

# The Robot Vanguard

By A J Blackham, 11-8-2019



Robot office software is hot judging by the skyrocketing valuations and revenues of the market leaders in Robotic Process Automation (RPA). You don't see growth figures of 5000% too often.

Is it a moon shot with a long term mission or is it a July 4<sup>th</sup> skyrocket that attracts attention but soon fades away? Just where does RPA fit in the future of 21<sup>st</sup> century business?

The best analogy may be Jules Verne's *From the Earth to the Moon*, a sign of things to come but with a technology limited by its vision.

Just as Verne's moonshot piqued the interest of the 19<sup>th</sup> century reader, robots have corporate board members asking their CEO, "What's our strategy for automation?"

If RPA accomplishes nothing else, getting the attention of the boardroom is a breakthrough for business automation technology - many of whose vendors have been around for over 20 years.

In March 2003 venture capitalist and technology commentator Bill Gurley hailed BPM (Business Process Management) automation software as a major breakthrough for business productivity.

But despite lashings of hype and venture capital, BPM could not break into the boardroom.

RPA has a big advantage over BPM. Like the spreadsheet, RPA is seen as a business tool. Getting it to work is not dependent on the technical smarts of a corporate IT department.

Like the spreadsheet, RPA allows business people to solve a self-evident business problem that consumes a lot of time; in this case, clerical staff re-keying data, a task that is not only repetitive and boring but results in transcription errors that can have serious downstream consequences.

In solving the re-keying issue RPA delivers a second breakthrough - albeit possibly detrimental to its own interests.

Imagine a law office – a clerk keys the content of a document into a client file and then into a case file. RPA automates all of this, scanning the document and updating the two systems. In doing so it solves a problem that has plagued corporate systems since day one - synchronizing data between different vendor's systems.

The problem exists because enterprise system vendors have little interest in connecting their customers to other vendors' systems ...it could lead to their customers migrating.

The need to solve the problem will increase as 5G communication and its facilitation of the IOT speed up our industrial value chains - from field to plate or mine to garage. Businesses in each chain will face increased pressure to eliminate integration barriers between their systems.

While RPA has broken through the integration barrier it is really only a band-aid solution. There is no technical reason why enterprise software products can't enable integrations directly.

It is only a matter of time before canny vendors realize that enabling their product to integrate with others is an attractive sales feature. When they do, where to for RPA?

Whether RPA is a moonshot or skyrocket is irrelevant unless you are an investor. By breaking into the boardroom RPA has given the next generation of robotic software the opportunity to automate the rest of business. Vendors from Eastern Europe to India are piling into the market. With corporate reputations now at stake corporate cash will ensure that business automation becomes a reality.