

The Benefits of Application Automation vs. Traditional Workflow Programs

The goal of this whitepaper is to describe the differences between traditional workflow programs and solutions which offer workload automation across the enterprise. While both claim to automate repetitive business processes, and share several common characteristics, they are actually quite different.

In an ongoing effort to realize improvements in productivity and efficiency, organizations often task managers across all business lines with implementing solutions that optimize workflows. It is often the IT department that must then determine the right tools to do the job based on their unique set of requirements and existing technology infrastructure. With the organization's goals of optimal efficiency and productivity in mind, IT management often has to consider whether to implement workflow programs or a workload automation (often referred to as job scheduling) solution. The ideal objective should be full workload automation for any organization that is serious about achieving optimal efficiencies.

Workflow and Workflow Tools

The Workflow Management Coalition (WfMC), a global organization of adopters, developers, consultants, analysts, as well as university and research groups engaged in workflow and business process management, defines workflow as the "automation of a business process, in whole or in part, during which documents, information or tasks are passed from one participant to another for action, according to a set of procedural rules."

Note the use of the words "participant" and "action" in that definition, implying that "people" are required to complete actions in the workflow process. Workflows are essentially ways of organizing and automating procedures, but still involve manual tasks and decision making. Put another way, in the absence of human intervention, a workflow process comes to a grinding halt.

Workflow models are beneficial in organizations that require human checkpoints but want to ensure that there is consistency in the way that processes are handled. For example, a hospital could use a workflow application to ensure that patients are correctly and efficiently discharged, from the time a doctor signs off on the patient's status, until the patient is escorted to the door. The workflow application would ensure that each hospital associate involved in the patient's release used the appropriate forms and successfully completed their required steps before allowing the process to proceed to the next person and the next step, on and on until the patient is allowed to go home or is transferred to another facility.

There are many tools available to facilitate the design and implementation of workflows. These tools usually aid in the creation of a diagram or flowchart that illustrates all the necessary steps in a business process, including the points where information is passed to participants in the work process in the correct order. While workflow tools can often launch programs and applications, they cannot move from one step to another without human interaction – especially when multiple options exist as the possible "next step."

Enterprise-Wide Workload Automation

Workload automation products, or enterprise job scheduling solutions, integrate and automate complex business processes across multiple applications and platforms.

One of the most critical functions of such solutions is scheduling, in which business processes are “scheduled” to automatically launch at specified dates and times. More advanced automation products have the capability of scheduling a job, or multiple jobs, after a previous step (or steps) has completed, or based on the state or capacity of a resource such as bandwidth or memory. For example, an enterprise job scheduler can check for the completion of a back-up and subsequently launch a file transfer.

Keep in mind that an organization’s business processes consist of multiple components, or “jobs”, and often disparate applications that may serve various departments or divisions throughout an organization. Such if-then-else logic, and the ability to transition from one job or process to another on a large scale without human intervention, is what defines a true automation solution.

Workflow vs. Automation

Workflows support environments where human tasks are required, such as when a physical signature is needed, to complete a component of a business process.

While the procedures outlined as part of the workflow state how each manual task is to be performed, the tasks are still performed manually and are not automated. Therefore, workflow tools attempt to improve the overall work process by outlining exactly how procedures are to be performed from task to task. While workflow tools often help to improve the business process for which they are implemented to address, they do not remove the manual steps that require human intervention, and hence cannot fully automate a work process.

Workload automation solutions, conversely, automate business processes consisting of multiple jobs that are interdependent on one another, and in consideration of other events in the environment that could affect the process or the outcome of any one job. This happens across the enterprise without human intervention in any of the stages of a business process.

Workflow tools have their place in organizations that are streamlining processes in which the business leaders desire human intervention, but such tools cannot by definition achieve full automation.

