated by RPA can only go as fast as the systems that support them.

Accuracy: Robotic Process Automation is in essence a sophisticated computer software and therefore does not make mistakes in its calculations. If it encounters an incident that does not fit its rules or parameters it will alert a human to inspect and continue with the next task.

Word of caution: Robotic Process Automation may be error-free but it is not fail-safe. From systems failure, to a software glitch, to simply misinterpreting a customer command, it is best practice to always provide a human option.

Data Management: Many customer service organisations today collect and process data from multiple channels, such as web, email, social, call centre etc. Robotic Process Automation helps eliminate redundant effort and errors by capturing, analysing, cross-referencing and sharing data across platforms and channels.

Employee productivity: By automating time-consuming processes employees are able to focus on better servicing the customer, while at the same time the overall duration of the call (average handling time) decreases and the rate of successful call completion increases.

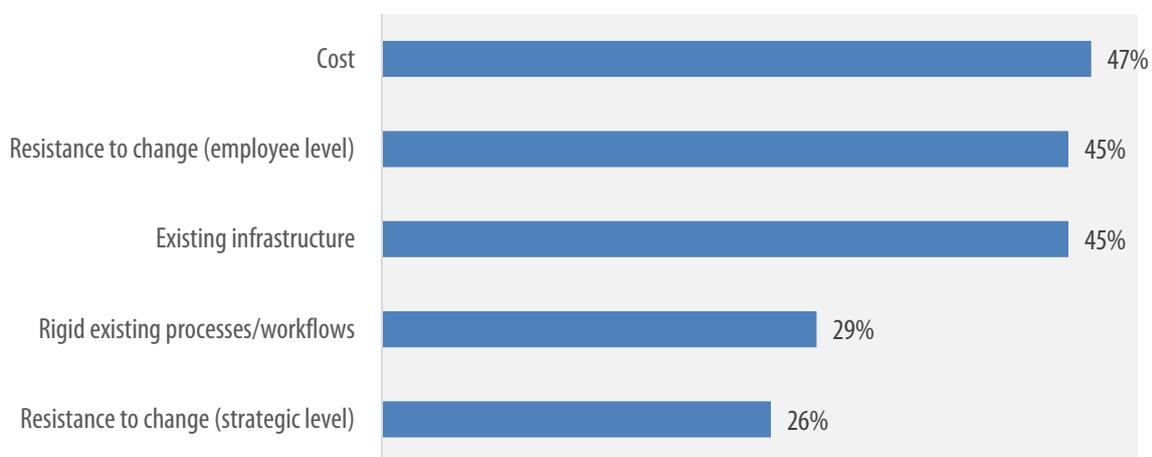
Customer Satisfaction: Robotic Process Automation brings speed and accuracy in customer transactions across channels, helping to streamline their overall experience with the organisation. In doing so, it frees up time for employees to engage in more relationship-based interactions, whilst improving customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Word of caution: Just as your customer service operation changes and improves to meet the ever changing needs of the customers, robotic process automation should not be treated as a static discipline. Reviewing, testing and fine tuning the robots should be an ongoing process to achieve ongoing optimisation in line with the business.

Q4. WHAT DO YOU THINK ARE THE BIGGEST DISADVANTAGES OF RPA FOR CUSTOMER SERVICE?

Cost seems to be one of the key obstacles for the deployment of robotic process automation closely followed by concerns over the suitability of the existing infrastructure and employee acceptance. This question attracted many comments, most of them highlighting the loss of the human touch as a main disadvantage. A few respondents also mentioned the lack of clarity and understanding of what exactly is needed in order to implement such a solution.

What do you think are the biggest disadvantages of RPA for customer service?



There are two main points to be taken into account when considering robotic process automation for customer service:

Cost & existing infrastructure - A massive advantage of robotic process automation is that it sits on top of the systems that are already in place of the organisation and does not require any special integration. The technology is also highly configurable and does not require much coding -instead it learns from users, 'copying' their processes and steps. The actual cost of robotic process automation solutions, although it varies, is relatively low and quickly offset by the cost efficiencies achieved in a short period of time.

Word of caution: To expect that robots will fix existing systems that are no longer fit-for-purpose is a mistake. Organisations should assess if an upgrade of their infrastructure as a first step would be a better option for addressing ongoing problems and issues.

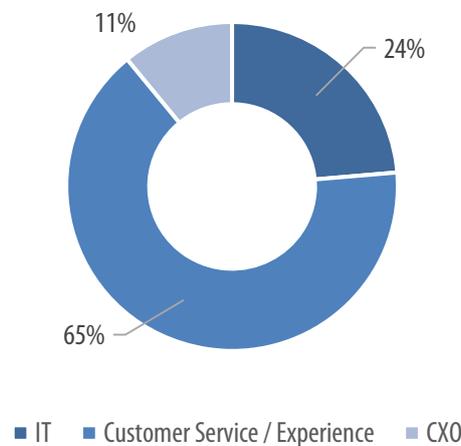
Employees - The biggest challenge organisations face is integrating human and automated roles effectively. Any change that comes with the implementation of a new technology can be stressful for employees as they might experience alterations in their responsibilities. Robotic process automation provides an opportunity for employees to enhance their role, and management should enable them to upskill, specialise and re-train where necessary. Frequent communication to ensure employees are fully informed about what is expected of them is essential to successful adoption.

Q5. WHO DO YOU THINK SHOULD DRIVE AN RPA INITIATIVE IN YOUR COMPANY?

The majority of the respondents identified Customers Service as the function to drive a robotic process automation initiative within the organisation, with many of them commenting that it should be a joined effort in collaboration with IT and senior management. To a great extent this is correct insofar as Customer Service has the most input to provide on workflows, processes and tasks that are hindering productivity, performance and ultimately customer satisfaction.

Word of caution: Robotic Process Automation is a highly scalable technology. An organisation can choose to automate one process and increase the usage of the robot(s) as it starts to have a better grasp of what a robot can do. However, if it continues to grow on an ad-hoc basis, there needs to be a strategy and a roll out plan in place. A successful robotic process automation initiative should be a business-wide collaborative effort with sponsors from Customer Service, IT, HR and other functions.

Who do you think should drive an RPA initiative in your company?



CONCLUSIONS

As with any innovation there are several stages to adoption and in customer service we are seeing some early adopters, but there is still some way to go before organisations embrace robotic process automation.

The benefits are manifold with the most prominent being cost efficiency and operational agility. Before you decide to embark on the robotic process automation journey, there are some key questions you will need to answer:

Which processes would be good candidates for automation?

What would the operational impact be from automating these processes?

What would the business impact be from automating these processes?

Who and how would be affected by this transition? Employees? Customers?

Which specialised resources and skills would be needed to deploy and maintain the new 'automated' model?

What training and upskilling needs will potentially emerge across the workforce?

Will external expertise and experience be required to facilitate the planning and adoption process (in the form of consultancy, training, solution assessment etc)?

What deployment and pricing model suits your needs best?

Remember that robotic process automation is all about change. Once you decide you are ready to make that change you will need a strategy to guide the transformation of your operation and a communication plan to ensure that all parties are on-board.

Let's discuss. Whether you want to assess if a Robotic Process Automation solution would actually be the right option for you, or you are thinking of procuring a solution but would like to know more about the available choices, we can help you answer all the critical questions so you can make the best decision for your customer service centre: T: +44 0800 458 2988, E: contact@businesssystemsuk.com

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