

CASE STUDY

New pharmacy robot delivers NHS hospital savings

‘Steve’ the bot frees up resource for Lewisham and Greenwich NHS Trust

Keen to unlock cost savings and focus on providing the best possible care to patients, Lewisham and Greenwich NHS Trust partnered with NHS Shared Business Services (NHS SBS) to discover how robots can reduce resources spent on repetitive, manual processes.



The NHS SBS team and project manager were knowledgeable, experienced and professional. I wouldn't hesitate to recommend NHS SBS as a highly effective partner."

STEVE WILLIAMS

Operations and IT Manager (Pharmacy)
Lewisham and Greenwich NHS Trust

THE CHALLENGE

Lewisham and Greenwich NHS Trust serves a population of around one million people, employs more than 7,000 staff, and has around 900 beds across its two hospitals.

Recognising the opportunity to automate some of its most mundane and time-consuming manual activities, the Trust identified an existing process that appeared to be an ideal candidate for Robotic Process Automation (RPA).

The Trust's pharmacy routinely orders a huge variety of medications, which, in turn, generates a high number of invoices to be processed.

Many are also from the same supplier, meaning there was an opportunity to consolidate invoices and make fewer transactions.

With its experience of implementing large-scale automation projects successfully, the Trust turned to NHS SBS to explore whether this was a good place to begin its RPA journey and to guide it through the development activity.



THE SOLUTION

NHS SBS automation experts collaborated with the Trust to create a clear plan and plot the journey towards developing a potential RPA solution – using innovative UiPath technology and NHS SBS securely-hosted infrastructure.

Firstly, the NHS SBS team delivered a series of workshops to identify the precise challenge and existing process – to ensure that RPA was indeed the best solution. This also highlighted any potential barriers to implementation or impact on other systems, and ensured Trust colleagues were engaged in the process and recognised the benefits RPA could deliver.

The team was then able to design and develop a comprehensive RPA solution – following high-quality documentation, testing and approvals at each stage of the project.

This led to the launch of a robot (or bot) nicknamed 'Steve', which was programmed to handle the very specific task of consolidating pharmacy invoices into a single weekly payment, achieving reduced invoice payment costs.



THE RESULT

The entire project was completed in just 12 weeks, with the bot delivering immediate benefits to the Trust's pharmacy department.

This included reducing task completion time from one hour to just two minutes, with a 100% accuracy rate. And, thanks to a more streamlined and consolidated pharmacy invoice process, the Trust expects annual financial savings of around £40,000.

Following this success, NHS SBS is now working with the Trust to identify further efficiency opportunities as part of its wider automation programme.

Steve Williams, who led the project at the Trust as Operations and IT Manager (Pharmacy) and was the inspiration for the bot's name, said:

"This was a very well managed project from start to finish. The NHS SBS team and project manager were knowledgeable, experienced and professional – guiding us through the journey in a clear and logical way.

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SUMMARY

- Pharmacy invoice process reduced from 1 hour to just 2 mins with 100% accuracy
- Trust expects annual financial savings of around £40k
- Project to build and rollout 'Steve' the robot completed in 12 weeks

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We achieved the savings and efficiencies that we set out to and all within the agreed timescales. Handing over the bot was extremely smooth too and we were impressed with the ongoing support and maintenance that NHS SBS provided."