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Laying the Groundwork for Growth through Process Automation

INTRODUCTION

Business owners and executives have often heard the old adage: “When you stop growing, you start dying.” That logic would indicate that everyone is in business to grow, yet few inherently possess the tools and knowledge to propel growth on an annual basis. This is evidenced in a variety of statistics that paint a challenging picture:

- Approximately 90% of new startups fail (Small Biz Trends, 2019)
- 20% of small businesses fail in their first year, 50% in their second year, and 70% in their 10th year (Bureau of Labor Statistics)
- 19% of businesses fail because they were out competed (CB Insights 2019)

While this data may seem alarming, it also tells us that there is much room for improvement when it comes to implementing tools that will place structure around a company’s ability to grow; and hence, their ability to avoid becoming a statistic. One such tool that has proven to play a major role in this area is process automation.

For many years, Business Process Management (BPM), whose implementations were known for being complex, time-consuming and labor intensive, was commonly interchanged with the concept of workflow automation. Most businesses did not have the resources to accomplish this, and mistakenly came to believe no other options existed. Yet in an environment where process automation can mean the difference between growth and stagnation (or death), it’s imperative for leadership to seek out and embrace technology tools to lay the groundwork for growth – growth through process automation.

In this white paper, we’ll outline the important issues to consider for the business itself and for the technology, and demonstrate the results a business may capture through automation.

Defining “Growth Mode”

Before we embark on our discussion of how process automation can facilitate growth, we must first define what growth mode actually is:

Growth mode means much more than just an annual increase in revenue. Companies who are in growth mode have developed, and are actively executing, a plan for growth as part of the overall business strategy.

According to this definition, growth isn't accidental. And it's not growth just for the sake of growing. The company has the how and the why behind its growth, which can happen in many ways:

- **A Price Increase** which grows revenue but not the physical amount of product or service provided.
- **New Markets** in the form of expanding geography or new product launches. This results in additional product and service to be provided.
- **More/Larger Customers** who require more time and more product or service, thus increasing the amount of fulfillment required.

Price increases are common and can increase top line revenue, but they rarely add to the bottom line. They typically are instituted to compensate for rising material, labor and other costs that go into providing the product or service.

That leaves growth through new markets, expanded geography, adding products or services, or landing more / larger customers as likely sources of growth. All of these situations require that the business be positioned to increase the amount of product or service delivered with the same amount of people. Or, if the business hires additional staff to handle the increases, the business must be ready to on-board and train new team members to quickly, efficiently, consistently and accurately fulfill on the volume of orders.

In either case, processes must be in place. To work at peak efficiency and manage the business in the most effective manner possible, those processes must be defined and automated.

What is a Process?

A process involves a series of tasks necessary to achieve or complete a specific outcome within a business. Processes, and the tasks involved, are repeatable and happen every day, whether they are documented or not. Processes can involve any and all aspects of the business, including:

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- *Accounting*
- *Human Resources*
- *IT*
- *Purchasing*

...and others

For example, think about how many repeatable things happen in an accounting department each day. Invoices come in and must be approved and paid. Checks must be cut for various requests. Collections must happen on a regular basis. In many businesses, key employees may have these processes in their heads, and they've become second nature to them. However, these processes aren't accessible to a new hire brought on board to help keep up with business growth. In this environment, processes are not repeatable across the organization, and the organization isn't scalable.

This is where documenting and automating processes enters the picture.

Why Processes are Important

Growing pains are called “pains” for a reason. Typically when a business grows, a series of things starts to happen that leadership hasn’t anticipated, or the growth has come so quickly that the organization isn’t prepared for it. Without processes, many business leaders (and the teams throughout the company) experience the following:

- There isn’t enough physical manpower to serve all the new business.
 - Orders can go unfulfilled
 - Customer service response suffers
 - Existing and new employees aren’t working efficiently
- Cash flow is negatively impacted
 - The volume of paperwork causes delay in invoicing
 - Extended lead times delay invoicing ability
 - Invoices don’t get approved in a timely manner
- Culture and quality suffer
 - Increased stress from top to bottom of the organization
 - Key employees leave
 - Customers decide to do business elsewhere

Based on the list above, you can see how growth can negatively impact a business. This list also demonstrates that when the business is in growth mode, hiring more people will not fix the problem. In our experience, throwing a number of new and inexperienced team members into the mix only exacerbates the issue.

Those who are successful avoid this through the realization that there must be a better way. These business leaders see that a breaking point is on the horizon, and seek solutions to avoid it. Time and again, they turn to processes – and process automation – to enable and smooth the path to their growth. Processes will allow an organization to:

- Fulfill more orders with the same amount of staff
- Create a repeatable experience for customers
- Enhance company culture
- Simplify the on-boarding of new team members, when they’re needed
- Build a scalable, successful business

Simplifying the Documentation and Automation of Processes

The first place to start with documenting processes is the organization's Policies and Procedures manual. This is typically a standard piece of documentation that exists in most organizations, yet most don't consider it to be process related. The good news is that this is exactly what policies and procedures are all about, and provide a great foundation to begin the process. The downside is that there is no way for leadership to monitor and manage whether or not they are being followed correctly or consistently. There are also processes that exist within a business that may not be included in the manual, but that reside in the minds and daily practices of employees across the organization.

