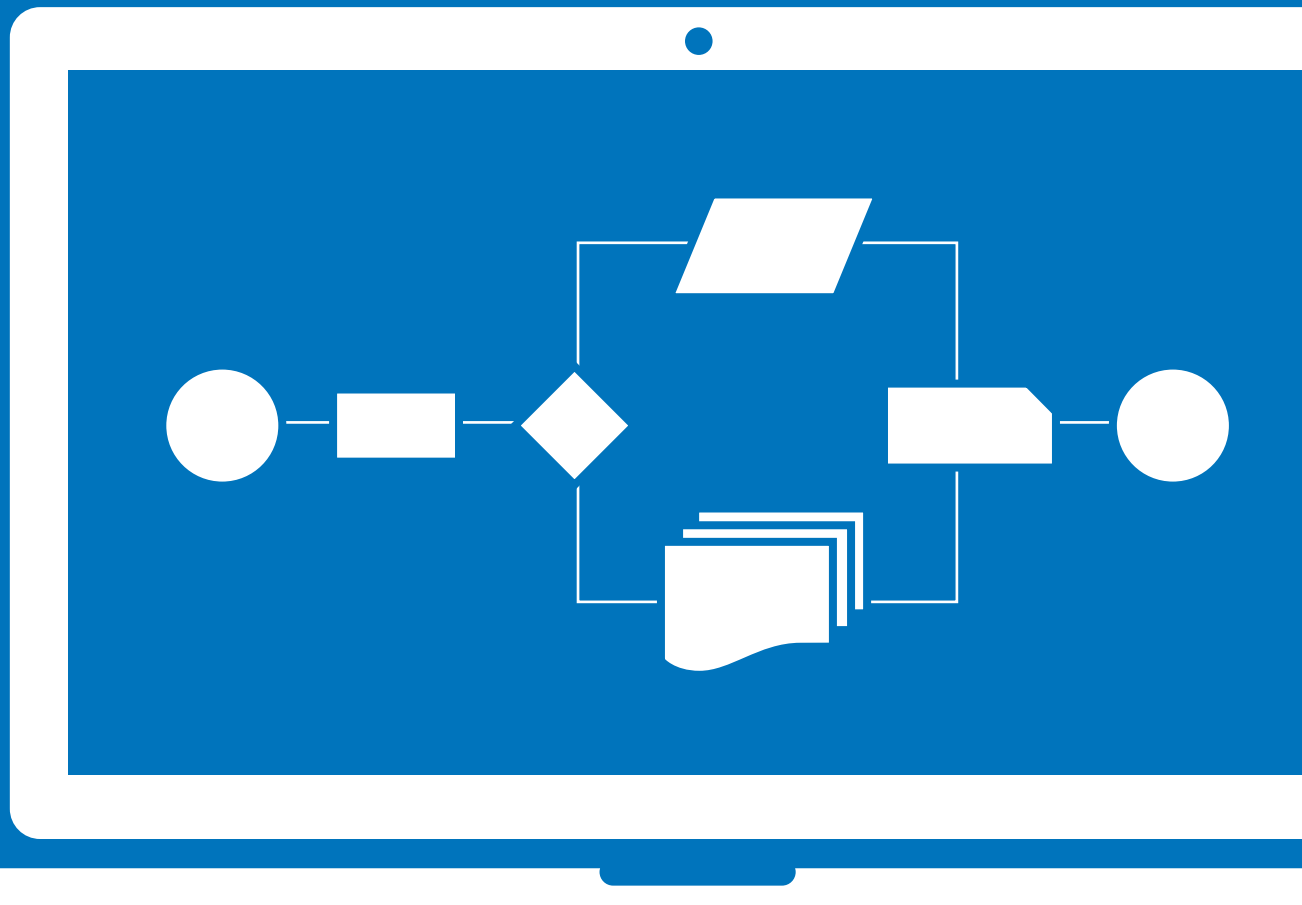


PeerPaper Report

Best Practices for Selecting a Workload Automation Solution

Based on Real User Reviews of OpCon

2020



ABSTRACT

Workload automation solutions play a vital role in IT operations, especially in large, complex organizations. Selecting the right workload automation solution is a subjective, nuanced process. According to members of IT Central Station, however, a number of best practices have emerged over the years that can guide the selection process. This paper is based on real user experiences with the OpCon workload automation solution. Highlights include ease of use, fast job processing, and fast implementation, as well as value factors like Return on Investment (ROI) and freeing employees to do more valuable work. Users also recommend solution providers who offer extensive training and fast, reliable support.

