



RPA and the 'automation first' mindset

Robotic process automation is a powerful way for agencies to start investing in AI



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ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE HAS a key role to play in agencies' digital transformation efforts, and robotic process automation is a natural starting point. RPA can incorporate many technologies that are critical for digital transformation, and in particular, it can help agencies deliver better customer experiences by seamlessly working across multiple user interfaces on multiple platforms.

RPA takes over necessary processes — highly transactional, rules-based yet low-valued work — that have typically been performed by humans, and it is most successful when the process owners create the automation modules, which are then combined to build a completely new end-to-end workflow.

Interestingly, we see a significant number of agency leaders from the business side adopting UiPath's RPA technology. That is good news for IT-led transformation efforts, which can sometimes lag when those in charge of business operations are not actively involved.

Now that the Trump administration has announced the American AI Initiative, agencies can use their investment in RPA as a down payment on the research and development called for under the initiative. Agencies that delay adopting AI forgo the opportunity to reduce operational costs, increase capacity, eliminate backlogs, improve compliance and allow people to stop working as robots for their computers. Instead, employees can dig more deeply into customer issues, conduct more insightful analysis and improve citizen engagement.

Agency pioneers leading the way

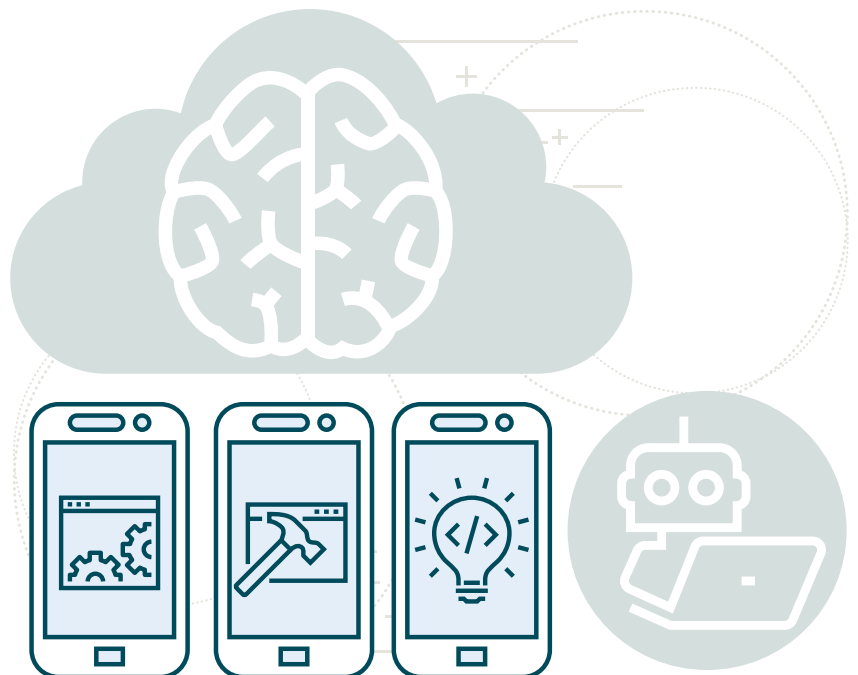
At UiPath, we have been seeing a growing interest in RPA across the government. Last year, the NASA Shared Services Center and the Defense Logistics Agency led the way with creative, secure pilot projects that gave their bots the credentials to perform cross-platform and cross-domain work. DLA combined "cloud first" with "automation first" when it deployed RPA into a Microsoft Azure environment.

The General Services Administration continues its leadership role with a crucial effort to help other agencies understand how to start an RPA program. GSA is also facilitating discussions about the role of Centers of Excellence in scaling and sustaining such programs.

In addition to GSA, the IRS, National Background Investigations Bureau, Naval Air Systems Command and others are reporting that bots are helping them reallocate thousands of staff hours to higher-value work, perform hours' worth of manual work in a matter of minutes, onboard new employees in hours instead of days and save enough money to allow RPA programs to be self-funded.

All that progress happened in a single year. 2019 is poised to be the year when agency leaders adopt an "automation first" mindset to support digital transformation and offer more efficient and effective citizen services.

It's the year when executives will ask, "Why isn't that being automated?"





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Training RPA bots to ‘see’

To begin, agencies should concentrate on the most obvious AI opportunities — those that involve multiple people in the same role performing standardized and manually intensive tasks. Government operations are complex, and RPA bots must be able to recognize and make use of unstructured and semi-structured documents.

Understanding natural language and

gleaning information from images — known as computer vision — are the next capabilities that will expand automation opportunities.

Graphics processing units are essential for complex machine learning and particularly for training computer vision models. UiPath seeks to be the first vendor to introduce technology that enables the creation of RPA bots that can accurately

and intelligently process images.

By making the most of those technological advances and adopting an “automation first” philosophy, agencies can quickly and effectively find ways to incorporate AI into their activities and ultimately transform everything they do. ■

Jim Walker is federal CTO and director of public-sector marketing at UiPath.



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