



Foundation Cuts Manual Data Entry, Empowers Staff With Robotic Process Automation

Customer Profile

The Ralph M. Parsons Foundation (RMPF), a private, nonprofit grantmaking organization focused on providing investments to arts & cultural, education, health and human services organizations within Los Angeles County, was experiencing rapid growth that their manual accounting processes and tools – and small staff – could no longer sustain. Working with Armanino’s Strategy and Transformation experts, the foundation streamlined manual job functions through robotic process automation (RPA).

Benefits

- Cut the time spent on manual processes, with RPA technology saving each employee approximately five to 10 hours per week and removing approximately 50 hours per month from senior accountant workload
- Modernized finance and accounting technology to meet RMPF’s evolving needs
- Empowered staff to relinquish manual tasks and regain focus on core business needs
- Maintained cost savings by eliminating the need to hire additional full-time employees

Services



Armanino Strategy and Transformation Services



Tax Services



1099 Filing Services



Sage Intacct



Concur



Armanino Managed Services

Challenge

In 2018, The Ralph M. Parsons Foundation – a private, nonprofit grantmaking organization focused on providing investments to arts and cultural, education, health and human services organizations in Los Angeles County – noticed their systems were no longer equipped to handle the rapid growth they were experiencing.

The organization had gone from an approximately \$350 million endowment to nearly half a billion-dollar endowment and was moving away from traditional investing into a diversification model. However, the organization was using disparate software systems coupled with spreadsheets to manage their finances. They quickly realized that this system would no longer be adequate for their maturing organization.

The nonprofit decided to engage the Strategy and Transformation team at Armanino to help them find a solution that would manage their heightening workload and business complexity – without bringing on additional employees.

“Our pride is around our lean, efficient team,” said Thomas Brewer, RMPF’s vice president of finance and administration. “We wanted to continue to reduce costs and keep our focus on grantmaking rather than building out a huge team. We wanted to save the cost of additional resources and put that back into the community.”

This desire to accommodate rapid growth without company expansion led RMPF to brainstorm other avenues, like the possibility of using automation to reduce task redundancies and manual entry.

Solution

Armanino – one of the nation’s top 20 CPA and consulting firms – had an established relationship with RMPF dating back to 2010. Initially engaged to assist with financial and tax requirements, Armanino’s main role was to help RMPF close the books quarterly and prepare taxes annually. RMPF also used Armanino’s 1099 Filing Service, a turnkey, electronic filing process, to assist with their 1099 tax filings.

In the years following, RMPF expanded its relationship with Armanino to encompass several other firmwide services. RMPF partnered with Armanino to implement Sage Intacct, a cloud-based financial management solution built to improve efficiency and reduce the spreadsheet jumble, and Concur, software used to manage expenses and seamlessly integrate with Sage Intacct. RMPF also used Armanino’s Managed Services program, which provided highly specialized experts

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and resources that enabled RMPF to cost-effectively optimize their current solutions and technology platforms.

As RMPF's endowment grew and business intensified, the nonprofit began a dialogue with Armanino's Strategy and Transformation team about the future of their business and the AI they hoped to incorporate in their daily operations.

Therefore, when RMPF encountered this latest challenge, they knew where to turn.

“Not all firms have the same breadth of skill,” Brewer said. “When I spoke with Armanino about what I knew I needed, which was strategy, software and someone who could help me with this RPA element, it was all within the framework of their organization. Having an existing relationship in place was great because when I asked Armanino whether they had the right team for the job, I knew that I would get an honest answer.”

Armanino answered RMPF's call to action by using DataVue, Armanino's methodology to digital transformation, to assess where RPA could alleviate some of RMPF's operational burdens. As a result of the analysis, Armanino began building out two separate RPA projects to meet RMPF's needs: investment analysis and grantmaking software integration.

Investment Analysis

The investment analysis RPA provides a way for RMPF to better manage the financial statements they receive regularly from investment fund managers. Prior to this RPA project, RMPF's senior accountants were spending about 50 hours per month extracting values from different statements, battling confusion with statements that had varying formats or terminology, and then manually creating journal entries for each of those.

The investment analysis RPA simplified this time-consuming exercise. It allowed RMPF to process large volumes of investment statement PDFs, automatically generating journal entries and uploading those into Sage Intacct, a cloud-based financial management system for nonprofits.

To begin this process, the accountant could either forward an email with the statement attachment to a particular RPA bot's email address, or save it in a file labeled, “to be processed.” At that point, the RPA bot goes into the fund, recognizes what fund it is, renames the file according to RMPF's standardized format, extracts the data from it, and then goes directly into their accounting system, Sage Intacct, and creates the journal entry.

WHAT THEY'RE SAYING

“In terms of results, this would save me an FTE, When you think of the data entry that has to be done...taking all the data that’s in the database, transpose it into our Sage Intacct account, create a vendor file, bring all the data across, input all the payment data, generate the correspondence ...that’s close to \$150,000 in total compensation.

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At this point, the senior accountant can simply spot check journal entries, verify that the data is correct, and then approve it, eliminating time spent on manual document processing.

Grantmaking Software Integration

Armanino’s grantmaking software integration allowed RMPF to interact with web-based systems and application programming interfaces (APIs) and provide two-directional data validation, high-volume programmatic and UI-based data entry.

At the beginning of the process, Armanino examined RMPF’s existing Blackbaud Grantmaking software, a tool commonly used in the nonprofit industry to manage requests for grant monies and handle everything except for the accounting part of the disbursement of funds. This software does not support traditional means of integration, and its API was poorly documented and poorly understood.

Armanino used RPA to pull data out of the Blackbaud system using the API where possible, and where it wasn’t possible, it pulled data and files directly out of the web interface. That data was then brought into Sage Intacct. By running this automated integration on a regular basis, the RPA was able to conduct a bidirectional synchronization of the data and the two systems, eliminating a significant amount of data entry along with any potential for human error.

Results

RMPF’s digital transformation yielded bottom-line benefits such as valuable time saved, greater visibility into the organization’s finances, reduced potential for human error, and cost savings by eliminating the need to bring on additional full-time employees. The grantmaking software integration saved approximately five to 10 hours per workweek of manual data entry, and the investment analysis project saved approximately 50 hours per month.

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But there were also intangible results realized.

The new technology empowered staff to redirect their valuable time to meaningful strategy rather than mundane tasks and boosted their morale by banishing spreadsheet fatigue. It produced excitement about the future of their jobs and the forward-thinking nature of their organization.

WHAT THEY'RE SAYING

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Additionally, in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, RMPF realized that now was the time to seize the opportunity to use technology and commit to the resources that would ensure their survival in a rapidly changing marketplace.


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About Armanino^{LLP}

Armanino provides an integrated set of accounting services—audit, tax, consulting and technology solutions—to a wide range of organizations operating both in the US and globally. You can count on Armanino to think strategically, to provide the sound insights that lead to positive action. We address not just your compliance issues, but your underlying business challenges, as well—assessing opportunities, weighing risks, and exploring the practical implications of both your short- and long-term decisions. When you work with us, we give you options that are fully aligned with your business strategy. If you need to do more with less, we will implement the technology to automate your business processes. If it’s financial, we can show you proven benchmarks and best practices that can add value company-wide. If the issue is operational, we’ll consult with your people about workflow efficiencies. If it’s compliance, we’ll ensure you meet the requirements and proactively plan to take full advantage of the changes at hand. At every stage in your company’s lifecycle, we’ll help you find the right balance of people, processes, and technology.

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