

10 Transformative Facts About SaaS Workflow Automation



Learn the key benefits to expect from adopting the right Cloud-based workflow automation solution for your organization.

Overview

Enterprises are striving to compete in an evolving marketplace where agility, flexibility and precise execution make all the difference between success and failure. It's why more of them are turning to Cloud-based workflow automation solutions.

Why? Because traditional business processes were built around manual, paper-based workflows. The results? High administration costs, errors and delays. Those may have been acceptable once upon a time, but can now be fatal in an era where workflow automation allows astute organizations to optimize and accelerate essential business processes.

Workflow automation can transform an enterprise

In this guide, we'll walk through 10 key facts showing how workflow automation can have a **transformative effect** on your organization. Then we'll provide a **solution assessment checklist** you can use for evaluating different automation platforms.



Automating old-school processes and workflows is becoming crucial to future success.

Putting the right platform in place means you'll be able to reap a wide range of benefits, affecting every facet of operations, from employee morale to the bottom line. By freeing employees from the "pain of the mundane," you'll empower them to be more productive and engaged.

In nearly every line of work and workplace, automating old-school processes and workflows is becoming crucial to future success. So understanding the full potential of workflow automation for your enterprise is mission-critical.

1

It saves time and resources

Workflow automation can – and should – have an immediate impact on your bottom line through the efficiencies it creates:

- One Fortune 500 enterprise found that once they'd automated key legal workflows, work was getting done in 1/20th of the overall time it had taken previously, while consuming just 1/4th of the employee time demanded by manual workflows.
- The benefit to their bottom line? It was absolutely measurable – in the millions of dollars.
- If an employee making \$50/hour writes 5 notification or update emails a day, even if they finish them all in only half an hour, it still adds up to \$6000 a year you're paying one person to send manual notifications.
- Imagine the costs involved at a larger firm where 20 or 100 staffers are doing it, and automation's benefits loom even larger.



The savings in terms of supplies and materials can be impressive, too:

- ✓ The costs of using paper in the office can be 13 to 31 times the cost of buying the paper in the first place, yet a single average U.S. office worker uses 10,000 sheets a year, according to Reduce.org.
- ✓ According to *The San Francisco Chronicle*, printer ink costs more per ounce than a bottle of Chanel No. 5 (and it sure doesn't smell better).



ThinkSmart Tip:

As a first step, lay out the business case and financial rationale for workflow automation. Use these as guidelines for evaluating prospective vendors' ability to deliver against them, especially their capacity to track the metrics needed to measure success.

2 It eliminates errors and delays

When human error and workflow delays are minimized or eliminated altogether, there's a better experience for everyone: internal team members and customers, clients or constituents alike.

There are hidden time-wasters involved in manual workflows that any best-in-class workflow automation platform should eradicate. Some examples?

- According to IDC, the time spent finding lost documents or handling other document-related challenges adds up to a productivity loss of over 21% per worker. In other words, a *fifth of employees' time* is spent wrangling just one problem caused by manual workflows.

- PricewaterhouseCoopers says finding a single lost document costs a company an average of \$122.
- Yet 7.5% of all company documents are lost completely, but the only way you realize they're lost is by wasting time and money searching for them.



There are hidden time-wasters involved in manual workflows



ThinkSmart Tip:

For the first workflow you tackle, pick one that consumes valuable time and employees see as a hassle. By automating it, you'll immediately demonstrate the value of workflow automation in both money saved and headaches cured.

3 It prevents security, governance and compliance risks

They're the kinds of risks that are serious enough for smaller firms. For growing or global concerns, they're incredibly problematic.

But with a Cloud-based workflow automation solution:

- Employee actions are recorded and auditable.
- Important data is safeguarded and role-restricted.
- Process governance is enforced for all stakeholders in any given workflow.
- Certification processes can be streamlined (such as an ISO 9001 QMS certification for professional services or manufacturing).



Workflow analytics allow management to monitor compliance, even across a far-flung organization.

- Alerts notify project owners when a process is out of sequence or stalled.
- Workflow analytics allow management to monitor compliance, even across a far-flung organization.



ThinkSmart Tip:

Get your company's security and governance experts involved very early in the process as part of a vendor review panel.

4 It centralizes document management and optimizes accessibility

There's no such thing as a "centralized database" in the paper-based workflow world. Compared to automated environments, old-school processes look Dickensian, with reams of forms buried in file cabinets and e-documents stored in remote servers within labyrinths of folders.

Workflow automation platforms, on the other hand, make documents and assets accessible across from across the entire enterprise, and from any device:

- By using a single unified database of record accessible through the Cloud, SaaS workflow automation platforms centrally store all documents, forms, stakeholder communications, workflow records, images and other assets, so they're readily obtainable and never lost.

- Especially when that database is Cloud-hosted, redundant backups make disaster recovery far simpler than it would be if a paper-based archive was damaged or destroyed.
- Accessibility is optimized, so stakeholders can do their jobs anywhere, anytime by engaging with workflows, forms and data using any desktop or mobile device.



