Intalere Uses Robotic Process Automation to Bring Efficiencies to Group Purchasing Operations and Accelerate Savings for Members

THE CHALLENGE

Connecting Intalere’s members to the correct contracts and ensuring they are maximizing their savings is at the core of Intalere’s operations and focus. The process to ensure members are on the correct contracts as quickly as possible is complex, crossing multiple internal systems and often full of manual data manipulation. Further, many of the processes require input and data from external partners, like distributors and suppliers, with their own systems and unique datasets. There are numerous datasets that must be validated, and there are often discrepancies in the data which delay savings for members.

Nutrition studies offer a particular example of an area with multiple manual processes and numerous repetitive steps. Cost study analysts spend significant time logging onto supplier websites to check pricing, copying and pasting that data into the cost analysis tool and then formatting it for analysis – all of which takes hours to complete.

When Megan Williams, Vice President of Client Success for Intalere, approached the Intalere Intelligent Automation team, her group was overburdened by an ever-growing backlog of work and a heavy reliance upon multiple unwieldy Excel spreadsheets. “As an implementation team we ensure that our members get access as quickly as possible to the right contracts at the right price,” said Williams. “Unfortunately, my team was spending a significant amount of valuable time pulling data from multiple locations then merging and scrubbing the data to get to the point where analysis could be completed.”

This prep work resulted in delays and backlogs in critical areas like processing letter of commitment forms, connecting contracts with distributors for new members, and resolving supplier contract connection denials. In the case of denials, working as efficiently as possible, one resource would struggle to process incoming denials and direct for follow up in under a week.

A SHORT TAKE ON SUCCESS

Challenge
Time-consuming, manual process for member contract connection.

Solution
Development of a software robot to handle documentation input and data analysis.

Outcome
More efficient operations returning more than four FTEs’ worth of productivity to higher value work enabling faster savings for Intalere members.

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John Carmelite, Vice President, Enterprise Applications, Intalere
Intalere began its automation journey by undertaking a proof of concept project to develop a software robot (bot) to complete Nutrition Studies. An existing team of developers was rapidly trained and developed and deployed its first bot in under six weeks. The deployed bot searches multiple supplier sites, navigates to the correct item, returns the correct price, updates that price information in the cost study tool, manipulates and formats the data, and notifies the team member that the cost study is prepared and ready for analysis.

Once the proof of concept was completed, Intalere’s automation experts met with several members of the Client Success team and facilitated a brainstorming session to identify, classify and rank potential automation candidates. “A process prioritization session is a key component of implementing an automation program,” according to John Carmelite, Vice President of Enterprise Applications for Intalere. “Working with Megan and her team, we were able to identify the best candidates for automation based on objective criteria like hours to perform the process, volume of transactions and process complexity.” The outcome of the session was a prioritized list of automation project candidates.

The team first worked on automating contract connection denials. A bot was implemented to monitor an Outlook inbox, download the specific daily file(s), input data from the file into a master tracking Excel spreadsheet then run several rounds of data analyses before finally sending emails to the contacts indicating if a denial was accurate and next step actions. The concept was that if the bot could take on most of the time-consuming and repetitive data analysis early each morning before the Denials team arrived, the team would be free to spend significantly more time researching more complex items while also substantially reducing the response time to suppliers.

Other time-consuming manual processes were addressed next. A bot was implemented to audit initial contract connections by distributors. The bot takes data submitted by multiple distributors, in their unique formats, compares it to the correct contract information, generates a differential exception list and emails the implementation analyst when complete. Another bot collects data from multiple systems, analyzes processed forms and sends an email to suppliers for follow up.

Overall, Intalere has saved and returned to the team on an annual basis over four full-time employees’ (FTEs) worth of effort by automating manual repetitive processes. More importantly, team members are leveraging the bots to allow them to move to higher value, more rewarding work.

“The success of this project was that it went beyond just automating or replicating an existing set of tasks. Our process was improved and reimaged,” said Elaine Jancay, Sales Support Coordinator. “We are seeing improvements in overall time to resolve denials simply because our outreach begins within 24-48 hours compared to seven days. We now have more time to collaborate with the contract access team on various supplier issues.” The reclaimed time has allowed the denials team to address more complex assessments, resulting in an increased monthly distributor response rate of 33%.

“Ultimately, the most important benefit of the RPA project was that Intalere members could be connected more quickly and accurately to savings opportunities through their Intalere contracts, maximizing the cost reduction benefits in the supply chain that are so important to healthcare providers today,” said Carmelite.

About Intalere
Intalere’s mission focuses on elevating the health of healthcare by designing highly personalized solutions to improve our members’ financial, operational and clinical performance.