

# A Strategic Approach to Business Automation



**Neil Ward-Dutton**  
VP Automation, AI & Analytics  
Europe, IDC



**Elena Semenovskaia**  
Research Director, European  
Intelligent Process Automation  
Systems, IDC

## The Business Automation Imperative

Business automation is at the top of organizations' investment priority lists and remains a strategic initiative for their development. Business automation is undergoing a new wave of adoption by organizations, and the recent emergence of generative AI (GenAI) has amplified interest in opportunities to apply automation technologies to business problems.

*In IDC's Future Enterprise Resiliency and Spending Survey (January 2024, n = 881), 10% of organizations indicated that GenAI has already disrupted their businesses; 23% reported that GenAI is starting to disrupt their operations; and 37% stated that they expect GenAI to have a significant impact in the next 18 months.*

As organizations continue to strive for both operational excellence and customer experience excellence, which are consistently named as the main drivers for business automation projects, they will look to invest in long-term, value-driven automation projects. Strategic approaches to automation step outside the boundaries of individual technologies: they must consider how a wide spread of technologies can impact work — and today, this means that GenAI (as well as predictive AI, powered by machine learning) must be part of the picture.

At a time when business automation is being reinvented, organizations are optimistic about the benefits that lie in wait. However, technology leaders are also under pressure from business stakeholders to leverage GenAI, and quickly: a CIO of a global manufacturing firm recently told us, "If I don't show progress on GenAI implementation to my board, I have a target on my back." Organizations need to pursue a consistent, strategic approach to business automation grounded in the needs of business processes in order to minimize the risks associated with an accelerated, but poorly considered, implementation of GenAI.

The promise of business automation technologies lies in their ability to accelerate the whole business process improvement life cycle: from the discovery of business problems to improved process modeling, and from faster application building to deep operational insight generation and process excellence. A strategic approach to automation requires organizations to balance the potential of new technology innovations, while closely assessing their value across all phases of the business process improvement life cycle, in order to maximize business outcomes and minimize risks.

**This paper outlines why a strategic approach to business automation is so important. It highlights what causes organizations to struggle in their responses to market pressures and identifies what a truly strategic approach to automation entails.**

## The Challenges of Volatile, Uncertain Environments

The volatilities and uncertainties that organizations have become used to since 2020 show no signs of abating. The forces driving these uncertainties are often organization- or industry-specific: a headwind for one organization or industry could be a tailwind for another. For example, the transition to net-zero emissions might cause major headaches for some manufacturers but create huge opportunities for companies that have sustainability built into the heart of their business models. Whatever the industry, there is no stable "new normal" for organizations.

*IDC's research shows that organizations are keen to protect their investments in automation and AI from budget cuts, regardless of the pressure that might flow from economic conditions. In IDC's Future Enterprise Resiliency and Spending Survey (March 2024, n = 887), automation and AI are ranked second (behind security, risk, and compliance) as the investments most resilient to budget cuts. This view is*

*gathering momentum, with the share of respondents reporting protection of automation and AI spending rising from 16% in June 2023 to 26% in March 2024.*

Organizations must increasingly operate and act in volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous environments. They must think boldly about how to use digital technologies to “level up” their situational awareness and improve their ability to drive quick, consistent strategic responses.

## Digitizing Inside Is as Important as Digitizing Outside

Organizations commonly start their digital transformation journeys by focusing on digitizing the “outside” — that is, the edges of their products and services that touch customers, particularly in relation to sales and marketing activities.

So far, most digital transformation work has revolved around creating digital experiences that focus on the early parts of customer journeys, specifically the point at which prospects start to be aware of products, through to purchase and sign-up. Digital “storefront” innovations — such as mobile apps, public APIs for digital services, and automated customer service chatbots— are all part of this work.

But for a customer journey to deliver end-to-end excellence, it is not sufficient for the website and mobile experience to be high quality. If a customer signs up for a service through a modern mobile app, but is then hampered by slow onboarding, inaccurate billing, or poor complaint handling, the end-to-end customer experience is still poor. The customer journeys that so many organizations are striving to digitize are powered, behind the scenes, by multiple

and diverse aspects of business operations — and those business operations need to be digitized too.

