A 7-minute guide to Microsoft Automation

There's never been a better time to move forward with Microsoft Automation

The benefits of automation are well-established. From taking care of time-consuming or mundane tasks to the seamless integration of complex processes, automation has become intrinsic to the delivery of business value. Whilst automation has been around since the Industrial Revolution, digital transformation has accelerated the pace of development and some industries such as warehousing and automotive manufacturing now benefit from very high levels of automation.

Yet elsewhere, there is hesitation. Automation makes perfect sense, but the relentless pressure of daily business all too often gets in the way of getting started. If you are in that position and would like to discover how to apply automation to your business, we can offer you the clarity and support you need to get going. That's why we're called Nudge – we provide you with that little bit of motive force to get you started – and there has never been a better time to get going with automation. Read on to find out why.

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1.

The Microsoft Automation family can connect your entire business.

Both Microsoft 365 and Azure automation services offer a comprehensive range of connectors to support its ecosystem, as well as those of other vendors such as Adobe and SAP – familiar and steadfast features of the business world today. Ranging from desktop-based products such as Microsoft 365 and general-purpose systems such as SharePoint and Teams, to backend systems such as Dynamics CRM and Azure AD, and infrastructures like SQL Databases or Azure, we can connect these software components to support complex and bespoke requirements, to make your IT ecosystem run seamlessly and intuitively.

Figure 1 illustrates the five key technologies that interact with supporting or enhancing components such as connectors and AI: Logic Apps, Azure Automation, Power Automate, Azure Functions and Microsoft Flow.
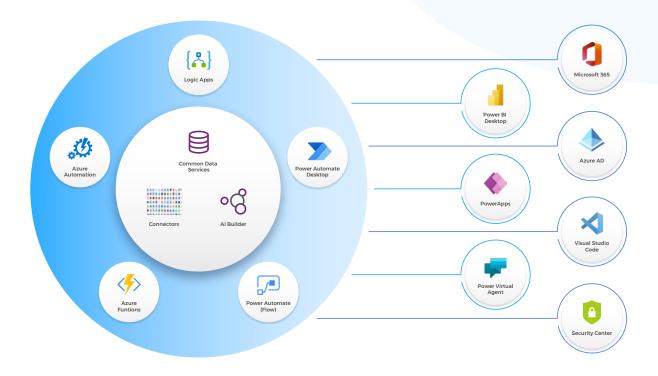

Fig. 1: Bringing together the essential automation components – data, processes and people – to be more productive, efficient and ultimately, valuable.

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There are many valuable benefits in liberating users from mundane tasks and enabling them to capitalize on using their unique strengths and skillsets in other areas of business. For example, legacy systems or complex workflows spanning multiple systems can be set up and run like a well-oiled engine. Robotic Process Automation (RPA) systems enable individual users without coding knowledge to automate repetitive desktop processes, and Microsoft is one of its key players. In an invoicing workflow, for example, the details can be extracted and uploaded, then prompted by an office worker to be sent out for approval, to then alert a team member to finalize the transaction by sending it to an ERP system (such as Microsoft Navision or from another vendor), which can extract and store the details.

Workflows can be highly personalized to organize documents, capture information from any format, and pass data onto a specified target, awaiting human checks and manual triggers where necessary. Automating small tasks such as these accumulate valuable quick-wins and open up the working landscape to more possibilities and further ventures. Data can be extracted from most sources, including emails and databases – hence, extensive connectivity is essential.

2.

Complexity isn't an issue.

Microsoft Automation provides solutions to all ecosystems in IT, however large or complex they are. We believe that any automation issue can be resolved, and that no requirements are out of scope. With Microsoft Automation, there are innumerable ways in which a highly bespoke solution can be engineered and mapped, according to specific requirements and any anticipated eventualities. We work across the IT ecosystem in its entirely to ensure that all interdependent components work together at optimum capacity.

If a challenging systems patch needs to occur where the workflow is critical to the outcome, this can be automated with some scripting knowledge – a straightforward copy-and-paste of a PowerShell script into Azure Automation will achieve this. The same approach can be used for onboarding new users and all that setting them up entails, streamlining an otherwise laborious and complicated process.

