GUIDE

HOW TO ACCELERATE **DIGITAL INNOVATION** DURING THE CRISIS

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INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has fragmented the workforce and interrupted critical processes in every function. While companies are under pressure to cut costs, optimise resources and build business resilience, many are also managing and supporting employees who are sheltering at home or working more flexible hours than they used to before the outbreak.

To adapt to this 'new normal', many organisations have shifted their IT strategies and priorities to address an urgent need for digitisation and automation. Inefficient or manual ways of working are simply no longer viable.

Now that face-to-face meetings are impractical, the market for digital conferencing tools is rising sharply. For example, Zoom recently surpassed 300 million daily meeting participants and reported revenue growth of 169% from the previous year in its first-quarter report for 2020. But video call platforms are just the beginning. Organisations need additional technology capabilities to rapidly transform manual processes, facilitate efficient data sharing, manage people and other resources more efficiently, and much more.

> ***"Zoom recently surpassed 300 million daily meeting participants and reported revenue growth of 169% from the previous year"*** *[1]*

Is this the right time to innovate?

As companies scramble to maintain operations, deliver vital services and stay profitable, it may feel strange to focus on innovation. However, leaders who take a long-term view and see this as an opportunity to build a stronger, more agile business through technology – will remain resilient and maintain a competitive edge as the world emerges from the crisis.

Investing in scalable technologies now will enable organisations to meet urgent digital needs, while also ensuring their teams have the tools to power long-term, positive shifts in the business once the world economy begins to heal.

On the other side of the spectrum, leaders who are reluctant to innovate now, and choose to rather stick with legacy systems and processes, may find themselves struggling to catch up later.

An urgent need to move beyond manual approaches

Many companies suddenly need new digital tools, such as process management and automation applications, to fix manual approaches that no longer function when the workforce is collaborating virtually or when business success depends on optimum efficiency and productivity.

Additionally, processes based on desktop tools like Excel over email offer poor visibility and make it difficult to track progress and performance. Teams now need to share and distribute information transparently; and managers want to monitor activities with the utmost efficiency.

Technology can address these issues. However, with so many solutions available on the market, it can be stressful identifying the best approach.

teams can collaborate with business users to build automation solutions in a few days or weeks – providing the responsiveness and rapid time-to-market that is imperative in the current scenario.

Market-leading low-code platforms go further to support business continuity by providing seamless integration with established business systems. This way, companies can digitise and innovate with minimal disruption, while legacy systems continue functioning.

And for those companies that want advanced technological capabilities, it's possible to connect low-code applications with robotic process automation (RPA) solutions and artificial intelligence (AI) tools such as machine learning and natural language processing. All these technologies complement each other and work together to create a rich framework for ongoing process automation.

When manual tasks become touchless, skilled workers are free to focus on activities that makes the company more profitable and competitive.

Choosing Technologies

Traditional software development methods can be time-consuming. It's not uncommon to wait six months or more for digital solutions to be delivered. In enterprises where the IT function is overloaded with requests for new applications, this approach is not fit for purpose. Teams and departments need fast access to digital solutions. They must also be able to adjust or refine these solutions quickly to meet new business demands and regulations.

Cloud-based, low-code process automation platforms provide an alternative to lengthy development cycles and IT bottlenecks. In the low-code application development environment, technical teams can collaborate with business users to build automation solutions in a few days or weeks – providing the responsiveness and rapid time-to-market that is imperative in the current scenario.

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Case study: Automating university accommodation refund requests

In the tertiary education sector, many students are applying for refunds on their accommodation due to social distancing measures. A university asked Velocity IT to develop a digital solution for efficiently managing vast volumes of refund requests and payments.

Initially, the university was handling this process manually: sending out Excel forms to thousands of students, waiting for them to return their completed forms (often containing typos and missing information), processing the payments, and then manually emailing each student to confirm that the payment had been processed. This approach was far too slow.

Using a cloud-based low-code platform, Velocity IT took just three days to develop and deploy a digital form and automated workflow to manage the entire process. This would have been impossible with a conventional software programming approach. In the low-code development environment, however, the Velocity IT team was able to deliver a custom solution rapidly and save countless hours of development time.

Using the new process automation solution, the university can automatically email students, collect and validate their information digitally, automatically route payment requests to the relevant university staff for approval, and automatically run batch payments for those refunds that are approved. Students also receive automated emails once their payments have been processed.

Maximising automation potential

Any business planning to introduce low-code technology – or extend automation into new business areas using an existing low-code solution – should involve both IT and business stakeholders. Right now, business users have the best understanding of the unique challenges they are up against and the application functionality required.

It makes a lot of sense for business and technical teams to collaborate closely when identifying automation opportunities and mapping solutions. When business and IT collaborate from the beginning, it helps to speed up low-code application delivery even further, while improving end-user buy-in when the solutions go live.

At an organisational level, a cultural shift may also be required. Now, as companies leverage digital innovation to keep teams connected and operations efficient, it's important for leaders to create and maintain a strong digital culture.

With so many jobs being lost during the crisis, automation can be a frightening concept. It's therefore essential for all employees to understand that strategic automation is not focused on replacing human jobs, but rather on re-directing people to more interesting and valuable work.

When manual tasks become touchless, skilled workers are free to focus on activities that makes the company more profitable and competitive.

Ready to equip your business for the future?

Velocity IT has extensive experience as a low-code process automation specialist. We can help your organisation select and roll out the most appropriate cloud-based low-code platform, identify automation opportunities across your enterprise, and help you gain maximum value from your low-code investment – right now and in the years to come.

To discuss your unique requirements, get in touch now.