

Quick Answer: How to Choose the Right Use Cases for Robotic Process Automation

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Adoption of RPA is growing year by year, and RPA software revenue is predicted to approach \$2 billion in 2021. Despite this growth, applications and software engineering leaders should not view RPA as a panacea but focus on selecting use cases that meet key criteria.

Quick Answer

How can we choose the right use cases for robotic process automation?

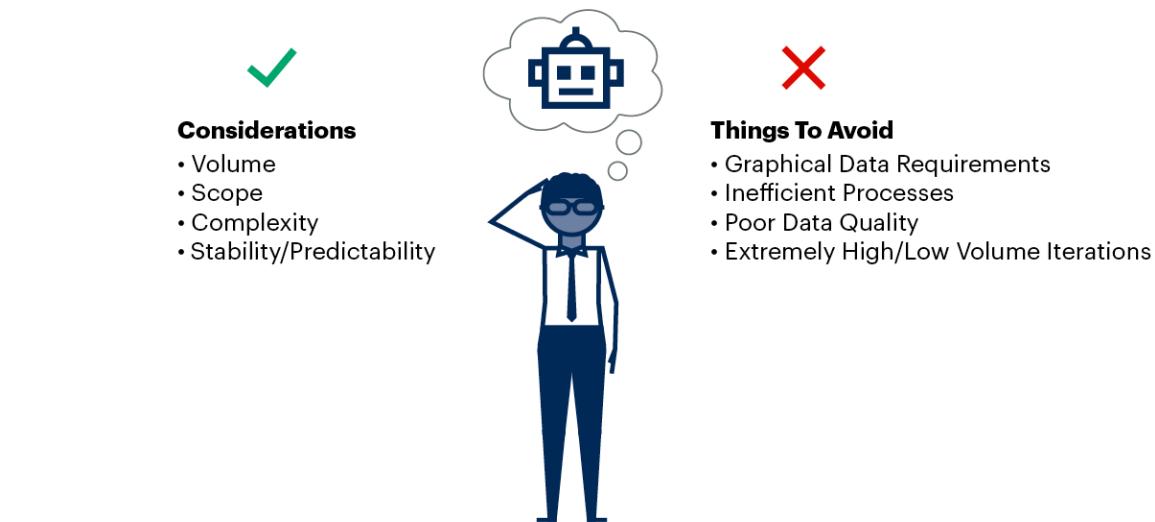
- Prioritize use cases for robotic process automation (RPA) by considering:
 - Volume
 - Scope
 - Complexity
 - Stability/predictability
- Avoid use cases that have:
 - Graphical data requirements
 - Inefficient processes
 - Poor data quality
 - Extremely high- or low-volume iterations

More Detail

How can organizations identify the right use cases for RPA? Figure 1 summarizes, on the left, four key considerations and, on the right, four characteristics of use cases to avoid.

Figure 1: Selecting Use Cases for RPA

Selecting Use Cases for RPA



Source: Gartner

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Gartner

Always ask “Is there a better alternative?” when assessing RPA use cases. If the answer is “no,” use the four key considerations to vet the use cases and determine whether they are a good fit.

Table 1 gives details of each key consideration.

Table 1: 4 Key Considerations for RPA Use Case Selection

<i>Key Consideration</i> ↓	<i>Details</i> ↓
Volume	Does the process occur frequently enough to justify implementing RPA? Processes that do not execute on a regular basis provide little ROI and are more prone to unexpected changes that will break the automation.
Scope	Evaluate the number of steps in a candidate process. There should be no more than 15. Evaluate individual processes, not combinations of processes.
Complexity	Use cases should not have complex business rules: There should be no more than seven “if-else” blocks. Additionally, these conditional statements must be expressed in a format that can be resolved by the automation process. Either all scenarios must be mapped out or a “catch all” must be put in place.
Stability/predictability	Is the process stable or liable to change? Review the history of changes to the process, in addition to any planned changes, in order to identify whether it is stable. RPA of a stable process will, in turn, require less maintenance and fewer changes.

Source: Gartner

Do not use RPA as a cover to obfuscate issues with current processes. You want to avoid automating bad processes, as doing so only “pasters over the cracks” and creates more work in the long run. Instead, align RPA with business strategy and ensure it will have a clearly identifiable benefit to the business. The best use cases have a high business impact and are not complex to automate.

Table 2 describes characteristics of bad use cases for RPA.

Table 2: Characteristics of Bad Use Cases for RPA

<i>Characteristic</i> ↓	<i>Details</i> ↓
Graphical data requirements	RPA works best with structured data, where the outcome is predictable. Graphical data introduces the potential for unintended consequences or a high rate of exceptions and errors. Where graphical data is text-based, the choice of optical character recognition (OCR) engine will strongly influence the outcome.
Inefficient processes	Automating inefficient processes may either mask their inefficiency or make bad processes run faster. Either way, for such processes, RPA prolongs, rather than solves, underlying problems. Consider whether the process itself is at fault, as opposed to automating without analysis.
Poor data quality	An RPA system normally takes source data and propagates it through to other systems. If the source data contains errors, these will spread to any downstream systems that are part of the automation process.
Extremely high- or low-volume iterations	A process with very few iterations provides insufficient benefit for RPA. A process with an inordinately large number of iterations may be more suited to an alternative approach that provides better resilience, error handling, auditing, recovery and resumption options.

Source: Gartner

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