Why Strive for Full Automation

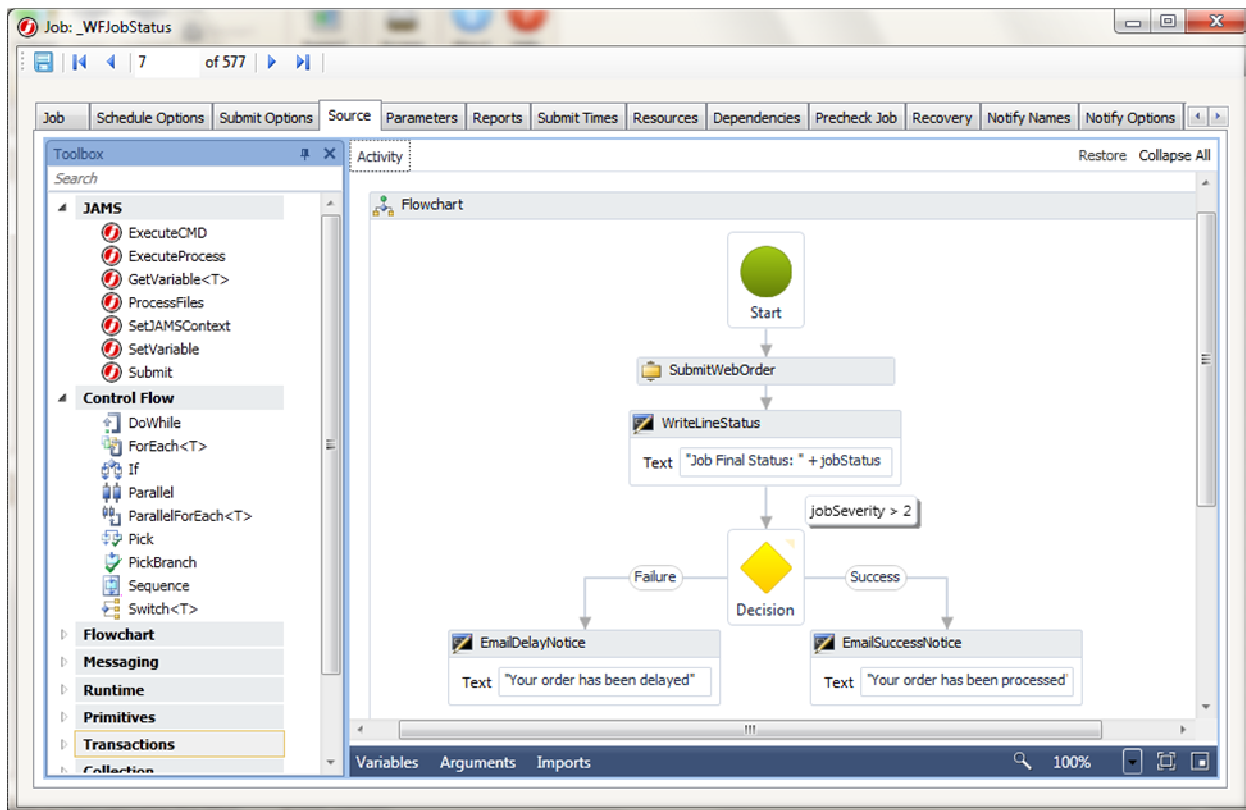
With manual processes, there is a constant risk of human error, delays and inconsistencies in every aspect of the business process. Meanwhile, automation has been proven to achieve tremendous efficiency and productivity in businesses for more than 100 years.

When it comes to critical data, the mishandling of which could lead to loss of profits, lawsuits, fines, or worse for many organizations, choosing a workflow tool over an automation solution could put an organization at great risk.

On the other hand, choosing an automation solution such as an enterprise job scheduling system enables an organization to complete its business processes in the most efficient way possible, with the least amount of downtime. Such a solution also helps you achieve the ultimate goal of full automation across the enterprise, eliminating needless risks associated with human error.

JAMS – a Full Workload Automation Solution

If you are considering a full workload automation solution, JAMS is the leading solution for automating IT and business processes. JAMS provides all the tools needed for complete process automation including visual workflows, and heterogeneous cross-platform execution, intuitive drag-and-drop development tools, event-based triggering, and job scheduling. With JAMS, sophisticated applications can be developed quickly without the need for programming expertise. JAMS also provides the power and reliability that large organizations demand. Its client/server architecture scales for powerful automation across the enterprise. Its centralized management tools provide a unified view of all business processes across the network, and ensure reliable execution of all automated processes.



(This JAMS job definition demonstrates a workflow flowchart decision based on job severity.)

JAMS is the only job scheduling system that is built on a .NET framework. As a result, JAMS is the first enterprise job scheduling system that can be leveraged by both IT Operations Personnel and Application Developers. With its roots in Windows, JAMS also supports running processes across a variety of operating systems (UNIX, Linux, iSeries, OpenVMS, etc.) and applications (SAP, SQL, Oracle, etc.)

About MVP Systems Software, Inc.

For more than 20 years, MVP Systems Software, Inc. has provided leading-edge batch job scheduling and automation solutions to its more than 700 customers. Customers include household names like JPMorgan Chase, Bank of America, The Boeing Company, Kaiser Permanente, The Hartford, and the US Postal Service. MVP's solutions are delivered in traditional on-premise software as well as SaaS models.

To learn more about JAMS, please visit www.JAMSScheduler.com or call 800-261-JAMS.

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