Digital Woodstock.
Were you there?

Wow. If the turnout at our NYC Automation Innovation Conference on December 7 was any barometer of growth in US interest in and acceptance of RPA and intelligent automation then, my original prediction that 2016 would be the "Year of the Robot," was spot on!

I quite honestly would have been content having 180 people in the room yet, we exceeded 300 attendees. It was truly a sold out and standing room only event. Apologies to those of you that we had to turn away. I believe we were one attendee away from a visit from the NY fire department. Talk about disruption.

Okay, enough of the post event hype and onto my takeaways for the many who missed the Digital Woodstock of 2016. After the good many presentations, breakout sessions, panels and individual meetings that I participated in, the following are a handful of thoughts and themes that stuck with me:

From a demographic standpoint, we had an audience that I have divided into three categories:

- Those that got off to a good start with RPA or the like.
- Those that got off to a false start.
- And those that haven't started.

Which one are you?

While the bulk of the questions last year from attendees were about definition and description, strategy was clearly top of mind in 2016. Strategy and roadmaps.

For the more advanced practitioners (the ones that got off to a good start) cognitive and AI wasclearly top of mind, as was overall governance.

- In my morning panel discussion on "The Battle for IP ownership," it became clear that not all IP is created equal. We spent a good amount of time defining the different types of IP as well as what buyers and providers will want to do to protect these assets.

- Many of the attendees who last year questioned if this technology was real and if it was ready were now a bit overwhelmed with the vast array of software product and service companies that were present.

- There was a good amount of buzz as well as apprehension around the impact of the incoming presidential administration on outsourcing and how this may impact automation efforts as an alternate to offshoring.

- My favorite quote of the day was a reference to "..random acts of automation .." byCompuCom CTO Sam Gross. I've used it several times since.

- The most challenging part of the day was trying to find an unattended sandwich at the lunch time.

- And finally, it's clear to me that while machine speed is pretty damn fast, humans are and will continue to be the biggest impediment to acceptance and execution. Or should I say it's human nature – with fear of change, protectionism, ego, politics and more politics. This is not just about science and math, folks. In every deal I am helping orchestrate there is also a strategy to navigate the organization. A "people plan" if you will. Without this, your RPA plan is likely DOA.

That is my take, and my takeaways from IRPA NYC Automation Innovation 2016 Conference.   Next and last stop for the year is next week, December 14 at the Automation Innovation 2016 Conference in London! I look forward to meeting many of you there, and getting a sense of what is similar and what is different across the pond.   If you haven't registered yet here is your last chance: http://www.irpanetwork.com/events/automation-innovation-conference-2016-london/

If you would like to suggest an RPA / intelligent automation / AI event in your part of the planet next year, I'd like to hear from you as we are finalizing our event schedule for 2017. You can post on this blog or email me directly at frank.casale@IRPAnetwork.com.