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What is digital business automation?

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By [Jonas DeMuro](#) a day ago [World of tech](#)

Innovation for a competitive edge

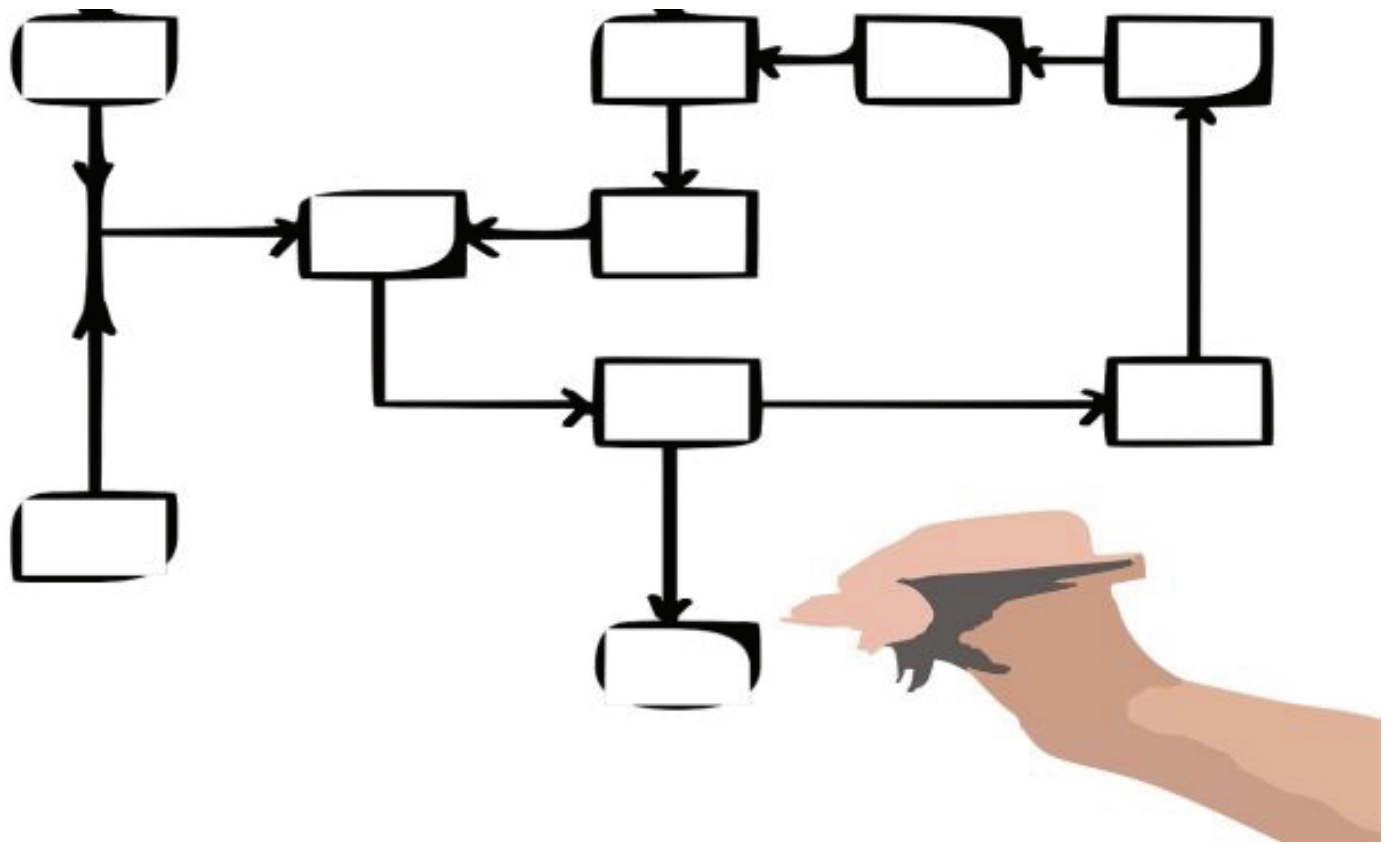


While business has always innovated and embraced new technology for a competitive edge, these days, the pace of this has hastened to breakneck speed. Witness such innovations as mobile Gigabit connections, autonomously driven cars, and smart homes - all on the cutting edge, and the stuff of science fiction just a decade or so ago. An important trend for today's businesses is digital business automation.