**Digitizing your “inside” — your business operations — is at least as important as digitizing your “outside.”**

## The Advent of GenAI as a Business Automation Technology

AI is not new, and some digital leaders have been using the technology in specific use cases (such as fraud detection, personalization, and security threat detection) for many years. But the emergence of GenAI assistants and copilots, powered using natural language conversations, brings the promise of general-purpose AI technology that might help to automate multiple kinds of administrative tasks and workflows, and so extend the scope of what can be done to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of business processes.

*In IDC’s Future Enterprise Resiliency and Spending Survey (January 2024, n = 881), when asked about their investment plans for GenAI-related development, data, services, and infrastructure assets in 2025, respondents said they expect to see 38% of investments contribute to process automation, 35% contribute to task automation, and 28% contribute to new business offerings.*

Interest in GenAI is huge, from the boardroom to the shop floor. Employees are typically curious about the technology’s ability to automate simple tasks like generating summaries of meeting minutes, while C-level executives are keen to explore how it can help their businesses develop new products and services, improve revenue generation, and enhance competitive differentiation.



## Employee Empowerment in the Era of GenAI

*In IDC's EMEA Future of Work Employee Experience Survey (March 2024, n = 4,300 employees), over 60% of respondents said they expect some tasks or components of their jobs to be partially or fully automated in the next two years. Furthermore, senior business leaders expect that GenAI will dramatically change the way people carry out their daily jobs. According to IDC's Worldwide C-Suite Tech Survey (August 2023, n = 895), 60% of respondents said they expect GenAI to increase business efficiency through enhanced employee productivity in the next 18 months.*

GenAI has the potential to positively impact employee productivity in multiple ways — from empowering knowledge workers with data analysis and decision-making support, to supporting frontline workers via the automation of aspects of customer service administration. At the same time, GenAI has the potential to provide new approaches to skill development through personalized learning experiences and the provision of real-time feedback.

Organizations have an imperative to explore how GenAI can provide better employee experiences as well as improve business processes. It is likely that the use of GenAI as a means of boosting productivity and enabling a creative workplace environment will soon become a key differentiating factor driving employee retention.

## The Need for Compliance and a Responsible Approach to AI Implementation

Regulatory compliance is a foundational element of doing business for all organizations, but the cost of compliance is becoming increasingly challenging. Cross-industry regulations (such as the GDPR and the forthcoming EU AI Act) and industry-specific regulations (such as PSD2 in banking) come into force regularly.

Increasingly, though, compliance is only one branch of a much broader strategic imperative: the need to

be transparent and trustable. Compliance might be about acting in accordance with industry rules and laws, but markets are demanding that organizations also act ethically — and in a demonstrable, transparent way.

Working to comply with regulations using armies of administrators to gather, collate, and analyze information, and then report on it manually, is foolhardy. The same is true for areas such as sustainability, where markets are demanding transparent, ethical behavior based on clearly committed targets.

At the same time, organizations are concerned about the risks of implementing GenAI. With AI technologies and systems becoming progressively integrated into people's lives, concerns about the ethical implications, potential risks, and misuse are now commonplace. Regulations around the deployment and development of AI are progressing differently in the European Union, the United States, and the Asia/Pacific region as authorities strive to strike a balance between the need for protections against possible GenAI-related issues and a desire to embrace the strategic innovations that GenAI could deliver for their economies.

In this context, organizations (with the support of technology vendors) are trying to establish internal regulations to leverage GenAI in their own ways. *According to IDC's GenAI Awareness, Readiness, and Commitment Survey (August 2023, n = 1,363), about 40% of organizations are concerned that GenAI use will expose them to brand and regulatory risks, and more than one-third of C-suite executives are prioritizing insights into regulatory risks and the IT operating costs associated with GenAI over other concerns.*

Organizations need to develop policies, and implement tools, that support the principles of fairness, transparency, accountability, and data protection if they are going to deliver long-term value from GenAI.

## What Holds Transformation Back?

The imperative to use business automation technologies to modernize business operations, drive business process improvement, and help with the responsible implementation of new technologies like GenAI is clear, but the path forward is not always easy to navigate.

