

How BP Logix is Empowering Urban Transformation as Business and IT Process Automation Converge

Introduction

With trends like digital transformation, cloud computing and the ascendance of mobile end users, IT and business processes are coming together as never before. Therefore, it's not surprising to see one of the most critical areas in bringing IT and business or organizational stakeholders together—business process automation and IT process automation—at the apex of these transformative changes.

This report shines a light on one of the true innovators in this arena, BP Logix. EMA examined a real-world urban transformation initiative enabled by BP Logix's Process Director. Process Director's versatility in empowering significant municipal process improvements, as well as in revitalizing IT, is compellingly established in the Q&A that follows in this report.

Process Director: A Brief Introduction

BP Logix's Process Director is designed to codify and automate processes in conjunction with business objectives with sensitivity to role, organizational and business requirements, and the need for easy adaptability to unique or changing conditions. It can combine process workflows into cases associated with roles or tasks—such as HR processes, service desk request management, or even optimizing IT efficiencies. Process Director does this by allowing rules based on key performance indicators (KPIs) to be established across a wide variety of data sources, from web services, to spreadsheets, to social media, to enterprise database repositories. Moreover, Process Director is designed for fast time to value in support of nontechnical stakeholders, versatility in support of differing security and access requirements, and extremely versatile integration options to enable more advanced levels of automation.

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Interview with an IT Director Empowering a Midwestern City to Transform Itself With Digital Services

Process Director's drag-and-drop versatility is underscored in the dialog below, in which "citizen developers" are encouraged to enhance and even at times revolutionize municipal processes—in this case to help empower new business growth and improved municipal functions overall.

Could you share a little background on your city and its recent challenges?

"We're one of the larger cities in our overall metropolitan area with more than 60,000 residents. Our city is seeking to revitalize itself with new businesses—ranging from engineering and technology to manufacturing to local services and entertainment. One reason for our move to revitalize is that a large manufacturing firm left our city in the 1980s, taking 17,000 jobs with them. So we're looking to build back."

What is your role and your IT organization's mission and direction?

"I am our city's director of IT. I began 10 years ago, when our IT organization was essentially just traditional data processing. We served the city by providing basic data processing requirements, including printing out requested forms and other materials on request. In the past, it took us six to nine months to develop a simple program. We had a primarily AS/400 platform foundation, which we expanded with what were then newer technologies like .NET and HTML5.

"But now we have made significant investments in more leading-edge technology—most significantly the PB Logix Process Director. And as a result we're assuming a much more proactive role in helping our city's public resources reinvent how they work, which in turn is helping to make our town more attractive to new businesses."

What first led you to the change how you worked?

"Three years ago our common council came to us complaining that too many things were falling through the cracks. The departments were not well coordinated in working with each other. For instance, we were short on tax revenues, while major projects were missing their schedules. Applications were sitting on people's desks and forms were not getting processed.

"As a result we were consistently getting complaints that it was too hard to open a business in our town. It just took too many trips to city hall. I can speak from personal experience because someone I knew in town was looking to put an extension on his bowling alley. He got what he thought were all the permits, and did all the construction, but it turned out he needed approvals in advance from city planning in addition to the one he got from the building inspector. No one told him this. And then it turned out he needed added approvals from the fire department and health department—because he was serving food on premises.

"So our common council wanted us to find a way to automate our business processes and avoid all this breakage."

What are some examples of how you're doing things differently now?

"One example of what we've done involved establishing process workflows for a more consistent and automated approach to taxing residents for street and curb repairs. The calculations had to be done following state regulations, but they also required different groups to share data to get the correct results. In the past, this used to be done entirely through pen and paper.

"Another example involved workflows we created to help our forestry programs track trees on public land. This included applets to help keep track of where the trees were and what kind of maintenance they required.

"And last year, creating an on-line business occupancy permit really revolutionized the way our building inspectors could work—especially how they could circulate requirements across multiple municipal organizations. This made it much easier for people to create or expand new places to live and work. I've seen full compliance processed in 17 minutes—less time than it would take just to walk to the various offices in city hall that require signatures.

"The really good news is that now the people in our community—not just our municipal teams—truly see the power. We just got an email from a franchise that moved into our community, glowing over how easy it was to open up a new business here. They were thrilled that they could schedule inspections conveniently on line, and then the building inspector showed up right on time."

