Delivering key management reports faster through automation

Deloitte streamlines report production
with suite of RPA bots

by Mike Tucker

6-minute read

I n 1911, 66 years after its establishment, a prominent London accounting firm opened its first office in Brazil to audit the British railway companies operating in South America's largest country. Today that accounting firm, Deloitte, has become one of the world's leading providers of audit, consulting, tax and advisory services. Deloitte is also one of Brazil's top accountancy and advisory firms, with over 5,500 professionals in 12 offices located in Brazil's major economic centers.

To oversee operations, Deloitte's 190 partners in Brazil rely on comprehensive management reports prepared for top-level review on a monthly basis. These reports provide partners with the financial and operational information they need to make business decisions and develop growth strategies.

For years, preparing management reports required significant staff resources in terms of the number of employees assigned and the number of hours they devoted to the project. Employees manually entered information from multiple systems into over 200 Microsoft Excel spreadsheets and produced each report under rigorous deadlines. To make sure manual input errors were caught and corrected, the Chief Financial Officer's (CFO's) office spent additional time reviewing reports before delivering them to the partners.

"We had five professional analysts assigned to preparing monthly management reports," says Martin Seefelder, Robotic and Cognitive Process Automation Leader for Deloitte in Brazil. "It took them five to eight days of steady work to gather operational information, confirm budget figures and compile updates. Producing the report, month after month, took them away from other high-value work assignments."

In addition to management reporting, other essential reporting tasks required large commitments of time and repetitive effort, including accounts receivable reports and travel expense reports. Since Deloitte was becoming increasingly involved in IT consulting and working on digital transformation projects for its clients, it began looking for opportunities to use advanced software tools for internal operations.

"We needed a solution that could improve the quality of the reporting and also enable us to redirect expertise to other high-value activities," says Seefelder. "Instead of just collecting data and creating the reports, we needed to optimize how we could analyze the data. And that's what led us to automation."

"RPA is an inexpensive way of improving productivity and improving the quality of the systems while also freeing time to focus on more high-value activities."

Martin Seefelder, Robotic and Cognitive Process Automation Leader, Deloitte-Brazil

Reduced management report preparation time from 5 – 8 days to

1 hour

freeing up 5 analysts for more high-value work

Reduced travel expense report preparation time from 3 hours a day to

10 minutes

while eliminating errors related to manual entry

Freeing time for high-value work

Because Deloitte is an IBM Business Partner, it was familiar with a wide range of IBM solutions designed to increase business productivity and efficiency. When Deloitte's IT team evaluated the IBM® Robotic Process Automation solution, an AI-infused platform, it learned that its capabilities matched up well with Deloitte's need to automate key reporting processes.

The robotic process automation (RPA) solution from IBM had technical and practical advantages when it came to integrating with Deloitte systems. First, it worked seamlessly with SAP, Deloitte's ERP platform, enabling the

automated transfer of data into report templates without the need for manual entry. Second, the RPA software package was configured to run on laptops and did not require hosting on network servers. "The ability to run RPA on laptops made a big difference when our staff began working remotely as the result of the COVID-19 pandemic," says Seefelder.

At the beginning of the RPA project, the Deloitte IT team saw that some employees misunderstood how streamlining report production would impact their roles. "Several analysts were concerned that this might replace their jobs," says Seefelder. "However, after the RPA bots were implemented, our analysts were very happy and satisfied with the automation because with the time saved, they can work on other, more rewarding activities."

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Working faster with fewer errors

After matching the capabilities of RPA to its reporting needs, Deloitte set up four RPA bots dedicated to the monthly management report, accounts receivable, travel expenses and currency exchange rate monitoring.

The RPA bot assigned to automate production of the monthly management report enables Deloitte to complete the report in one hour—a process that used to take five to eight days. Automation eliminates errors introduced into the process through manual data entry. Deloitte also uses an RPA bot to automate the production of a quarterly management report.

The process used to take 240 minutes to run but is now completed by the RPA bot in 30 – 40 minutes.

For accounts receivables, an RPA bot generates a list every day that reports how long each invoice remains on the books without being paid. This aging list report used to require one hour a day for processing but is now completed in 15 minutes.

To manage travel expenses, the RPA bot generates a daily report of all travel expenses for review by top management. "It used to take us three hours a day to acquire the information because the analysts had to open many emails from travel agencies to extract the information and put it into the system," says Seefelder. "Now, the RPA bot can finish the task in 15 minutes."

To keep Deloitte employees current on the fluctuating rates of currency exchange, the RPA bot links directly to Brazil's central bank. Updates require no human intervention.

Based on the successful deployment of RPA bots in automating management reports, Deloitte is considering other applications for RPA technology, both internally and externally. "We're sure that the technology works so we can go to our clients and offer them these products," says Seefelder. "For example, one of our clients is a large Brazilian telecom company, and we'll work with them on opportunities to benefit from this solution, based on our experience."

Deloitte.

About Deloitte

A leading provider of audit and assurance consulting, financial advisory, risk advisory, tax and related services, Deloitte serves four out of five Fortune Global 500 companies. Deloitte includes over 335,000 dedicated professionals in independent firms operating in over 150 nations. These firms are members of Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu Limited, a private company incorporated in England and Wales.

The client featured in this case study initially engaged with WDG Soluções Em Sistemas E Automação De Proces LTDA, which began conducting business as IBM on January 1, 2021. The WDG products in this case study, WDG Studio and WDG RPA, are now known as IBM RPA Studio and IBM RPA Solution, respectively.

Solution component

- IBM® Robotic Process Automation