### Skill Gaps

IDC estimates that the worldwide shortage of full-time developers will rise to 4 million in 2025. It is abundantly clear that there are not enough professional software developers to enable organizations to digitize their operations with traditional tools and approaches.

*In IDC's CEO Survey (February 2024, n = 354), 34% of respondents named talent and skill gaps among the top factors that will have the greatest impact on organizations in the next 12 months, alongside economic pressures and cybersecurity threats.*

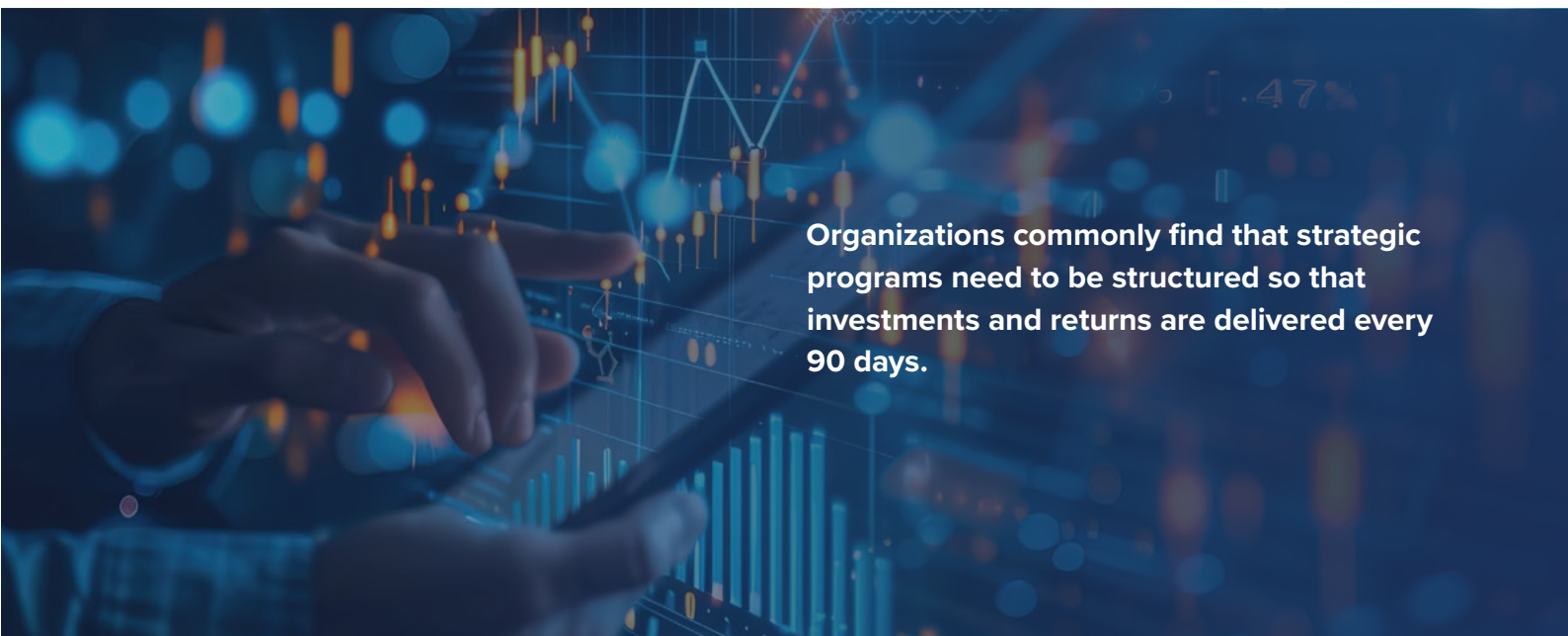
When it comes to responding to the GenAI opportunity specifically, CEOs are increasingly focused on issues such as retraining employees, recruiting prompt engineers, and managing the overall cultural changes associated with GenAI use. *In IDC's CEO Survey (February 2024, n = 354), 30%*

*of respondents identified a lack of business-relevant AI skills (i.e., prompt engineers, low-code/no-code developers, and business analysts) as the biggest skill gap hampering organizational efforts to deliver AI solutions.*

The survey respondents believe that the shortage of AI expertise will widen and that enterprise leaders will continue to struggle filling job vacancies in these areas. More than half of the respondents believe they do not have the necessary skills to deliver on planned AI initiatives over the next 12 months.

