



Automation to build business agility

Sol Caribbean streamlines CapEx
processes with IBM Cloud Pak®

by Kristin Fern Johnson

5-minute read

Business agility is a must for fast-growing Sol Caribbean, Ltd. The petroleum company has expanded exponentially since it launched in 2005. Today, it's valued in the billions of dollars and operates in 23 countries throughout the Caribbean basin, supplying fuel, liquid petroleum and lubricant to the retail automotive, aviation, marine and trucking industries—among others.

To coordinate and automate its capital expenditure (CapEx) processes across its complex, diverse organizational structure, Sol Caribbean uses [IBM](#)



[Cloud Pak for Business Automation.](#)

That coordination is no easy task. The company initiates approximately 1,000 projects a year spanning its countries and businesses. Projects vary greatly in scope, from developing a new gas station to purchasing an office computer.

Before engaging IBM in 2017, the company's CapEx process was far from agile. "At the time, the entire process was done via email," says Juan Lopez, Regional Operations Manager at Sol Caribbean. "There was no central repository, no way to

track the documents for a project, no workflow and no stamp of approval when all stakeholders had signed off on a project.”

“When we got to an audit, it was difficult to find supporting documentation for each project,” he continues. “Our business is asset-heavy, and we wanted to have better control of our investments. From the approval process through completion, there was no way to review the relative success of a project—not only in terms of money spent, but also what business it generated or whether it had a good or a bad return.”

The company needed a technological solution to help better manage its CapEx processes, track and audit projects, and minimize the risk of fraud.

Automates
capital
expenditure
process in 23
countries for

1,000

projects per year

Streamlines
approval time
for major
projects from
weeks to

1

week or less

Automation in action

Sol Caribbean worked with IBM Business Partner LPA Corporate Solutions (LPA) to build an automation platform underpinned by the IBM Cloud Pak for Business Automation solution, which is optimized for deployment on [Red Hat® OpenShift®](#) on any cloud or IT environment. Sol Caribbean executives chose the solution over several others based on a prototype LPA presented during the selection process. “It touched all the points—business process management, document management, content management and automated workflow,” says Lopez.

The resultant centralized platform, housed on premises in Barbados on virtualized servers, completely automates the company’s investment process:



- To initiate a project, authorized users—often country managers—log in to the platform through the IBM solution’s web-based interface, fill out an online application form and submit requisite supporting documentation,

which is stored in a centralized repository of project-related content. The repository is part of the content management component of the IBM Cloud Pak for Business Automation solution, which also employs a

robust security schema to protect confidential documents from exposure to unauthorized users.

- The rules-based engine included in the business automation workflow component of the IBM Cloud Pak for Business Automation solution then automatically assigns and routes the project request to the appropriate reviewers using an authorization matrix based on budget threshold, business sector and country of origin. Reviewers approve or reject the project and submit justification for their decisions.
- The system then tracks every step of the CapEx project—from approvals through project completion—and can generate reports on the status of a project or set of projects at any time during project execution or following completion. In addition, the system is integrated into a collaborative process with the accounting system to ensure budgets are in sync and on track.

“In the past, we would spin our wheels for weeks on some of the more complex projects, trying to reach consensus on decisions Now, the great majority of our approvals are done in a week.”

Juan Lopez, Regional Operations Manager, Sol Caribbean, Ltd.

An end-to-end view

Since the platform's implementation in 2019, it has fulfilled its promise—attested to by its positive reception by one of Canada's largest suppliers of fuel and petroleum products, Parkland Fuel Corporation, which acquired Sol Caribbean in January 2019. "We've been able to prove the value of the system to Parkland," says Lopez.

"Parkland stakeholders have looked at it from different perspectives and have endorsed it."

Most importantly, it's provided Sol Caribbean vital process improvements. The centralized repository grants users access to project documentation at any time, from anywhere, facilitating compliance and speeding up processing time. "We have much better control from a compliance perspective," says

Lopez. "We're comfortable knowing we have documentation for every project and can substantiate any audit. The CapEx approval process is streamlined—it takes less time to get projects approved because everyone knows what needs to be done and by whom.

"We now have the tools to track the duration of projects," he continues, "which helps us make continuous improvements. And we're starting to generate information that allows us to track KPIs, such as the percentage of projects that are on budget or are on time."

Fraud prevention is another benefit. "There are checks and balances in place now to make sure we can

measure procurements against our ERP investment tool," says Elena Henckel-DaCosta, Managing Director of LPA. "That capability helps us minimize the potential for fraud."

The platform's rules engine also facilitates faster decision making. The IBM Cloud Pak for Automation solution is configured to include milestones and deadlines for project sign offs. If reviewers miss their deadlines, the final approver is automatically notified through the platform. "In the past, we would spin our wheels for weeks on some of the more complex projects, trying to reach consensus on decisions," says Lopez. "Now, once the project starts, the platform automatically assigns timelines, so people are required to provide feedback within a

given period. Decision making literally has to be quicker. The great majority of our approvals are done in a week.”

According to LPA, future recommendations may include using robotic process automation to integrate the platform with Sol Caribbean’s ERP system. Another area for future exploration is the use of AI to enhance statistical and market analysis.

In the meantime, Sol Caribbean is enjoying the benefits of its current platform. “This solution complements the management of our investment process,” says Lopez, “so I’m very happy with it. All IT implementations are difficult; change management is difficult. It has required a lot of work and commitment, but we’re at a point now where the system is working well.”

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Juan Lopez, Regional Operations Manager,
Sol Caribbean, Ltd.



About Sol Caribbean Ltd.

Founded in 2005, [Sol Caribbean](#) (external link) supplies petroleum products throughout the Caribbean basin, with operations in 23 countries. Headquartered in Bridgetown, Barbados, it distributes fuel, lubricant and liquid petroleum gas through a network of service stations and to commercial customers in the shipping, aviation, trucking, mining and luxury boating industries. The company was acquired in early 2019 by Parkland Corporation, Canada's largest independent supplier of fuel and petroleum products.

Solution components

- IBM Cloud Pak® for Business Automation
- IBM® Business Automation Workflow
- IBM FileNet® Content Manager

About LPA Corporate Solutions (LPA)

Founded in 1996, IBM Business Partner [LPA](#) (external link) is a group of companies with international presence and leadership dedicated to the production and integration of digital transformation solutions including business processes management, case management, enterprise content management, robotic process automation, intelligent automation, AI, web application and portal development, and e-commerce development. Its solutions enable more than two hundred clients to achieve competitive advantage through the intelligent management of their assets and documents, and by optimizing their critical organizational processes. LPA has branch offices in Argentina, Chile, Peru, Ecuador, Colombia and Barbados.

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