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INTRODUCTION

IT operations, especially in bigger organizations, tend to generate numerous repetitive, time-consuming processes. Workload automation offers a solution, helping IT departments avoid cumbersome and laborious batch processes. It's a mature technology, but one that's continually improving. Selecting the right workload automation solution is thus a subjective, nuanced process.

As members of IT Central Station explain in their reviews of OpCon, best practices are emerging to guide selection. For instance, users place an emphasis on ease of use, fast job processing, and fast implementation. They encourage potential buyers of workload automation toolsets to focus on Return on Investment (ROI) and the potential to free employees to do more valuable work.

A Brief Overview of Workload Automation and Use Case Examples

Since the dawn of the computing era, system administrators have been responsible for activities like backing up files to tape and batch transaction processing. Workload automation tools came into existence years ago to alleviate the burden of such labor-intensive manual processes. IT Central Station members are dedicated users of this technology. “We use it to run our core system,” said an Administrator, Core Application Services at a financial services firm with more than 200 employees. For him, this includes “all of our batch processing and [file movement](#), automation, and extract processing.”

Figure 1 shows a selection of use cases for workload automation.

A Systems Developer at a small financial services firm shared that his solution “runs all types of jobs to make [changes to our database](#).” He added, “From our end, we primarily use it to pull and

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... runs all types of jobs to make changes to our database.”

push information to our cloud-hosted system: moving files around, making changes to files, and those types of things.” An OpCon Support Admin at a financial services firm with over 10,000 employees runs all of his [batches](#) across seven Unisys mainframes.

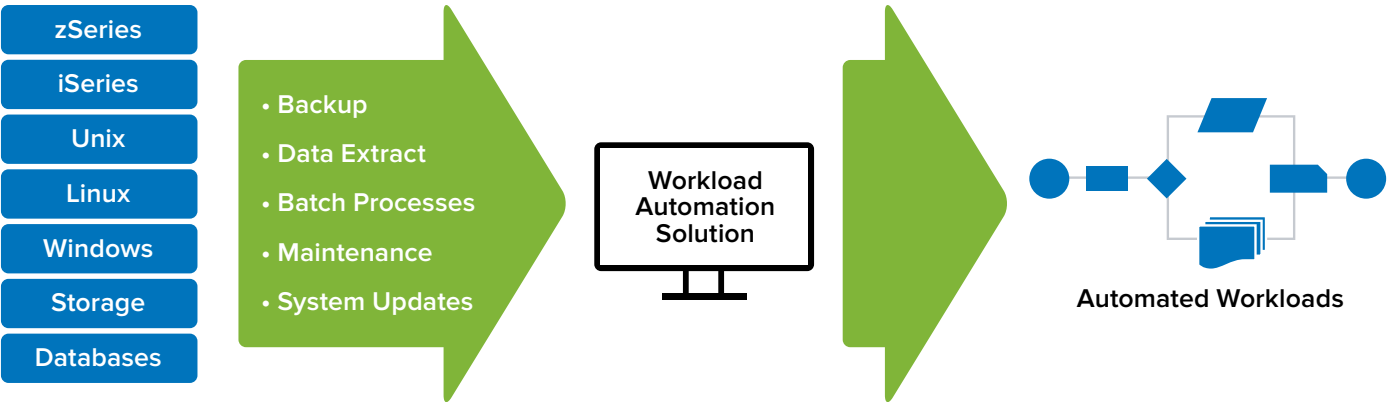
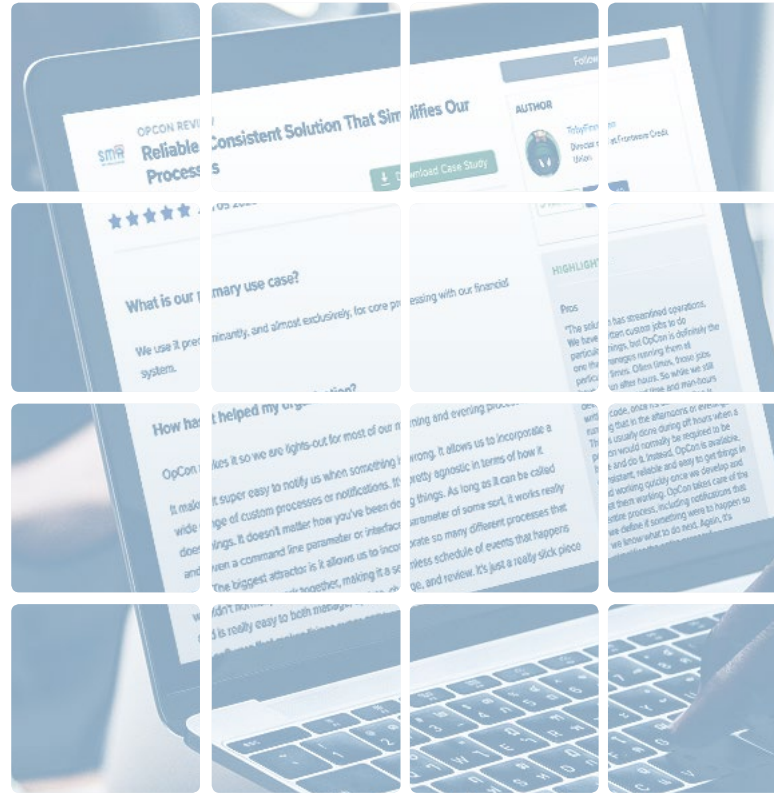