### The Need to Prove Automation's Value

Ten years ago, organizations needing to transform aspects of their business operations could make large-scale IT software investment cases requiring millions of dollars upfront and anticipate payback in three to five years. Now, organizations commonly find that strategic programs need to be structured so that investments — and returns — are delivered every 90 days. There is no room for “big bang” investments. While organizations must have a clear transformation destination in mind, they must be prepared to work toward that destination iteratively and deliver measurable value at every step.



**Organizations commonly find that strategic programs need to be structured so that investments and returns are delivered every 90 days.**

As the business automation landscape matures, organizations are keen to justify their investments. The business value of automation initiatives is a burning question for organizations today: for example, *according to IDC's EMEA Automation Survey (February 2024, n = 500), the vast majority of organizations (94%) are currently measuring or planning to measure the benefits of automation.* After a period of implementing siloed automation projects that delivered isolated results, organizations are now looking at overall operational performance and trying to measure end-to-end business process improvements. *In IDC's CEO Survey (February 2024, n = 354), 48% of respondents indicated that "helping deliver measurable business outcomes" was one of the key characteristics that they value the most in a vendor (or technology partner) partnership.*

As new automation technologies arrive, the need to prove value continues to grow. After an initial huge acceleration of business interest in GenAI technologies created a wave of piloting and experimentation, organizations are now facing the need to deliver more than marginal personal productivity improvements by locating and implementing use cases that make a material difference to business metrics that matter.

### Narrow Approaches to Technology Use

Organizations often start their journeys to digitize their business operations with the automation of routine request processing, using tools such as robotic process automation (RPA). *IDC's CIO Sentiment Survey (October 2023, n = 361) shows that organizations are continuing to invest in RPA solutions, with the number of organizations planning to test or adopt RPA in 2024 being significantly higher than for other technologies such as machine learning or natural language processing (NLP).*

RPA has a role to play in addressing the automation imperative discussed in this document because it enables organizations to digitize behind-the-scenes

tasks that typically remain stubbornly "analog" even as new digital projects drive customer-focused innovations. However, RPA can only impact individual work tasks; its "sweet spot" lies in mimicking the interactions that human workers have with systems of record as they conduct daily administrative tasks. As it turns out, organizations see limited ROI from RPA use as it is mostly limited to simple tasks. Organizations that want to automate more than individual administrative tasks must look beyond RPA.

## The Benefits of a Strategic Approach to Automation

Organizations prepared to take a strategic approach to automation technology can overcome all the challenges described above. For example, with the right approach automation initiatives can:

