



CASE STUDY

Robot eases pressures and boost performance

The decision by NEP, the largest not-for-profit consortium working with NHS organisations in England, to introduce Robotic Process Automation (RPA) means that its clients are now receiving a more efficient and faster service.

NEP, provides the only true cloud based ERP platform, shared by NHS Organisations across England, supporting the NHS national initiatives of digitalisation in the NHS.

OVERVIEW

To ensure accurate and consistent data across the solution, it is important that NEP maintain standing data, as it is shared across the solution to all of NEP's clients. Therefore, a key task for NEP is to add new suppliers to the main database.

The challenge was that each request is manually processed, in a standardised format to NEP's central cloud-based database. The information is presented in a format which can be accessed quickly and easily by each client's procurement teams so they can raise purchase orders for goods and services for hospitals.

When Covid-19 hit and put unprecedented pressures on the NHS, the need to add new suppliers significantly increased. On average NEP would upload to the database around 700 supplier requests a month, a figure which increased significantly at the start of the pandemic.

With NEP's Service level agreements (SLA) requiring the completion of new requests within three hours, an influx of new requests caused by the pandemic placed an enormous amount of pressure on the NEP support team.

There were also further challenges for NEP as they had recently implemented three large NHS Organisations, who required further support. This, combined with the increase in requests due to the pandemic, showed an increase in workload for this task by 21%.

NEP'S ROBOTIC PROCESS AUTOMATION (RPA) GAINS



Greater efficiency and speed in NEP's Organisations supplier requests into NEP Cloud.



Much improved accuracy of data



80% Faster efficiency in creating supplier requests



Focus by staff on more value-added tasks supporting consortium members



Enhancement of other services planned using RPA

DELIVERING UNDER PRESSURE

“ Craig Alderson | NEP’s Head of Applications |

“With our consortium members at the forefront of the pandemic response, it was clear, that we needed to provide a robust response. By balancing and managing our support function on a 24/7 basis and combining staff availability and delivery meant that with some extraordinary efforts we delivered to our SLAs.

“We realised quickly, that we had to look at how our processes could be improved to deliver at the same levels without the intense pressure we had experienced. In doing so, we also needed a cost-effective solution with a strong business case to justify any required investment to solve the issue.” Having previously looked at RPA, it was agreed, this might provide a solution to the time-consuming process of manually inputting the data to register new suppliers: “We knew about the advantages robots can bring which until this point had always been a ‘nice to have’.

“Our recent experiences meant considering seriously whether there could be a role for a robot in the business. If it could improve efficiencies, those cost savings could be passed on to our consortium members and that feeds straight back as more money for patient care.

“As a not-for-profit business we are also a fairly lean organisation so RPA could help to maximise our resources and free staff from the repetitive time-consuming tasks while making their jobs more professionally and personally fulfilling. This could also give us the opportunity to improve and develop the business while enhancing the skills we have with the organisation.”

NEP approached software provider UI Path, to understand more about how automation software could work on the uploading of supplier information for NEP. “UI Path’s proof of concept identified RPA’s benefits for us and showed that a system would pay for itself in around nine months.

“We spoke then with our partner EAS and it quickly became apparent that they understood our needs. Together we agreed to test an RPA process to transfer the supplier information on to our main database to understand how the technology could work for NEP,” added Craig.

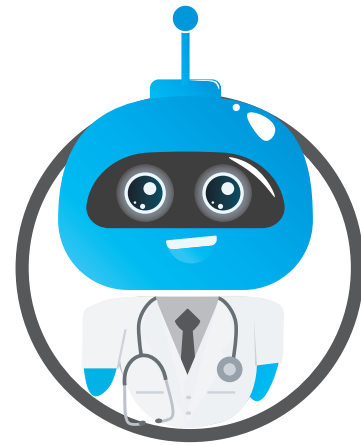
STRUCTURED PLAN AND COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIP

EAS created an initial project plan and considered how, if successful, the technology could be scaled up quickly to provide more resource in dealing with the continuing pandemic pressures.

As project lead, Craig welcomed EAS’s approach which included a fixed price contract giving the not-for-profit organisation certainty in terms of cost of investment. As part of the offering, EAS assigned a dedicated technical developer to lead the implementation as NEP at this time, had no in-house robotic skills.

Craig commented: “As a consortium, working in partnership is important us. EAS quickly understood our ethos putting forward a structured implementation programme which gave us the collaborative partnership we wanted. The support EAS offered also meant our technical team quickly gained the knowledge to develop the skills needed to feel comfortable in working with the robot.”

Internal communication about what the robot’s introduction means to those affected was important for NEP. The rationale of moving to RPA and the opportunities this provided were clear. Freeing up staff time to engage in more value-added activities would make their role more enjoyable while also offering a clear focus on personal and professional development.



IMMEDIATE PERFORMANCE BOOST

NEP, and its staff, quickly saw an immediate and positive impact from the robot’s introduction. Data entry became much more efficient and accurate.

- 1 Faster Response Time**
The time saved in data processing meant that NEP has reduced the SLA in this area to a one- hour response time and allowing NHS partners to also respond faster to the needs of their organisations.
- 2 Staff Freed Up**
Benefits have been seen in other areas of NEP. Staff have been freed to carry out other tasks and learn, which is adding more value the consortium members in supporting NEP’s portfolio of services offered.

Craig is in no doubt that introducing RPA was the right decision: “The impact of this project has been significant. By automating a fundamental but mundane process means our response time is significantly improved and we have been able to increase the number of supplier requests by around 200 a month with no additional cost.”

This is benefitting the service we provide which ultimately makes us and our partners more efficient. This alone proves the business case.

“We are at an early stage of our automation journey but the experience, with the results we have seen means that we have increased confidence to bring in a full-time robotics expert in-house. This, in reality, sees that NEP can implement additional enhancements and look at other areas of the business which can benefit.

The partnership we have with EAS has been the bedrock of our success: “EAS understood what we needed, and quickly identified how we could benefit, at a time when the NHS were under enormous pressure. This has quite simply, got NEP into a position where we see RPA as an integral support tool for NEP and its NHS colleagues.”