A process that we've found to be effective in the documentation of processes involves the following:

- 1. Identify the pains of the organization.**

Either one of two things will be true: 1) there is an existing process causing the pain; or 2) there is no process at all, so executing on daily work is inconsistent or not done in a timely or quality manner.

- 2. Prioritize the internal pains.**

Identify which issue is causing the most internal pain and what process will deliver the biggest bang for the buck in the quickest amount of time. Ask the question: by automating this process, will it relieve stress on the employees?

- 3. Prioritize the external pains.**

Identify what is causing the biggest customer service problems for the organization. Ask the question: by automating this process, will it improve customer satisfaction?

In our experience, the processes that make the biggest impact on the organization revolve around fulfillment and customer service. As we examine pains with our clients, we find that these are the issues that are typically prioritized to be the first processes developed and automated. And this makes sense when a business is in growth mode. You must deliver your product or service efficiently, accurately and consistently. You must also provide the highest level of customer service to ensure that your existing and newly found customers will continue to do business with you. In the absence of these processes, you risk no longer being in growth mode. You're now in survival mode – the opposite of what your business plans call for.

What to Look for in Process Automation Software

When a business is in growth mode, the number one thing leadership wants to focus on is growing the business, not going through a major software implementation. Business need more immediate solutions to address their growing pains quickly, or head off any challenges that may be looming on the horizon as a result of increased customer demand. Therefore, a software should demonstrate the following characteristics:

FAST - a solution that is quick to customize, implement and begin producing results.

EASY - no technical expertise needed for implementation or to use on a daily basis.

AFFORDABLE - price should not be a barrier to solving business challenges.

Today's business culture demands these characteristics. Leadership and team members want to quickly obtain and start using their solution to address problems today, not a year later when a large-scale implementation is complete.

HighOrbit was founded with these tenants in mind. We developed the first solution to meet the fast, easy and affordable needs of businesses in growth mode who don't have the time to wait for a software to ease their pains. A quick and accessible process management system can mean the difference between the growth these businesses desire and the failure that plagues so many.

How to Put Process Automation in Place

Many process management software companies offer a free trial, allowing you the opportunity to test the waters and determine if the product will solve the problems your business is facing. For this reason, free trials are great, but they are not effective if you don't have the right guidance. We at HighOrbit provide this guidance, so our method of putting process automation in place for your organization looks a little different than you may be used to:

Step 1 – The HighOrbit Solutions Session

It is impossible to show you how the software can work for your growing business if we don't know what problems you're facing. This is not a demo, but rather a hands-on session where we work together to identify: what is the biggest problem you're trying to solve? During our time together, we'll document and build a process in the system that you can start using right away. We believe this is the best way to determine if HighOrbit (or any software you may be evaluating) is right for your situation. Within the hour, you'll have a good indication of whether this will work for you. This session, conducted by a HighOrbit Process Specialist, is free.

Step 2 – The Free Trial

Once your first process is launched during the Solutions session, you'll be able to start using it right away, for free for 30 days. You'll be able to see and experience the impact that processes have on your growing business. A HighOrbit Process Specialist is available throughout the course of your trial to help you build additional processes.

Step 3 – Go Live

Once your trial period has concluded, you will go live with the system. HighOrbit offers both hosted and cloud-based options, with the cloud-based being the most popular for businesses in growth mode. All you need is an internet connection.

Grow More Effectively, Increase Profitability

Businesses put growth plans in place for a variety of reasons, whether it's to increase the value for future sale or to gain a competitive advantage, or anything in between. Processes are directly tied to efficiency and profitability – and ultimately, scalability.

The most valuable companies are those which can continue to deliver more product (fulfill on more orders) at the same or lower cost. In other words, to be successful in your growth, you must determine how you will maintain your cost structure while increasing top-line revenue. Automating your processes can make this happen in a number of ways:

- Processes create the most efficient way to run a business. There are many variations within the organization in terms of how things are done. This is just as true in a start-up as it is for a 100-year old company looking to grow. Processes establish the best and quickest way to get from point A to point B. This saves time and money.
- Processes create scalability. When the team is working efficiently, you can do more with the same amount of people, thus, controlling your cost structure while fulfilling more orders and bringing more revenue into the company.
- Processes provide visibility. You can see, in-real time, the status of all activities within your organization. You're actually managing the company, rather than hoping that things are being done.
- A process-oriented environment breeds accountability. Because you have visibility, and all tasks are tracked, everyone is accountable for getting work performed accurately and on time.

All of these factors not only pave the way for growth while helping you avoid the proverbial growing pains, they also make a company more valuable if and when the time comes to sell. Getting started is quick and easy, and can be the most important thing you do for your business.

ABOUT US

HighOrbit

Founded in 2001, HighOrbit is one of the forerunners in the process automation software industry, providing a solution that is fast, easy and affordable for businesses of all sizes to implement. The system was designed to require no coding experience for managers or users, and is supported by U.S.-based process specialists who help clients design processes and best leverage the system for success. HighOrbit clients include a range of both large global Fortune 100 companies and small businesses around the world who commonly value its ease of use and accessibility. *Visit HighOrbit.com to learn more.*

The Author

Brian Dwyer is Lead Process Specialist at HighOrbit, and holds more than 20 years of experience in process automation. He takes a hands-on approach to client implementations, starting the process by identifying the prominent pains a client is facing and working quickly to create a solution to remedy the challenges they face. He has been a fierce advocate for the demystification and simplification of process management to establish and maintain its accessibility for businesses of all sizes.