Compared to automated environments, old-school processes look Dickensian...



ThinkSmart Tip:

Stress-test automation products at length using multiple devices and operating systems to ensure cross-platform accessibility. Also, have remote users and teams in multiple locations verify they can reliably save and access the same centralized workflows and assets.

5 It shouldn't require IT involvement

Some of us have suffered through earlier iterations of workflow automation that required constant IT involvement. Divergent products ran on different platforms, or used kludged-together custom coding and inconsistent interfaces. Often, workflows and their associated data were hosted in separate silos or even different physical locations across the organization.

Nowadays, a reliable Cloud-based workflow automation platform should provide ease of adoption and implementation, allowing users to start building workflows with minimal ramp-up time or assistance.

How minimal? Anyone with reasonable proficiency and experience in setting up workflows should be able to design 80-90% of their very first workflow completely on their own when using a Cloud-based workflow automation system with features like those at right.



ThinkSmart Tip:

Get real world experience using any potential product, and talk to existing users, especially longtime ones who can give you their POV on its reliability, performance and support from the vendor.

- Plug-and-play simplicity of adoption and use, requiring minimal training.
- Drag-and-drop ease of designing workflows and forms via an intuitive UI.
- Easily customizable workflow and form templates.
- The ability to readily import or convert existing forms.
- Automated back-end programming of workflows, with no hands-on coding necessary.



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6 It rewards collaboration and improves change management

Optimizing workflows absolutely depends on stakeholder engagement. So when the process of building them becomes more flexible, customizable and quick, as it does using workflow automation, it makes it easier to get stakeholders to collaborate to define and refine the workflows they really need.

How does that play out?

- First, identify the stakeholders who'll be involved with any given workflow.
- Talk with them and get their input, then design a draft workflow; if you're using a best-in-class automation platform, this should be quick and intuitive, even for complex models.

- Engage your stakeholders at every step of this process. By production time, they should feel like they own it.
- Have stakeholders review the draft workflow, then iterate until everyone is happy.
- Once it's approved and launched, regularly review analytics on process durations and completion rates to spot and alleviate bottlenecks or make other improvements.



ThinkSmart Tip:

Adopt a dual perspective – that of a process engineer and a CFO – as you're optimizing a workflow. That way, you'll be on the lookout for both efficiencies and savings.

7 It can integrate painlessly with your existing systems

Best-in-class SaaS workflow automation platforms provide seamless, out-of-the-box integration with an organization's existing digital infrastructure and legacy systems. That not only removes any need for "rip-and-replace" installation costs, but permits your workflows to actually act as unified data hubs.

Previously, you had to check multiple tracking systems, spreadsheets or other data sources to nudge a workflow forward. A workflow automation platform spares your team all those aggravations.



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Here's a for-instance:

- You design a workflow for "New Work Intake" for the law firm where you work.
- Since the new platform interfaces flawlessly with other systems, like billing, docket scheduling, HR recordkeeping, budgeting and invoicing, it centralizes all those functions in a one-stop location.
- Duplication of effort and repetitive, time-sucking activities are minimized or removed.



ThinkSmart Tip:

Make sure management understands not only the ROI of workflow automation integration but also the costs, in dollars and lost opportunities, if the "owners" of some systems and data want to stay segregated in silos.

8 It cost-effectively ensures permanent audit trails

Workflows shouldn't vanish once they've served their purpose, but be storable, searchable and retrievable. Cloud-based workflow automation platforms can provide that convenience, ease of access and peace of mind.

This enables accountability, permanent auditability, accurate reporting, and complete visibility into every stage of a workflow, so it can be reviewed in granular detail. This helps you perpetually manage risk, maintain digital governance, and control the costs of compliance reporting:

- An automated workflow for, say, a sensitive HR procedure has been designed to strictly define the right way to carry out that task.

- By recording that workflow in the Cloud, you've got permanent documentation, always at the ready, to prove it was properly executed.
- By automatically recording hundreds or thousands of workflows, a company can see huge savings in maintaining compliance records mandated by Sarbanes Oxley (SOX) or other regulations.

58% of large companies responding to a 2015 survey by global consultant firm Protiviti said they'd spent more than \$1 million annually on SOX compliance, and that costs were continuing to escalate.



ThinkSmart Tip:

Don't hesitate to insist on seeing examples of how a vendor's product delivered verifiable savings or efficiencies for other customers.

9 It's become platform, device, and location-agnostic

Your employees need to be able to check in on workflows from their desk, the airport, their backyard or anywhere else. And they should be able to do so on any device or platform, whether it's an Android tablet, a Windows laptop or an iOS smartphone.

SaaS workflow automation platforms are catering to that need, because it's now essential to customer success, according to a 2016 study by the Aberdeen Group:

- 45% of best-in-class corporations were currently implementing mobile workflow technologies.
- They were 2.7 times as likely to have real-time visibility into the status of all processes.
- They'd seen a 19% improvement in the cycle time of key business processes over the previous 24 months.

Your workflow automation roadmap, in other words, shouldn't include mobile device integration as an afterthought. Mobility should be front-and-center as you're evaluating competing solutions.