How does digital business automation differ from digital transformation?

This is distinct from [digital transformation](#) which refers to the implementation of digital processes across the business. Digital transformation is more of a cultural thing, with a rollout of digital technology, such as migration of data to [the cloud](#), embracing the [DevOps](#) approach to software development, and use of [business analytics](#) tools to spot trends - and do all of this faster than the competition.

Digital business automation is a component of digital transformation. It focuses on incorporating the digital realm - in particular data, the software and hardware that works with it, and the infrastructure that supports it - and applying upgrades to efficiency to traditional business processes. This is all done to make the business more responsive to current market trends, interfacing with customers better, with the ultimate goal of improving revenue. In other words, digital business automation uses digital innovation to take a clunky business process, and streamline it for a competitive edge.



History of digital business automation

The origin of digital business automation can be traced back to IBM in 2005, and its creation of the BPMN standard (Business Process Model and Notation). IBM provided software to facilitate creating flowcharts and diagrams for business purposes.

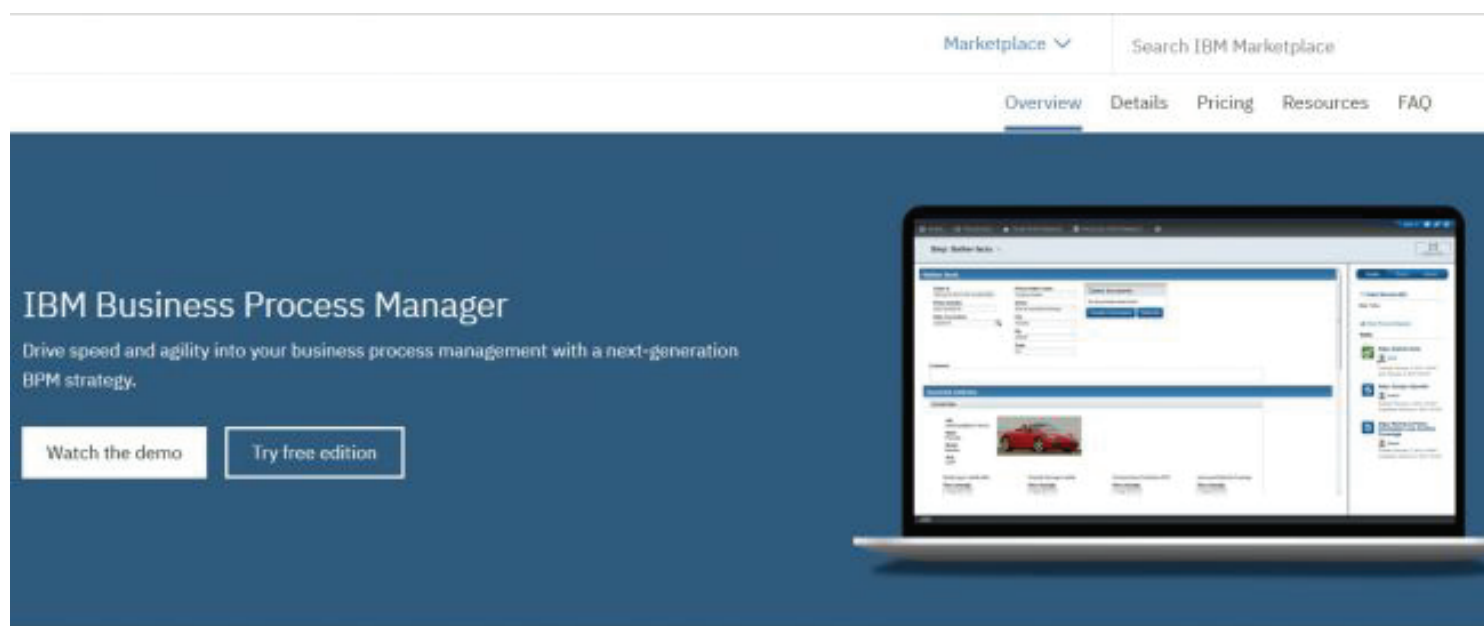
The goal was to graphically describe complex business processes, with a standard notation, to make it more understandable in the organization. The software that IBM released for digital business automation was known as WPS (WebSphere Process Server), and the files created were from a newly created open standard known as BPEL (Business Process Execution Language).