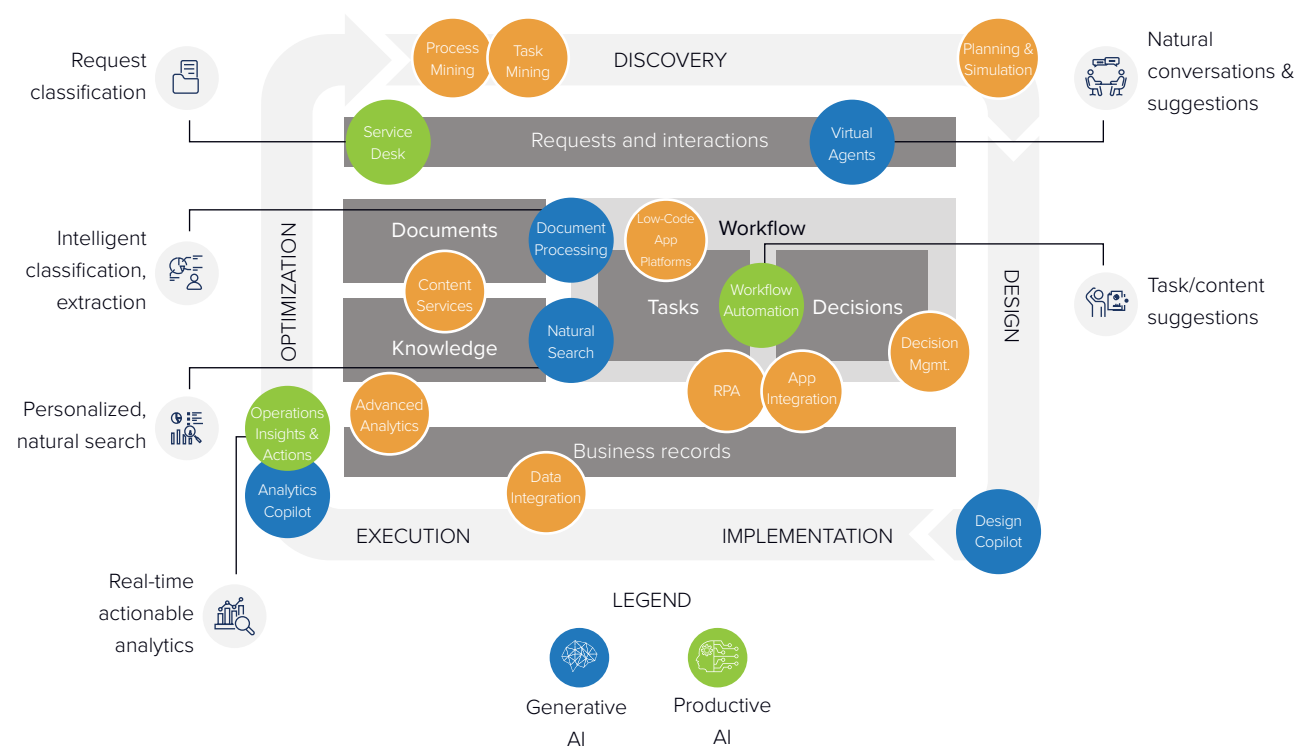
- Create a flexible bridge between legacy systems and processes, with all their inbuilt assumptions, and the current demands of always-on, work-from-anywhere workflows, tasks, decisions, and customer needs.
- Simplify and expedite the entire process of operational monitoring, analysis, and reporting in relation to compliance, trust, and sustainability initiatives.
- Eliminate the need for employees to spend time on routine, repetitive tasks, thereby giving employees more time to focus on high-value tasks that require human traits like creativity and empathy. Involving employees directly in automation programs equips them with new skills, drives innovation, and empowers them to improve their own environments.
- Provide a trusted, transparent environment that shapes, constrains, and directs the implementation of GenAI technologies and tools for specific, targeted business use cases.

## A Strategic Approach Starts with a Blueprint for Business Operations

A strategic approach must explore how business automation can add value across all aspects of work in business operations — not just individual tasks. Figure 1 provides a blueprint that shows the

different elements of how “work works” — and on that blueprint, every area is a potential focus for automation.

**FIGURE 1**  
The Framework for AI and Automation: A Blueprint for Operations



Source: IDC, 2024

### Across this blueprint, business automation technologies can add value:

- When work is initiated via a request received from an internal or an external customer.
- When making sense of documents that provide further information or context for the work.
- In making knowledge (about things like procedures, policies, and best practices) easy to consume and act on.
- In accelerating the tasks that must be done, and the decisions that must be made.

- In the orchestration of work via a workflow — which determines the order and assignment of work and defines how reviews or sign-offs must be carried out.
- In interactions with systems of record as the work is carried out and completed.

### Modern business automation platforms provide kits of tools that help across this work blueprint in different ways:

- At the bottom of the blueprint, RPA and application integration tools can automate tasks and actions.
- Intelligent document processing automates the interpretation of documents, providing actionable information quickly.
- At the top of the blueprint, virtual agents and chatbots help to automate and streamline aspects of request/interaction management and collaboration.
- Critically, process automation application development tools help to automate workflows, without necessarily automating individual tasks — and provide a common orchestration capability for orchestrating interplay between systems, people, bots, and data.

Modern business automation platforms bring all these capabilities together and, critically, make these capabilities available through low-code design and development environments that enable solutions to be built without the need for low-level programming.

With GenAI in the mix, and driving greater awareness of the potential of more mature approaches to AI, Figure 1 also shows examples of where GenAI and broader AI technologies can be integrated into business operations.

### Looking across the blueprint diagram, GenAI specifically can add value:

- In handling requests and interactions, by supporting natural conversation and suggestions via virtual agents.

