MAKING THE BUSINESS CASE FOR YOUR IT AUTOMATION INITIATIVE

Get The Buy-In
(And Budget) You Need

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Organizations are pushing the pace of digital transformation, and IT environments are expanding to support this new reality. This has made IT environments increasingly complex and difficult to manage manually.

As organizations accelerated their digital transformations in response to the COVID-19 crisis, IT departments began investing more in automation. A 2021 Flexera study found that automation spending is outpacing other key areas such as cloud computing, artificial intelligence and containers.

But getting buy-in for new IT investments isn't easy. Decision makers in IT and the business can have conflicting priorities, additional budget spend can be scarce during economic downturns and cultural resistance can pose additional barriers to automation initiatives.

Gaining buy-in and building the business case isn't something most IT professionals spend much time on — but really need to. So we've put together five strategies that will help you get the buy-in you need from stakeholders and decision-makers.

What Challenges Can Automation Solve?

Start by clearly identifying the problem you want to address when making a business case. Identify the major challenges you plan to address with your automation and communicate those first.

For example, many IT teams are stretched thin, trying to deliver on a growing number of projects while still managing legacy systems and new additions to their tech stack. As a result, projects are being delayed or derailed due to a lack of IT resources. Automation can free up critical IT resources so your team can spend more time on high-value, strategic projects, while providing more efficient services in less time.

Challenges that are commonly addressed with IT automation tools include:

- Long run times for critical processes and workloads
- Time-consuming troubleshooting and slow remediation
- Inability to complete all projects on time
- Too much time spent writing and maintaining automation scripts
- Unreliable processes causing delays and failures
- Fragmented environments that make it difficult to integrate new tools, processes

IT teams spend on average **59%** of the time keeping the lights on[1]

46% of CIOs say their IT teams are stretched too thin[2]

56% of IT teams can't complete the tasks they've committed to because too much time and resources are spent keeping the lights on[3]

83% of IT departments report that demand for new digital products and services will increase this year[4]

51% of business partners are frustrated by the speed that IT teams deliver digital projects[5]

25% of CIOs at large enterprises will be accountable for business operations by 2024[6]

Include specific examples and numbers when possible. How often do you fail to meet your SLAs, and how would automation help improve it? If processes are being delayed, how many hours were lost and how many can be gained with automation?

You know that long-term business success depends on IT, but to be truly effective you need to show how business goals will succeed — or fail — without the proper IT support. Without scalable environments, real-time data and always-on digital services, many businesses will fail to compete. Work with the business leaders to understand their project and then align your IT projects to these initiatives.

Speak Directly To The Business Strategy

The role of the CIO is evolving. The most successful CIOs are closely involved in strategic planning and business decisions. This is part of a larger trend that places IT closer to the center of day-to-day business operations, customer experience and the overall business model.

This is one reason why your business case should speak directly to business goals — business leaders know that IT is a critical part of their success. Tie your automation initiative to key business goals instead of positioning it as a one-off, standalone IT project.

You've spent the first part of your business case explaining the challenges that you face. Now show how those challenges are impacting business goals, and how automation will help achieve business goals.

For example, your automation initiative can:

- Free up IT resources for higher-value tasks, accelerating project timelines
- Make it possible to scale resources efficiently and cost-effectively
- Deliver data to decision-makers and customers faster, allowing the business to make better decisions ahead of others in the market.
- Enable developers to rapidly build, test and deploy new processes
- Prevent process failures and reduce MTTR so that impacts on the business are minimized
- Reliably automate processes across platforms, tying business services to disparate databases

The more specific you can get, the better. Perhaps your automation initiative can streamline customer billing for faster payment processing and an improved customer experience.

Additionally, speak to the specific concerns of stakeholders. For example, how will your automation initiative help the CTO deliver new services? How will it help the COO expand operations?

Understand Barriers To Buy-In

The COVID-19 pandemic has helped to reduce barriers to automation, though perhaps more on the business side than the IT side. Regardless, understanding the concerns that can sink an automation initiative will help you prepare a successful business case.

The top barriers to automation buy-in include:

- Competing priorities
- Cultural barriers
- Budget constraints

The number of projects IT teams are responsible for is expected to grow as organizations become more reliant on digital solutions. IT is only going to get busier. Automation shouldn't be positioned as an either/or project, but rather as a tool to facilitate those other priorities.

Your business case for automation is also going to have to address cultural resistance. It's not uncommon for people to defend the way they've been doing things for years. But at some point it should be pointed out that custom scripts are brittle, or that manual hand-offs create delays.

More importantly, automation enables employees to spend less time on tedious, manual tasks and more time on projects that require creativity and long-term planning — giving employees more time to spend on high-value projects that they care about, instead of manually triggering batch processes or searching for idle VMs.

Quantify Cost Savings

The last major barrier is getting budget approval. IT spending dropped considerably during the COVID pandemic, and it will take some time before spending fully recovers. Your business case will have to justify the expense, but how?

Most automation initiatives do not achieve expected cost savings. This is important to note.

Many organizations expect that an automation initiative will result in staff reductions, but more often than not, these cuts never materialize. The reason is that there are exceedingly few jobs that can be fully automated in the workplace. When onboarding gets automated, HR employees spend more time on talent acquisition. When job triggers are automated, IT employees spend more time developing services.