Figure 1 - Workload automation solutions take on a huge variety of tasks involving many different systems.

The Competitive Landscape

IT managers have many choices of workload automation toolsets. In their reviews, IT Central Station members discussed how they came to their preferred solutions. For example, the OpCon Support Admin shared, “We use a product called Control-M from BMC. We can’t find any advantages of Control-M over OpCon. The drawbacks of Control-M are that it’s too expensive and an upgrade takes ages, days, to do. OpCon is cheaper and the [service we get from SMA](#) is absolutely fantastic. The product is always growing.”

The Administrator for Core Application Services offered context for his choice, commenting, “It’s important to keep in mind that OpCon and KeyStone, together, are a completely different animal than Spectrum and UC4. They are separate systems. They work differently. What we gained with OpCon was the ability to [continue to automate everything](#). That was the real key for us.” He also found, “With UC4, our prior core system, we had to go through a core vendor and, if there was a software issue, it would take a little while for UC4 to have a fix. I don’t know if that’s changed with Automic, but support definitely felt once or twice removed, whereas with SMA it’s very immediate.”



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Best Practices for Selecting a Workload Automation Solution

IT professionals have developed a set of best practices for selecting a workload automation solution. As their reviews on IT Central Station reflect, they tend to come to the selection process with high expectations and a lot of experience. As a result, what matters to them are factors like ease of use, fast process, training, quality of support, and ROI.



Seek Solutions That Offer Ease Of Use

Making life easier for system admins is one of the main reasons workload automation exists at all. Thus, ease of use is a highly prized quality in a solution. In this context, the Administrator, Core Application Services was pleased that OpCon “allows us to enable staff to run complex automation tasks by [clicking a button](#) and entering some information.”

Self-service stood out as a key element in ease of use. As an employee at a government agency

with over 1,000 employees remarked, “The most valuable feature is [Self Service](#) because it has made it possible to provide simple and quick solutions in the handling of certain tasks. Self Service is easy to use for people who are not in the IT department and who must act at any time for and with the customers.”

For an IS Operations Manager at a financial services firm with more than 200 employees, “The ease of use and [simplicity in automating processes](#) are good. For example, I have a guy who started working with me about three years ago, he had never touched anything like this but

he was able to pick it up and run with it.” A Senior Core Systems Specialist at a financial services firm with more than 200 employees similarly shared, “I would definitely rank basic ease of use as very high. It is very [user-friendly](#).”

