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Use Case eCommerce

#Automate happiness

Ariba Platform: Automate your procurement

Companies thrive on the orders they receive from their customers. Regular customers, i.e. customers who order regularly, are particularly welcome. In the following story, a well-known German e-commerce company is one of the lucky companies to have such a customer. This customer regularly placed between three and 12 orders per day - nice! Unfortunately, there was a small catch: the cumbersome and slow ordering process.

Is it possible to automate incoming orders?

This is precisely the question that ecommerce, which is not described in detail, ultimately faced. Important to know: The company uses SAP Ariba software for incoming orders from customers. There, the customer can very flexibly define how an order mask should look. However, this often poses a challenge for the internal customer care team, because the company's own warehouse must always be compared with the ordered goods, delivery data must be transferred, and goods that are no longer available must be marked as such or rejected.

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Within this process, there were many manual and repetitive steps. There are no standard interfaces (APIs) between Ariba and, for example, SAP as a warehouse system. The use of RPA bots was an excellent solution in this case.

When considering and evaluating processes, the automation potential and the automation capability play a very important role at the outset. Fortunately, the automation potentials of classic Ariba platform processes are in a very good range. This is especially due to the possibility of scaling the automated process vertically. Once the first regular customer has been automated on the platform, developing similar automations for other customers requires much less effort. In the case at hand, e-commerce had initially dedicated itself to a customer process that had a high order volume.

The next automations could then be easily copied. This meant that e-commerce did not incur any additional costs or time. After the first Ariba bot went live, customers with an identical process could simply be “switched on” - virtually by “copy and paste”! In a further step, the electronics manufacturer then looked for customers who required only minor changes to the initial process. In this way, the company was able to scale the SAP Ariba platform within a very short period of time without any major effort.

The Process in detail

Using access to the customer's ordering system, the electrical retailer was able to view the customer's orders and - as requested by the customer - confirm delivery capability and delivery date. If a new order was placed by the customer, it appeared in the Zendesk customer service and CRM sales software and created a ticket.

Using the order number from this ticket, an employee then logged into the customer's order portal and searched for the order to be delivered at a specific time - manually, mind you! Then it was a matter of matching the ordered item with the warehouse system and checking whether it was still in stock at all and available for delivery at the specified time.

An employee then had to log back into the customer's order portal and confirm the delivery or a partial delivery - if there were not enough items in stock - and the delivery time. This actually completed the order and the customer knew when to expect delivery. Occasionally, however, the process was further complicated by a number of exceptions, such as bundle orders with different delivery times.

Reach your goal with RPA and API

To prepare for the use of RPA, exceptions are critical, among other things. Exceptions are rules within a process that represent planned deviations, such as:

- “What happens if a purchase order contains multiple items, not just one?“
- “What happens if an item receives multiple items?”
- “What is the order volume per day?”

This is just a sample of many questions that should always be asked before developing such automation. The e-commerce described recorded up to 14 orders per week from more than 30 customers on the Ariba platform - that makes 60 orders per week! A considerable volume and, in the manual state, an enormously personnel-intensive process.

RPA

RPA stands for "Robotic Process Automation" and describes the automation of processes, through digital software robots (bots).

The ticket system used, Zendesk - in which all orders were managed centrally - had a standard API, which suggested a hybrid solution between RPA and API. An RPA bot thus used the Zendesk API to pull the tickets from Zendesk and then checked in the SAP system whether all orders could be delivered in full or in part by the desired time. Once it had collected all the necessary information for the orders in the SAP system, it logged into