- In business process and application design, with AI-generated code, application user interface, and process optimization suggestions (delivered by copilots).
- By providing relevant content to improve task execution and decision-making.
- By personalizing search and supporting knowledge sharing through human-like interactions.
- In document processing, by improving results of automated document classification and extraction approaches.
- With an overall conversational approach that enables the democratization of automation at every step.

## A Strategic Approach Empowers Cross-Functional Fusion Teams

A strategic approach to automation must explore how automation projects can be executed by broad multidisciplinary teams — not just professional developers. Low-code tools have great potential to help organizations escape the straitjacket of IT skills shortages. They are often promoted as vehicles to create and enable “citizen developers” — people who develop applications or systems on an informal basis, even though software development is not a formal part of their job.

Organizations are increasingly creating programs to allow non-technical staff to get more directly involved in creating and delivering automation applications. However, in practice, few organizations are delivering strategic value by simply asking “citizen developers” to build those applications by themselves.

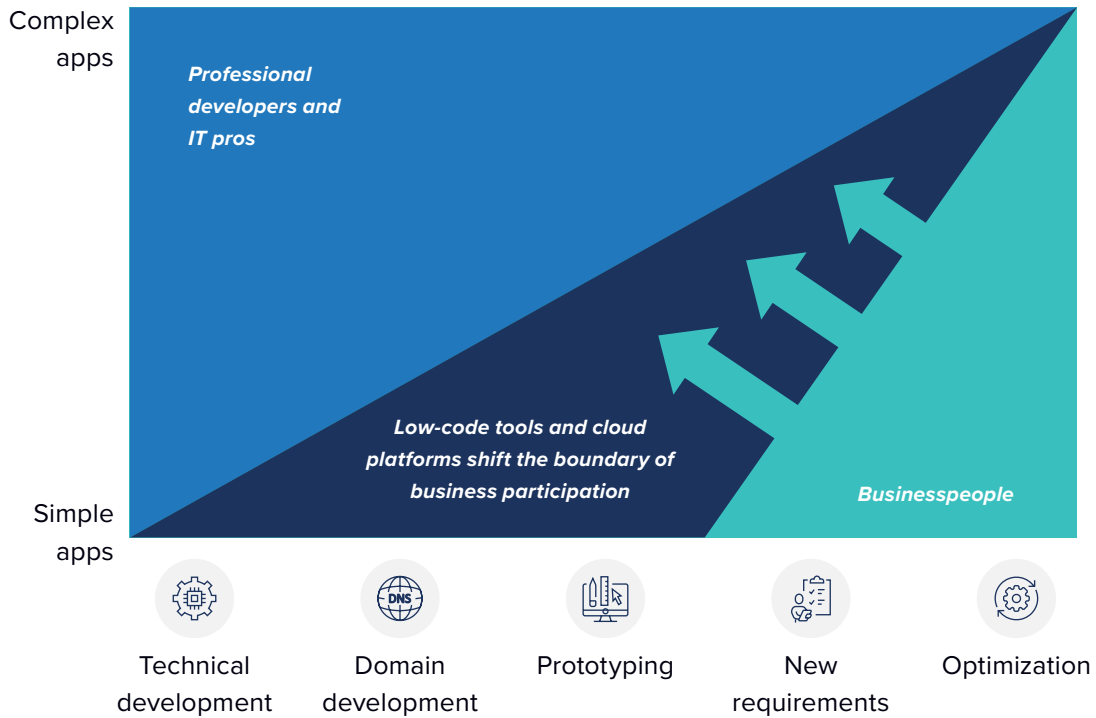
Instead of enabling non-developers to work alone to create automation applications, most of the value of low-code development tools comes from enabling multidisciplinary “fusion teams” with mixes of skills and abilities to work together to create applications. Rather than relegating businesspeople’s involvement in projects to the start (when new requirements are discussed) and the end (when applications need to be accepted by the business), low-code tools can



shift the boundary of participation, enabling more people to be more involved in more aspects of development and delivery.

Today, as more and more technology vendors include digital assistants and copilots into their tools, the low-code promise is being extended even further.

