Robotic automation goes mainstream: Accenture announces agreement with IPsoft
OVUM VIEW

Summary

Accenture has announced an agreement with IPsoft to integrate IPcenter, IPsoft’s autonomic platform, with its infrastructure services delivery tool set. The announcement is an important reference point for the adoption of process and robotic automation within the context of service delivery. Although adoption of these innovative approaches is increasing, the supply side has been uncharacteristically coy about discussing these concepts. The transparency resulting from these approaches is probably one of the main reasons for this coyness in an industry that does not usually shy away from hyping even marginal developments.

The announcement of this collaboration with Accenture, one of the most established yet innovative system integrators, points to a tipping point in the adoption of process automation. This is further underlined by demonstrations of robotic automation in other service providers’ delivery centers and by the emergence of technology providers that go beyond rules-based processes. However, despite the marketing presence of providers such as IPsoft and Blue Prism, the context of the discussions should move from the narrow confines of robotic automation toward the wider implications of process automation on service delivery.

Robotic automation is at a tipping point

Robotic automation is leading to new levels of comprehensive process automation, as it addresses the shortcomings of other concepts of industrialization and service-orientated architecture (SOA). Robotic automation is different from more tactical automation approaches, such as run-book, policy-based, IT-workload, and data center automation, but from the perspective of industry stakeholders there is a lack of clear differentiation between these different approaches.

The innovative technology vendors in this space are relatively small, so will need to address how they mitigate risk and scale their support. The global partnership between Infosys and IPsoft was a first reference point for how these technologies can be scaled and supported on a global level (see Infosys’s partnership with IPsoft breaks new ground in service automation). Almost all service providers are working on similar concepts, often blending them with proprietary systems. However, demonstrations of robotic automation in service delivery centers are largely under the covers of an NDA. Therefore, the collaboration between Accenture and IPsoft will provide a better quality reference point; it could be argued that company-specific reasons influenced Infosys’s step to be the first mover. This reference point is crucial, as the market currently lacks case studies that convey the experiences of large-scale deployments of process and robotic automation.

IPsoft evolves both its sales reach and its portfolio

The agreement with Accenture is a critical milestone for IPsoft in referencing its capabilities and sales reach. The collaboration has been touted for a considerable time, which we consider an indication of thorough due diligence and strategic intent. The associated press release states that "autonomics will play a key role in an intelligent infrastructure by enabling constant monitoring of business processes and their application behaviors," pointing to a subtle widening of IPsoft’s value proposition. The evolution of IPsoft’s portfolio underlines an extension from a narrow infrastructure focus toward
broader business adoption by expanding offerings for business processes. Following IPsoft’s launch of F&A offerings, the latest reference point for this shift is the development of project Amelia, a virtual service agent that shifts the notion of robotic automation toward a combination of augmented reality and cognitive models.

**Accenture continues to focus on the value side of infrastructure and on partnering**

Accenture has stayed largely away from traditional infrastructure approaches, and thus the agreement is complementary to the Accenture Cloud Platform and its concept of Agile infrastructure. The partnership focuses on helping clients quickly anticipate and react to business and market changes through the adoption of an "intelligent infrastructure" – one that can predict trends, expand, and contract automatically as needed, and move business processes across platforms in and out of the cloud. This extends to the exponential rise in the number of devices that need to be managed within an infrastructure environment. Automation and orchestration are important components in building an intelligent infrastructure. Within this context, IPcenter increases the ability to move and monitor workloads between infrastructure stacks, particularly hybrid clouds.

The agreement should benefit from Accenture’s mature approach to alliances, which includes collaborating with competitors – as evidenced by its recent partnership with Dell to deliver cloud services to the mid-market. Furthermore, the contract with IPsoft is based on both license fee and business outcome elements, underlining Accenture’s emphasis on enhancing the business value of IT. However, to enhance the business value, it is imperative to take a wider view of organizations’ standardization and industrialization journeys. Approaches to process automation need to be discussed within this context. As with SOA and cloud services, there are no shortcuts to overcome the "leg irons" of legacy processes and technology.

**APPENDIX**

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**Further reading**

*Beyond Labor Arbitrage: The Impact of Automation and Robotics on Service Delivery*, IT019003230 (June 2013)

*Infosys’s partnership with IPsoft breaks new ground in service automation*, IT019-003205 (April 2013)

*Arago combines robotic automation with innovative engagement models*, IT019-003288 (November 2013)

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