Azure Function is often used where complexity is high or where the scope is ambitious, or perhaps where the aim is to package multiple functions into one app. In serverless

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environments, it is possible to deploy custom code in almost any programming language. This is best suited to developers, who can directly code into this environment. This can be used for abstract and highly complex cases – for example, where time-critical feedback is needed from an integrated or legacy system which can't easily be mapped.

3.

It is available to everyone.

An automation ecosystem will both benefit everyone and be available to everyone. It consists of different automation services for all skill levels and workflow complexities. The days where we take a problem to the IT department are behind us: the workplace is being democratized, ready for a more robust, systemic future. No-code and low-code are for everyone from the tech-savvy enthusiast to the IT specialist; scripting, low-code, code and RPA are still within the comfort zone of the IT professional. More complex RPA is best suited to trained engineers and personnel, allowing the seasoned and specialized software engineers to focus on scripting and highly specialized operations. **Figure 2** illustrates strength of a holistic automation system.

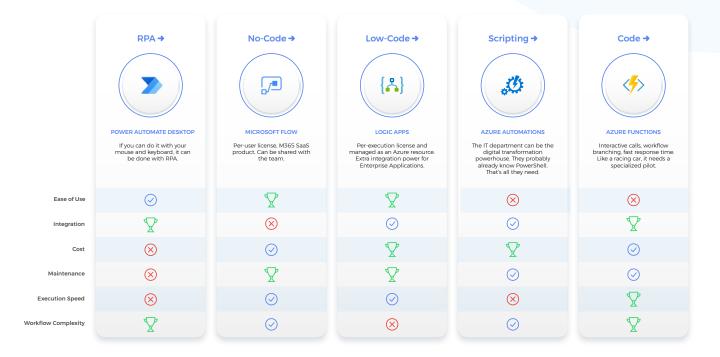|	RPA ➜	No-Code ➜	Low-Code ➜	Scripting ➜	Code ➜
	POWER AUTOMATE DESKTOP	**MICROSOFT FLOW**	**LOGIC APPS**	**AZURE AUTOMATIONS**	**AZURE FUNCTIONS**
	If you can do it with your mouse and keyboard, it can be done with RPA.	Per-user license, M365 SaaS product. Can be shared with the team.	Per-execution license and managed as an Azure resource. Extra integration power for Enterprise Applications.	The IT department can be the digital transformation powerhouse. They probably already know PowerShell. That's all they need.	Interactive calls, workflow branching, fast response time. Like a racing car, it needs a specialized pilot.
Ease of Use	✓	🏆	🏆	✗	✗
Integration	🏆	✗	✓	✓	🏆
Cost	✗	✓	🏆	🏆	✓
Maintenance	✗	🏆	🏆	✓	✓
Execution Speed	✗	✓	✓	✗	🏆
Workflow Complexity	🏆	✓	✗	✓	🏆

Fig. 2. A summary of the individual Microsoft core automation technologies, with a view of the strengths and weaknesses of the individual technologies.

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4.

It addresses all your requirements.

In all automation deployments, a range of multiple technologies are required that support different methods from low-code, RPA and Azure Functions. Each has its own area of fit and value. The ecosystem's growing audience requires an integrated approach which supports interaction between all functions, from office workers to HR to technical staff, according to their own capabilities. Naturally, security and identity management requirements need to be addressed and Microsoft provides a centralized platform to enforce security and data protection, so users can proceed with confidence.

The capability to connect to multiple interfaces, data sources and destinations is key to the business value of automation but is also a challenge which can be overcome by the diversity of Microsoft's automation engines and range of connectors.

As the reach of automation extends to a larger and wider audience, the requirement for a broader interface that supports multiple automation engines becomes important. A conversational interface powered by AI can provide this by understanding users' needs and objectives and reacting to their intents. This approach also supports the system as user adoption increases. Of course you will want to understand the value delivered by automation in terms of how well adopted it is and how much time is saved, and we can provide you with the insights you need.

Ready for that nudge?

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