**FIGURE 2**  
**A Strategic Approach to Automation: Enabling Multidisciplinary Teams**



Source: IDC, 2024

## A Strategic Approach Streamlines Tech Complexity While Maximizing Use Case Coverage

A strategic approach to automation will uncover many different use cases for automation platforms, with different use cases having different usage and scaling profiles.

If your organization is ready to explore a more strategic approach to automation, it is important to consider your approach to technology platform selection. When organizations start exploring automation opportunities and use cases, it is common to find numerous small-scale vendor relationships

distributed around the business: there might be three relationships with RPA vendors, two relationships with AI platform vendors, two relationships with process automation vendors, and so on.

One major challenge with such a strategic approach is that economies of scale — in software licensing, vendor relationship management, skills development, and software asset reuse — are much more difficult to achieve.

However, as you start to seek out strategic technology partners, it is important to consider not only each vendor's technological capabilities and skills, but also the flexibility with which they license their software.

### Each of the traditional enterprise software platform licensing models have their own compromises:

- Per-user licensing works well if a group of users needs access to multiple applications; it does not work well with large populations of users or external users.
- Per-application licensing works well if a use case demands one or few applications with many users; it does not work well to incentivize new use case development.
- Per-developer licensing works well if development work is done by a small group of developers; it does not incentivize broadening out of development activity.
- Consumption-based pricing works well where processes and work volumes are already known, but it creates billing uncertainty if new use cases are being explored.

Ultimately, you should seek out business automation platforms that do not limit your ambition and look to work with vendors that can license in ways that align to your own needs in scaling development, applications, and users.

## Vendor Profile: Bizagi

### Company Background

Bizagi is a business automation platform provider with its roots in business process management (BPM). Headquartered in Washington, D.C., the company has over 500 employees located in offices in more than 56 countries.

Bizagi's launch of a free process modeling tool called Modeler in 2008 gave the company a vehicle that it has used to create a community of over 1 million users — and in recent years, the company has introduced a range of products and services that provide routes this community can take to drive strategic automation and transformation projects.

Bizagi's wider platform offering has over 1,000 customers, with concentrations in the financial services, healthcare, manufacturing, and retail industries. Key clients include Deutsche Post DHL, BNP Paribas, Unilever, Old Mutual, Bancolombia, and Manpower Group.

### Product Offerings

Bizagi positions its platform as a solution that is reinventing automation, using GenAI, orchestration, and low-code development as key enablers. This is in line with the main demand of end users — the support for business agility while increasing operational excellence. Bizagi's AI strategy focuses on delivering business results with GenAI, making it easy to adopt AI in a secure way, and turning data into information and insights.

The vendor offers a platform-as-a-service (PaaS) approach to its customers.

### The Bizagi Platform has six major capabilities:

- **AI Assistant:** "Ask Ada" is Bizagi's GenAI assistant that supports conversational analytics in natural language, actionable insights, and governance to end users. Users can ask Ada questions about the data in their applications and obtain key insights that they can act upon.
- **AI Agents:** Bizagi's AI Agents bring the power of GenAI to your business. Agents can be embedded into process automations, orchestrations, and apps or be made available on demand to users and service calls. To ease the adoption of GenAI, Bizagi helps fill the AI skills gap with industry AI Agent Templates and a prompt-builder copilot.

- **Bizagi Apps:** Users can create highly personalized applications using low-code development tools, leveraging the platform’s reusable elements and built-in governance features.
- **End-to-End Automation:** Technical and non-technical users can collaborate to design and implement automated workflows, along with task forms, business rules, integrations with third-party applications, and more.
- **Enterprise Orchestration:** Organizations can use the Bizagi Platform to orchestrate the work of people, RPA bots, third-party applications (via APIs), interactions with data sources, and AI services to fulfil the needs of end-to-end business processes.
- **Process Improvement:** With sophisticated business process modeling, simulation, and mining capabilities, customers can create a complete picture of how their business processes operate, explore improvements, and then monitor ongoing performance.

## Challenges

As business automation becomes an increasingly visible business concern at the highest levels, the pace of change within the marketplace for business automation technologies will accelerate. Established vendors with decades-long experience and heritage are competing against very well capitalized start-ups and scale-ups. Due to the nature of modern customer needs, these vendors are having to cooperate and partner with each other at the same time as competing for wallet and mind share.