“Many of the other solutions I’ve used require a lot of scripting and coding,” said a Computer Operations Manager at a financial services firm with more than 500 employees. He added, “OpCon is more a GUI interface and I was able to get a lot of my team [training on this with ease](#), without sending them to any classes. A lot of my team members can build jobs, from simple to complex, with SMA OpCon without going to any additional classes.”

A Manager Applications Operation Group at an insurance company with over 10,000 employees echoed this sentiment, observing that “the web solution, Solution Manager, [enables easy access](#) to the application to quickly see if we have problems with our programs. Immediately, with its color code, we know if all is okay or if we have a problem. The web interface is really simple to use and we can put it on a screen on our desks and look.”

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... the entire automation landscape that OpCon provides is valuable.

Integration with other platforms also figured into users’ assessments of value and ease of use. The Administrator, Core Application Services shared that “the entire automation landscape that OpCon provides is valuable. The way it works with Correlation KeyStone is probably unmatched for that core system in the credit union industry. SMA has created [four connectors](#) that work with KeyStone in a way that allows us to automate basically every batch-processing or back-office task. That’s the true value.”

Opt For Fast Processing

A workload automation solution should execute its processes at a brisk clip. This was an insight that emerged from real user reviews. As the OpCon Support Admin put it, “OpCon has streamlined the batch. [It’s made it quicker](#). We’re processing work a lot more easily now, given the dependencies and frequencies we have. We don’t really have to think about checking things. It’s all there in the system and done.”

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OpCon has streamlined the batch. It’s made it quicker.

Users quantified their workload acceleration, with a Unisys Infrastructure Support Specialist at a financial services firm with over 10,000 employees remarking, “If we are talking about a one-off job, it takes roughly five minutes to set that up, which is very quick. Results are [pretty much instantaneous](#).” A 10 percent gain in speed for nightlight processing was the experience of a Manager at a financial services firm with over 1,000 employees. This was matched by a [50 percent](#) reduction in data processing time for a Director of IT at another financial services firm.

Find Ways to Get Up And Running Quickly

No one likes a long slog to get an IT solution into service. IT Central Station members acknowledged the qualities of OpCon in this regard. A System Administrator at a small financial services firm said, “Technically, OpCon was [up and running on the first day](#), but we were still moving things into it during that first week.

Within a week we had processes that were being automated. It wasn't long at all." An Application Support Analyst II at a manufacturing company with over 1,000 employees shared that his first workload job "was automated [in about 10 minutes](#) after install."

Other notable comments about OpCon's ease of install included:

- "The initial [setup is really easy](#). Installing the product is not really difficult." – Manager of Applications Operation Group at an insurance company with over 10,000 employees
- "The [initial setup was straightforward](#). After deploying the solution, it took us 10 minutes to automate our first process."- Systems Developer at a small financial services firm



We have seen ROI in terms of people being able to work more efficiently, which helps with the cost of employees.

- "The initial [setup is very simple](#). When we decided to install OpCon, this was done in two hours and two jobs could be executed directly afterward. For the other two solutions that we tried, it was much more difficult, quite incomprehensible, and nothing worked as a result." – IT staffer at a government agency with over 1,000 employees
- "We automated our first processes [within a week of deployment](#)." - IT Manager/Business Solutions Delivery at a small financial services firm
- "The deployment of OpCon took about three to four weeks. This deployment was [tremendously faster](#) than our previous automation tool, which took almost a year to get in place completely. Even then, we still struggled with issues (with

our previous solution)." - Systems Director at a small financial services firm

Make Sure To Understand The Solution's Economic Value And ROI

IT managers usually have an intuitive sense of whether a solution is paying for itself, but with workload automation, it's a good practice to get a clear picture of ROI. For many users, the issue has to do with team member productivity. As a Senior Analyst at a financial services firm with more than 200 employees explained, "We have seen ROI in terms of people being able to [work more efficiently](#), which helps with the cost of employees." An IT Manager/Business Solutions Delivery at a small financial services firm similarly noted, "We have definitely [seen a return on investment](#). The big return on investment was the fact that we lost three OpCon people from our staff and nobody even knew that we had."