WPS failed to gain the needed popularity, and was more focused on the SOA (service-oriented architecture) than on traditional business aspects. This made it more focused on technical aspects, which made it more difficult for application to business processes. To focus more on these users, IBM then released their IBM WebSphere Business Modeller. However, it did not stand alone, and migration was required from the new software back to WPS for execution to occur.

In the meantime, while WPS struggled to gain traction in this emerging sector, a competitor emerged, Teamworks, a product of Lombardi. IBM's solution to this worthy competition was to acquire the company outright. They also promptly in June 2010 renamed the Teamworks software to WebSphere Lombardi Edition (WLE).

Having two products for digital business automation, WPS and WLE, under the IBM umbrella proved confusing. They subsequently combined them both into one product, the IBM Business Process

Manager (IBPM), drawing on the best of these two platforms. The IBPM offered an intuitive way to capture business processes, and is approachable for less technical business types to turn the business process into an understandable diagram. Furthermore, diagrams can be adjusted easily.



Optimize core business processes with IBM BPM

IBM® Business Process Manager lets your process owners and business users engage directly in the improvement of business processes. The full-featured, consumable platform includes tooling and runtime components for process design and execution, along with capabilities for

State of digital business automation today

The [current IBPM](#) remains focused on improving business processes, and unlike earlier versions that favored the technical or the business aspects, this version attempted to strike a balance that can [“improve collaboration between IT and business teams.”](#) They also include built-in process accelerators, a self service portal, and a learning library.

IBM recently took a step forward this year to their next generation of digital business automation, and debuted their [IBM Automation Platform for Digital Business](#), which promises “an integrated platform of five automation capabilities that help business people drive virtually all types of automation projects at speed and scale.” Their five pillars are:

- Tasks - automation of repetitive human work
- Content - collection and management of business data with connectivity to digital business applications
- Workflow - the ability to analyze and improve business processes for improvements
- Capture - digitization of business documents, with extraction and analysis of data while obviating a manual entry process
- Decisions - application of business rules to fuel on the fly change in processes, while being able to audit the process

With such a robust platform, all types of enterprise work can be automated including tasks, decisions and workflows, with the capability to grow, and add multiple pieces as needed.

Other implementations of digital business automation

Another less known company is offering a digital business automation tool. Much of digital business automation has focused on analyzing and streamlining a process at an organization. As the data is available, and stays within the confines of the organization, this is a less challenging scenario.

[Ultimus](#) wants to take on a more complicated scenario, of transactions between organizations.

Here, things are more bumpy, with major trust issues between the parties involved in the transaction, including customers, suppliers and partners. These types of transactions, from a purchase order, to a loan, or an employment contract, are typically quite time consuming. Documents need to be completed, and they are usually paper based, with physical signatures, notaries, and the dreaded faxes back and forth- hardly the speed that a nimble business aspires to.

The [blockchain](#) functions quite well as a distributed ledger, most commonly for cryptocurrency transactions these days, but it could also be applied to these types of business transactions as well.

In order to take the theoretical to the practical, Ultimus is moving towards applying blockchain technology to business transactions with their Composed Process Solutions (CPS). Some practical challenges that their solution addresses include the accuracy of timestamps (within two hours given current blockchain tech), scalability and keeping the cost of preserving the data at an affordable level.

A case scenario of Ultimus' CPS is for a blockchain enabled car loan. Here a digital business automation approach gets applied to a streamlined user interface. Via a web portal, with data stored in their blockchain, the documents for the loan are tracked for uploading, verification, and review.

Gone are the pile of manila folders, as well as waiting for the notary public to return (who is invariably at lunch in our experience), as the documents are now 'e-notarized' via a highly secure login process. Along the way, an audit trail is created, and in another example of an automated business process, automated emails are generated to update the concerned parties on how this is proceeding.

- We also discuss [digital transformation](#) in greater detail here

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