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ThinkSmart Tip:

As a first step, lay out the business case and financial rationale for workflow automation. Use these as guidelines for evaluating prospective vendors' ability to deliver against them, especially their capacity to track the metrics needed to measure success.

10 It empowers employees and increases engagement

Today, employee engagement is a primary concern for organizations. In 2016, Gallup found that only 32% of U.S. employees feel engaged with their jobs. And manual workflows and mundane processes are among the chief culprits:

- A ServiceNow study found that managers spend an average of 2 days a week on administrative tasks, preventing them from doing strategic work.
- Four out of 5 said these routine processes caused significant delays.
- Three-quarters of them wanted “simple, self-service support processes that are as easy to use as Amazon or FedEx.”

By delivering that kind of solution, workflow automation frees employees to focus on higher-value work, and helps them be more productive. That, in turn, helps them feel more fulfilled in their jobs, with a greater sense of purpose and work-life balance.

It also satisfies their desire to use updated tools. In a 2016 study by Adobe, 81% of U.S. office workers ranked technology as being one of the most important factors in keeping them happy at work, ahead of more glitzy perks.



ThinkSmart Tip:

Beta test a workflow automation platform with an entire team or department, if possible, and survey its effects on their morale and engagement.

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Bonus Fact: It creates (good) unintended consequences

These are positive consequences with real benefits, though they can be difficult or impossible to anticipate until an organization has already implemented workflow automation:

- **Higher-quality work:** A 2006 review of healthcare providers who had installed workflow automation found that not only were there expected benefits like time savings, reductions in staff stress and improvements in morale, but the actual quality of care being given to patients had improved.
- **Positive morale:** Legal firms that have deployed workflow automation have seen employees, especially Millennials, gain a more positive view of the organization, as younger attorneys feel they're being supported by their firms and made part of a collaborative team.
- **Stronger client & customer ties:** Teams have been able to establish stronger ties with clients and customers once repetitive tasks have been streamlined, removing burdens on all concerned. At law firms, other examples have included more attorney/client partnering on pro bono work and greater transparency in budgeting and forecasting thanks to automation tools, both helping with client retention.
- **Job creation:** This has happened as law firms and legal ops departments have moved tech-heavy jobs in-house to customize tech tools to fit specific needs. By creating in-house roles, creation and deployment of these solutions is accelerated, equaling better collaborations with clients and end users.



ThinkSmart Tip:

Ask current users of a workflow automation system you're evaluating what *their* unintended consequences were, good or bad.

Automation Vendor Checklist

- Does a vendor's workflow automation platform automatically track and report workflow success, completions and timeframes, among other indicators, so management can continually monitor efficiency and savings?
- Is it customizable, configurable and flexible enough to meet your exact needs?
- Does it allow users to quickly and efficiently build even complex workflows?
- Does it feature an intuitive UI and drag-and-drop design tools?
- Will it require a minimal learning curve?
- Can it be implemented without custom coding and programming?
- Does it require little or no involvement from IT?
- Is back-end functionality automatically programmed, avoiding hands-on coding?
- Does it include reminder and notification features that mitigate delays – for example, by nagging the next person in an approval chain to give their signoff?
- Will it ease and encourage collaboration by stakeholders?
- Can it painlessly integrate with legacy systems or third-party platforms via APIs?
- Is it easily scalable to meet sudden or even anticipated business needs?
- Is it certified for HIPAA_HITECH; ISACE PII; ISO 27001; PCI_DSS 3.1; and, SSAE 16 (SOC), or other industry-specific standards?
- Does it meet all specifications developed using input from your organization's security and governance stakeholders?
- Does it provide a centralized, truly Cloud-based environment to handle every facet of a workflow?

Automation Vendor Checklist

- Is everything related to workflows retained and accessible within a single database of record?
- Can users access and manage workflows, documents and assets using mobile devices?
- Does it let you predefine general stakeholder/participant roles, such as supervisor, assessor, employee, etc.?
- Does it deliver out-of-the-box integrations that are ready to use immediately?
- Does it provide approval process features such as e-signature functions from providers like Adobe Sign and DocuSign?
- Does it include comprehensive auditing and reporting capabilities?
- Can the vendor provide in-depth case studies or customer testimonials?
- If your workforce uses a specific OS or hardware lineup, is it optimized for that system or family of devices?

About ThinkSmart



At ThinkSmart, we free your workplace from the “pain of the mundane” by providing workflow automation solutions that liberate people from outmoded, repetitive, error-prone manual workflows, so they can focus on being truly productive and engaged with their jobs.

Our customers testify about how the ThinkSmart Automation Platform (TAP) has transformed their workflows and business processes so they’re faster, more efficient and error-free. TAP provides you with easy-to-use drag-and-drop form and process-building tools, seamless API integration with other systems, customization to your exact needs, and support from the most collaborative support team imaginable.

By using ThinkSmart, you wind up with smarter workflows, centralized control of your optimized business processes, and immediate ROI.

CONTACT US NOW

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