"We've seen a [tenfold return on investment](#)," exclaimed the OpCon Support Admin. The insurance group's Manager of Applications felt their ROI came from [reducing the number of incidents](#) they experienced along with improving the quality of service for their customers. The financial services Systems Developer put it like this: "We have seen ROI. We are becoming an automation forward organization instead of just a financial institution that does everything manually. We have been able to [move so much reporting from paper](#). We are digital because of OpCon."

Cost is not the only driver of ROI. In the case of the financial services Computer Operations Manager, ROI came on the revenue side. He shared, "We have definitely seen a return on our investment with OpCon. We have [doubled our client base](#) without needing to increase our workforce."

Discover Ways To Free Employees To Do More Valuable Work

Liberating people to do more valuable work is another aspect of ROI. It's intangible, but still very real. If automation enables IT staffers to serve the business better, it's a benefit to all. OpCon earned respect for this ability from users on IT Central Station. For example, a Systems Developer said, "This solution has freed up our employees to [do more meaningful work](#). Some portion of everyone's job has been automated, and that's probably saved two to three hours a week. So, that is 120 employees times two to three hours a week." Figure 2 shows a depiction of what this looks like.

A Core Operations Analyst at a financial services firm with more than 200 employees also described how "The solution has very much

freed up employees to do [more meaningful work](#) as a result of automation." In his case, the organization was able to automate roughly 60% of its workloads.

“**This solution has freed up our employees to do more meaningful work.**”

“The ideal is for us to [become a 'lights-out' organization](#) at nighttime. We're really close to that,” said the financial services manager. He then commented, “We've also been able to eliminate manual touches on our systems and we're down to five actual touches to make nightly processing go. Before OpCon, there was a team of five that was doing nightly processing, almost through the night. We've automated hundreds of processes since deploying OpCon. We're up to 78 percent automation of nightly processing.”

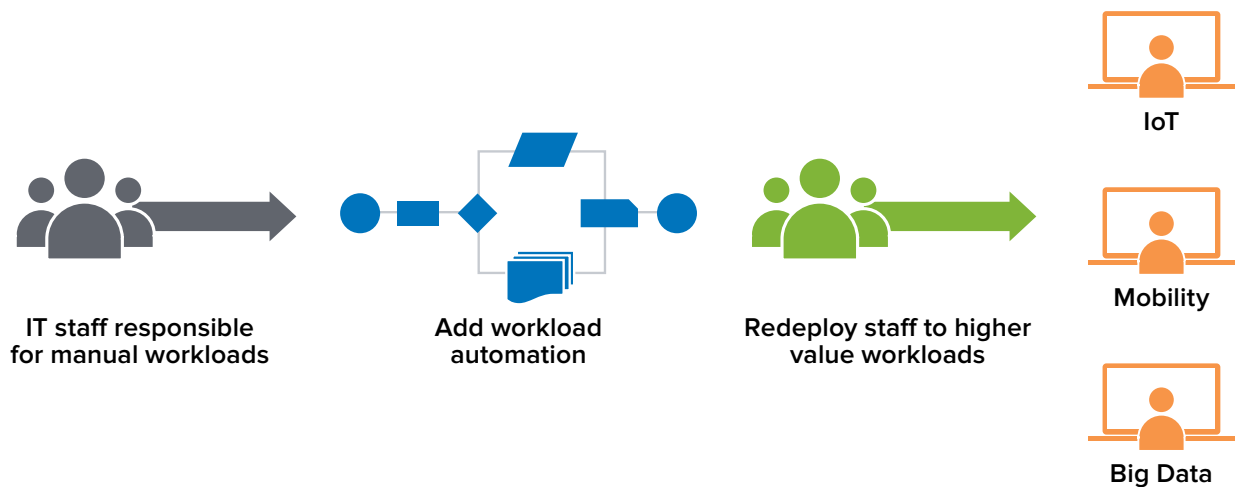


Figure 2 - Successful workload automation leads to redeployment of IT staff to higher value tasks like IoT and mobility

Look for Free Basic Training

Members of IT Central Station emphasize user training as a requirement for success with workload automation. A Systems Developer within the financial industry advised workload automation adopters to “pick the right team and [send them to basic training](#). Pick people who are going to invest in and use the system on a daily basis. They should also be curious and creative. Then, send all of them to training, both the free and advanced training.”