Additionally, elements of the business automation technology landscape are increasingly being powered by AI and GenAI.

The competition among business automation vendors will intensify as automation platforms get infused with GenAI capabilities and it becomes more challenging to differentiate between vendor offerings. After a period in which automation initiatives were piecemeal in nature, organizations are increasingly tending to consider business value and ROI. In line with this,

automation is now seen more as a business domain than a general IT domain. Consequently, a strategic approach that does not focus on business outcomes becomes less valuable.

In this context, it is vital for Bizagi to focus on technology, product, and service packaging — that is, delivering a platform that is clearly focused on the needs of specific personas. It must be easy to use (i.e., enable customers to manage automation system life cycles effectively and at scale) and capable of boosting business efficiency.

## Conclusion

AI and GenAI have grabbed enormous amounts of industry attention. These technologies have crucial roles to play in helping organizations digitize end-to-end operations and speed up automation initiatives. AI helps deliver insights through the whole automation life cycle and democratizes automation further with GenAI natural language capabilities. With the aim of boosting overall efficiency, customers increasingly realize that automation is important for both external and internal processes — and that it brings the most value when these processes receive a holistic automation “makeover.” The growing complexity of processes and systems and the increasing number of stakeholders involved in automation demand a strategic approach to business automation. It is important that the strategy accounts for the latest technologies and tools — and correctly implements them within the automation life cycle. With GenAI being a hot topic that attracts the attention of stakeholders and non-technical people, it is critical to select a vendor and automation platform that minimizes the risks of ad hoc GenAI adoption driven by immediate value.

### Organizations seeking to develop strategic automation programs should:

- Look beyond a task-based approach to automation and explore how end-to-end processes leveraging systems, people, bots, and data can be

- orchestrated using a business automation platform infused with AI.
- Analyze the ways that a business automation platform can add value to automation initiatives. Look beyond the immediate value associated with orchestrating the activities of people and automated bots and explore how a business automation platform can improve end-to-end business process visibility and drive performance and improvement insights.
  - Mitigate risks by leveraging the features and governance capabilities offered by vendors when implementing GenAI-enriched solutions.
  - Look beyond simple productivity use cases to exploit more opportunities to apply AI technologies to improve decision-making accuracy and consistency within processes.
  - Find a business automation platform vendor that offers tools embedded with the latest technology, but that focuses on the ease of technology adoption, secure use and implementation, and business values it delivers. Today, the value of automation investments is under increasing scrutiny, and valuable outcomes are at least as important as the technical functionalities of selected solutions.

## About the IDC Analysts



**Neil Ward-Dutton**  
VP Automation, AI &  
Analytics Europe, IDC

Neil Ward-Dutton is vice president of AI, automation, and analytics at IDC Europe. In this role he guides IDC's research agendas and helps enterprise and technology vendor clients alike make sense of the opportunities and challenges across these very fast-moving and complicated technology markets. In a 25-year career as a technology industry analyst, he has researched a wide range of enterprise software technologies, authored hundreds of reports, and regularly appeared on TV and in print media. He initially studied and worked as a software developer and project manager.

[More about Neil Ward-Dutton](#)



**Elena Semenovskaia**  
Research Director, European Intelligent  
Process Automation Systems, IDC

Elena Semenovskaia is research director for IDC's European Automation, Integration, and Generative AI Strategies Program. In this role Elena takes part in regular IDC research and consulting projects. Elena has been working at IDC for almost two decades, covering various areas of the software and IT services markets, and has authored more than 50 analytical reports and white papers. Elena also contributes to the development of key messages and analytical content for events organized by IDC or by technology providers.

[More about Elena Semenovskaia](#)

## Message from the Sponsor



Bizagi is an enterprise software company that enables business transformation. Its platform empowers users to create low-code apps with built-in AI that automate business processes. The intuitive and business-friendly technology boosts collaboration between business and IT, delivering faster results. Bizagi powers global brands, including DHL, Unilever, Caterpillar and Bancolombia.

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IDC Research, Inc.  
140 Kendrick Street, Building B, Needham, MA 02494, USA  
T +1 508 872 8200



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