

Case Study:

Automate Studio Powers Mass Uploads of HR Data at Centrica

Introduction

Centrica is an integrated energy company that secures and supplies gas and electricity to over 20 million business and residential customers across the United Kingdom and North America. Operating under its core retail brand names, British Gas and Direct Energy, Centrica is the largest supplier of natural gas in the UK and one of the largest energy and energy-related services providers in the United States and Canada. The company also offers drain cleaning and plumbing, as well as lock and security services, through the Dyno Group.

Centrica employs almost 34,000 people worldwide and went live with SAP in 1997.

Challenge

In 2009, Centrica embarked on a project to implement a new identity access management system, a move that would reconcile data from SAP HR as the trusted source and access to Centrica's UK-based IT systems. "Our HR databases included all of our paid employees, but we needed to capture data for our non-payroll contractors and third-party suppliers to ensure that each person that accessed our systems had a unique identifier," says Julie Hunt, HR Business Solutions Analyst at Centrica.

Called the Identity Access Management (IAM) project, the plan not only required the company to update its backend systems, but it also meant that Centrica had to upload 5,500 new records to its SAP HR module quickly. "Usually, for bulk uploads, we would have to spend time determining if our developers had already created a tool that would work. If not, it would take them at least another two months to develop, test, and deploy one," Hunt says. "If we had to wait that long to start updating our data, the entire IAM project would be delayed. That just wasn't an acceptable option for us."

Hunt and her team began searching for a technology that would accelerate bulk uploads to SAP and bypass the lengthy in-house custom development process. They found that solution in Automate Studio.

Industry

Energy

Challenges

- Quickly upload non-payroll contractor and third-party supplier information to SAP
- Bypass lengthy development process required for creating custom bulk upload tools
- Flexible tool that can be utilized for a variety of reasons

Solutions

Automate Studio

Results

- Successfully uploaded non-payroll information to SAP within a short timeframe
- Adjust trade union rates for thousands of employees in one day
- Significantly cut cost of uploads performed by outsourced
- HR services provider

"With Automate Studio, our HR provider can complete bulk uploads much faster, so we are charged far less. That brings our costs down significantly, allowing us to reinvest those savings into other areas of the business."

— Julie Hunt, HR Business Solutions Analyst, Centrica

Solution

Centrica had been using Automate Studio in other areas of its business, specifically to manage maintenance at its energy plants. “Another internal unit within the company was using Automate Studio to streamline plant maintenance functions, so they approached us and suggested we try it,” Hunt says. “After we learned more about the technology and explored its functionalities, Automate Studio seemed like the ideal tool for accelerating the bulk data uploads that HR needed to accomplish.”

Initially, Hunt was concerned about safeguarding employee data and complying with the company’s strict data security requirements. However, she quickly saw that Automate Studio complies with SAP authorizations. “We make it a top priority to secure all of our company data, but HR information is particularly sensitive,” she says. “With bulk uploads, there’s the risk that someone could make a mistake and compromise the data, but Automate Studio utilizes SAP controls to help ensure that doesn’t happen. Furthermore, we restrict Automate Studio access to expert users, a feature that gives us the ability to complete updates quickly without having to forego tight security.”

Results

Prior to Automate Studio, Hunt and her team had to engage in lengthy development cycles to create tools that could handle bulk uploads. Now they can update thousands of records quickly without the costs associated with custom development. “When we had to create our own upload tools, it required at least two months for development, testing, and implementation. Even worse, if you needed to make any changes, it meant the tool would be back in development for at least another two months,” Hunt says. “With Automate Studio, we can create a new transaction and start uploading within a matter of hours, a change that has enabled us to complete projects much more quickly.”

In addition to the IAM project updates, HR now uses Automate Studio to save time while performing other bulk updates. “We recently had to change the trade union rates for almost 8,000 employees, changes that would normally take 10 people two days to update in SAP,” says Hunt. “With Automate Studio, that job took one person only seven hours to complete. The technology has made SAP updates faster and more efficient across the entire department.”



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Automate Studio has not only helped Centrica save time while performing essential data updates, but the technology has also allowed Centrica to reduce the cost of uploading employee information to SAP. “We outsource all of our HR data administration to a third-party provider that charges a fee for any updates that fall outside of ‘business as usual,’” Hunt says. “With Automate Studio, our HR provider can complete bulk uploads much faster, so we are charged far less. That brings our costs down significantly, allowing us to reinvest those savings into other areas of the business.”

Future plans

Given their success so far, Hunt and her team are looking to further expand the use of Automate Studio within the HR department. “There are still many HR functions, including organizational management tasks, that require large data updates that are still done manually,” says Hunt. “The more we use Automate Studio, the more we discover new ways to integrate the technology into our processes. Using Automate Studio has already saved us time and lowered costs, and we’re excited to see how we can further expand upon those successes in the future.”