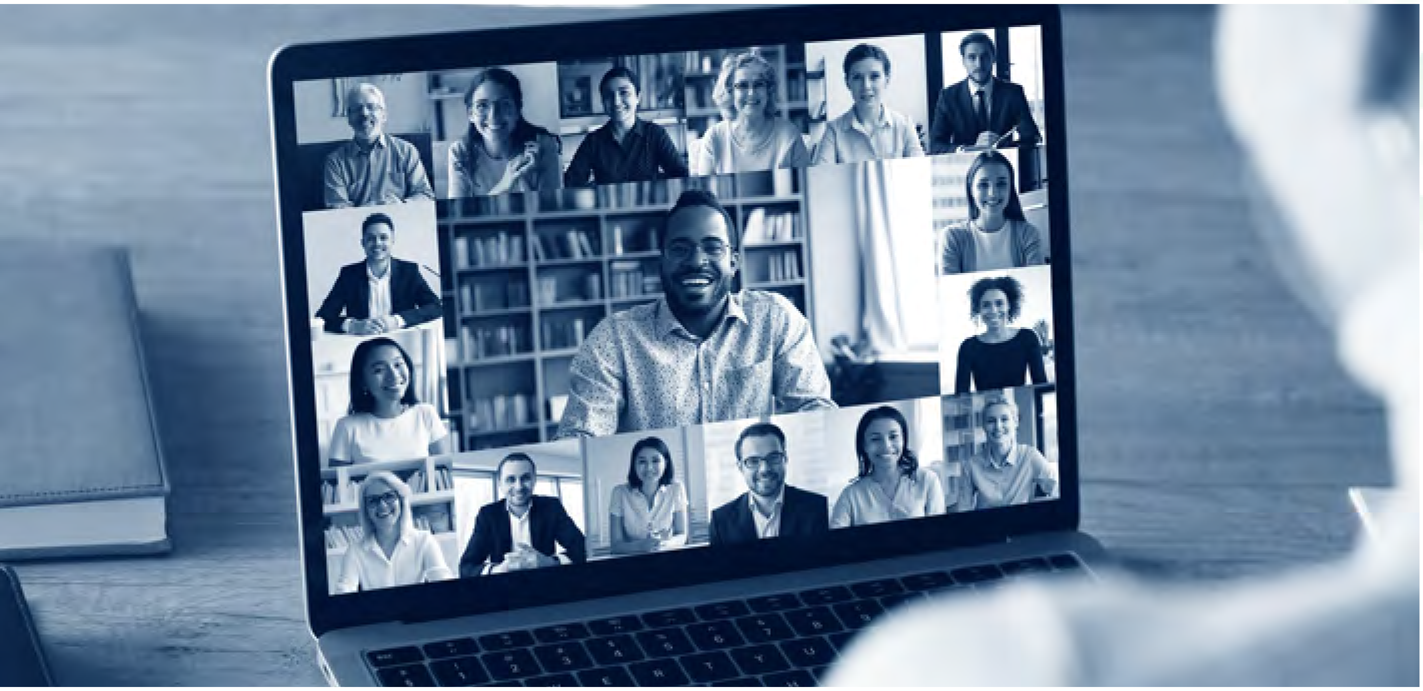
So we know that IT automation doesn't provide savings from job cuts. So where does IT automation provide savings?

As IT becomes busier, you need to empower your team to achieve more without adding more people. It's estimated that large enterprise IT teams spend almost half of their time keeping the lights on, mostly in the form of manual processes, at a cost of $4.8 million per year. Approximately 38% of manual IT tasks could be automated for an average annual savings of $2 million.[3]

With the right automation tools, IT teams can now drastically increase the time spent on innovative projects and development, accomplishing far more without having to increase resources.

When building your business case, consider what your team's workload will be moving forward. How many more projects do you expect to be responsible for, and will this require an additional team member? Can automation be used to reduce workloads so that your current team has time for more projects?

There are other areas for cost savings as well, for example, managing cloud-based resources. As cloud environments scale, server sprawl can quickly cause cloud costs to spiral out of control as servers are left idle. Automation tools can help rein in these unexpected costs by provisioning and deprovisioning cloud resources based on real-time demand.



Don’t Forget The Human Element

Numbers can be used to great effect and your business case isn’t going to hold water without them. But numbers are abstract and it can be difficult to build a strong case that relies only on spreadsheets.

Your automation initiative has the potential to impact day-to-day jobs across the organization, or at least across your team. Make sure your business case includes real-world stories that drive home the need for automation. Include anecdotes where a manual process caused significant delays, or an unexpected issue tied-up senior team members. Focus on specific cases where automation could have saved the enterprise time (and money) while facilitating key business projects.

What Comes Next:
Preparing For Product Evaluations

The next step after securing buy-in is preparing for product evaluations. This includes researching IT automation solutions and vendors, scheduling phone calls and demos and soliciting proposals.

There's a lot that goes into this. Knowing your budget and timeline before entering into conversations with vendors will help keep your project on track. Remember to be clear with vendors about your anticipated go-live date and what use cases you are looking to automate.

Many vendors give the same demo to all customers, but you'll get more value from demos that are tailored to your specific use cases. When discussing proposals with vendors, make sure to have decision-makers and key stakeholders present to help expedite the process, and to make sure they have all the information and validation they need to sign off on your project.

How long will a proposal process take? From demos to proposals to proofs-of-concept, and finally to onboarding and implementation, you could be looking at a multi-month project. Make sure you begin the process with plenty of time before your go-live date.

Ready To See What Workload Automation Can Do To Facilitate Your Digital Transformation Project?

Schedule a demo customized to your specific use cases now.

GET YOUR DEMO NOW

Endnotes

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5 ZDNet, “Top 8 Trends Shaping Digital Transformation In 2021”,
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