Their support is excellent. It's one of the best I've worked with for an automation tool, in my career.

Free basic training is seen as a big plus, naturally. As a Senior Applications System Analyst at a financial services firm with more than 200 employees explained it, “You have to put the effort into the training and learning. SMA is big on [free training](#). They do monthly basic training down at their headquarters office. As long as you own the product, the only thing you pay for is your employees' travel expenses. The basic training is free. They are willing to train people and give them the knowledge. That way, you are equipped to do what you need to do.”

Expect Fast, Reliable 24/7 Support

Vendor support emerges as a non-negotiable aspect of vendor selection for workload automation. However, as one engineer noted, “Every company can say, ‘Our support is great. Our product is great.’ We were able to go and see what a client was doing. They confirmed what people from OpCon told us, which was great.

However, when a customer says it, then it's way more important.”

The Administrator of Core Application Services affirmed “Their support is excellent. It's one of the best I've worked with for an automation tool, in my career.” Specifically, as he said, “They'll pick up the phone when you call them. If you've got a simple question, they'll answer it. If it's more complex, they pass it along to the right people. If you have a technical production issue, they jump on that really quickly. They do have after-hours support that we've taken advantage of. All of those things have been very valuable for us.”

Other acknowledgements of OpCon's support included:

- “[Their support people](#) are fantastic, and the support is out of this world. We're UK-based, so we have a UK team that looks after us in our daylight hours, and then we have a US-based team, and then we have an on-call US-based team as well, if we have problems.” - OpCon Support Admin at a financial services firm with over 10,000 employees
- “The best differentiator is [SMA's support](#). Their support is unlike any support I've had with an automation tool in my career, so that is the real advantage.” - Administrator, Core Application Services at a financial services firm with more than 200 employees
- “The [technical support](#) is always excellent. Having a network which can help you troubleshoot and build the best possible system is probably the most valuable thing that I have learned.” - Systems Developer at a small financial services firm
- “Technical support is excellent. We felt that we were [treated like family](#), not a number. They are very competent.” - Employee at a government institution with over 1,000 employees

CONCLUSION

As IT Central Station members have highlighted in their many reviews of OpCon, selecting a workload automation solution is a process that reflects an IT organization's distinctive needs. For some, the solution's speed is a critical factor. For others, ROI and re-assignment of IT staffers are the main issues. What comes across in all discussions, however, is an emphasis on using the toolset to make the IT department work better — and smarter.

Workload automation is essential for smooth IT operations and IT staff productivity. Vendors have been responsive to this need, with solutions providing a never-ending series of feature upgrades. As IT departments seek to improve their workload automation results, they enjoy a rich array of choices. The best practices described in this paper can guide them in making the selection that best suits their specific requirements.

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The Internet has completely changed the way we make buying decisions. We now use ratings and review sites to see what other real users think before we buy electronics, book a hotel, visit a doctor or choose a restaurant. However, in the world of enterprise technology, most of the information online and in your inbox comes from vendors when what you really want is objective information from other users. IT Central Station provides technology professionals with a community platform to share information about enterprise solutions.

IT Central Station is committed to offering user-contributed information that is valuable, objective and relevant. We validate all reviewers with a triple authentication process, and protect your privacy by providing an environment where you can post anonymously and freely express your views. As a result, the community becomes a valuable resource, ensuring you get access to the right information and connect to the right people, whenever you need it.

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OpCon is a cross-platform and cross-application IT solution that integrates and automates the business from a single point-of-control.

OpCon automation delivers tremendous business value to every aspect of your enterprise. It provides critical process automation while being remarkably easy for anyone to use. You can streamline everything, from complex IT processes to front-line business services, leading to significant savings for your organization. And you can be up and running in as little as a few weeks. OpCon unites your entire enterprise. From tools to applications, legacy systems to cloud, you're able to operate via one interface. And with only one simple system to learn, every employee is empowered and much less dependent on IT experts. Contact SMA Technologies today and learn how you can unlock the full potential of your business and employees through OpCon.