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How did you come to select BP Logix?

“When I first began to look for a solution, I wasn’t aware of business process automation. All I knew was that we had to find a way to get everything online. We started looking at five to ten custom programs directed at municipalities, and many did 80-90% of what we needed, but nothing entirely fit our requirements. Moreover, they were all constraining in their options, so the town would have to change the way it worked to fit the software. On top of this the support issues we anticipated would have killed us.

“Then I discovered BPM and business process automation. We looked at a number of options there—including IBM and Oracle. But BP Logix stood out for a number of reasons. First of all, it was far and away the most cost-effective. Secondly, it provided a very flexible and easy-to-use development environment, where our IT staff could train and support “citizen developers” across the various municipal organizations.

“For instance, I was just talking to our building inspection department—and they wanted to create another form to do building inspection. They can do 80% of the work with no technical training, and we then we come in to do the last 20% to neaten up.”

How did deployment go, and how was BP Logix received by your community of municipal users?

“We began using Process Director about two years ago and we got very quick results. You might say if anything it’s become too popular. Our municipal groups are starting to think of new, revolutionary ways of doing things. And because it’s easy to make changes, they’re constantly adding new features and enhancing what they do and how they work. You might call this a unique kind of “process creep.” So we’re trying to encourage them to finalize certain forms and processes rather than keeping them as ongoing works in progress. It’s a good thing, but we need to promote a little more discipline around it.

“I’d have to say that many of my counterparts in other cities don’t yet realize what all this is about. They keep thinking it’s just about creating an online form. But the form itself is just 10% of it. They don’t appreciate the value of the process flows and automation that support the activities surrounding processing that form.”

What about IT process requirements?

“We’re also seeing real value in applying BP Logix process workflows to IT. We were using Spiceworks for managing requests and orders in the past but it wasn’t meeting our needs. Now we are using Process Director more and more to automate our IT processes as well.

“For instance, I used Process Director to help me create a new website for the Christmas parade, including payment and registration options—and I did it all in just two hours. In a prior year, during tax season, I had to create a way to manage tax-related issues for IT. Our prior program wasn’t working right, and BP Logix enabled me to produce what we needed. This also took only a few hours.

“Now we’ve integrated Process Director into all of our key databases and every application related to financial data, as well as our geographic information system (GIS). Process Director easily ties into just about anything—including text messaging and web services. Very occasionally Process Director requires a little scripting, but most of the time it’s just point and click.

“Thanks to Process Director, we’ve been able to reorganize IT into a more proactive team. We now have a center of excellence supporting municipal requirements, with a separate group doing what we used to do in terms of just day-to-day operations. And both groups are profiting from new levels of process efficiencies. I think that type of realignment is going to have to occur in many IT organizations over time as IT plays a more proactive role in supporting organizational or business services.

“But honestly, so far I don’t think people realize how powerful BP Logix can be in supporting IT as well as business needs.”

Do you have anything you would like to add?

“I guess I’d like to say that I don’t think the industry understands yet that these two worlds are colliding. *Business process automation* and *IT process automation* are coming together. And BP Logix stands right in the middle of this convergence. Certainly for us, BP Logix has been transformative. Process Director has become our game changer.”

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EMA Perspective

After doing hundreds of Q&A discussions, whether for documentation, consulting or research, I can safely say that it is extremely rare to find one as substantially positive as the conversation here. But perhaps equally to the point, this dialog strongly underscores the need to bring business process automation and IT process automation and workflows together.

So far most of the innovation in shared levels of process workflows has occurred from the IT service desk arena, with strong roots in workflow creation and automation. But BP Logix’s in-depth capabilities for automating business outcomes provide a different and compelling approach to unifying IT and business processes—with clear options to support both IT and business transformation. Process Director’s fast time to value, its ease in supporting business stakeholders with varying needs, and its versatility in both data collection and integrations all help to make it stand out, as well. EMA believes that this Q&A reflects a significant step forward for the industry—hardly the last step, but rather a first compelling exploration of what can be achieved as Process Director and BP Logix continue to evolve to address the growing need for IT-to-business process automation convergence.

About EMA

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