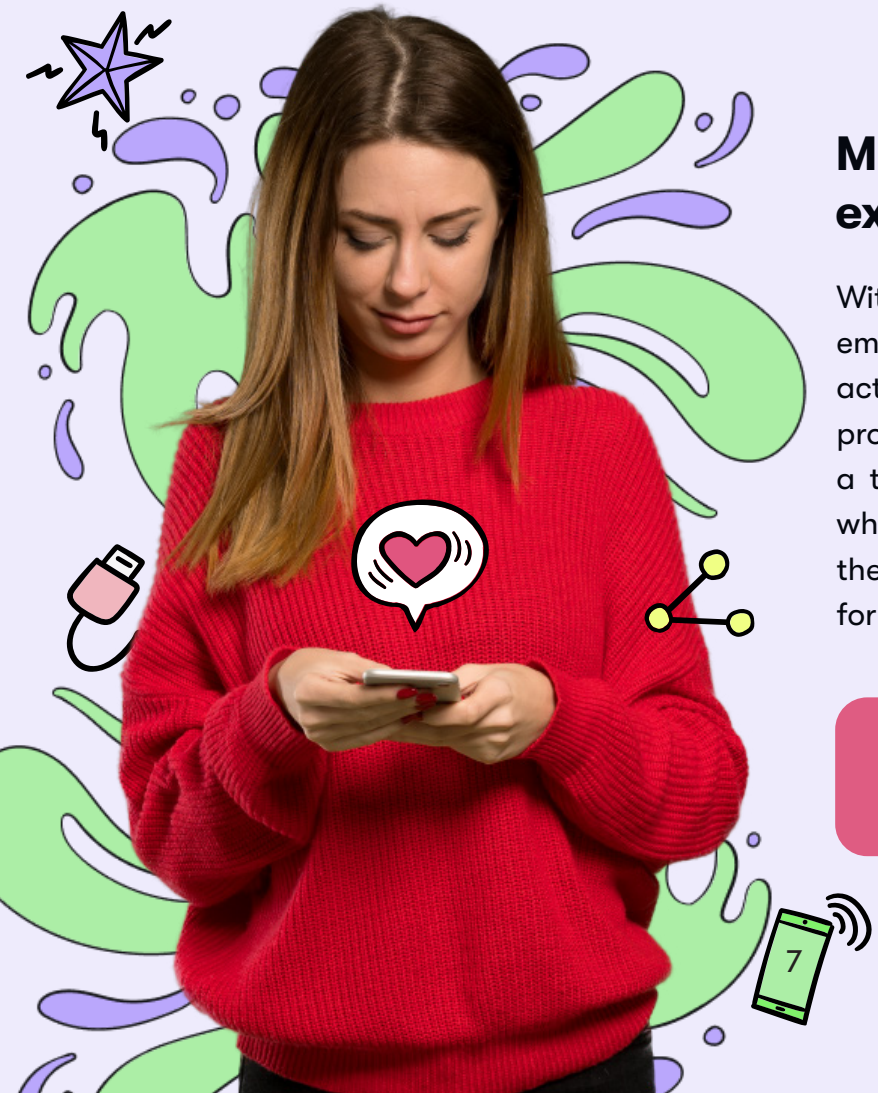
the customer's order portal and transferred the information from the electrical retailer's SAP system to the customer portal. It then compared each individual order with its information from the electrical retailer's SAP system and entered in the respective order whether the order was complete, partially available or not available at all. In addition, the RPA bot added or confirmed the various delivery times. The order was thus completed.

RPA and API for the win!

The use case shows that focusing on individual process automation technologies does not usually lead to success. On the contrary, RPA and APIs can complement each other, depending on the constellation, to solve specific automation requirements.

Especially when companies use applications that work well for their requirements, but the transfer capabilities of data to other applications leave much to be desired, automation solutions that combine RPA and API are a good way to support higher-volume transaction workflows.

The combination of APIs often discounts a pure RPA project. Fewer steps need to be developed in the bot. This minimizes the overall development time and thus increases the return on investment (ROI). Therefore, care should always be taken to use the best combination of different technologies for the individual process steps.



Manual editing only for exceptions

With the help of RPA and API automation, employees almost don't have to take action. Only when orders could not be processed properly, the RPA bot creates a ticket with a tag via the Zendesk API, which is forwarded by the internal logic of the Zendesk application to an employee for manual follow-up.

API
An API makes it possible to exchange data between software and program parts.

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While in the past, up to 60 orders a week had to be processed manually, today there are approximately only three exceptions that require manual follow-up.

The results

For the employees of the electronics manufacturer, automation has greatly simplified their day-to-day work. The free time resources can now be put into new, perhaps creative projects. For the e-commerce customers, this means greater reliability in confirming or changing orders. If the bot's exceptions are cleanly defined, the error rate of an RPA bot is virtually zero.

For the company, automation thus enabled a cost advantage and higher customer satisfaction. Employee satisfaction and acceptance of process automation should not be underestimated, especially in the early stages of introducing automation. Employees who are enthusiastic about automation can act as ambassadors for further automation projects.

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The use case was planned, executed and accompanied by Bots and People and is considered a success story for process automation within the company - a large German e-commerce for electronic devices. The example can be applied to all public tenders in general, but its content relates specifically to the Aumass eTendering platform.