

AI is a game-changer. It's bigger than the internet itself.

Interview with Frank Casale



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Frank Casale is an entrepreneur and founder of the Institute for the Institute for Robotic Process Automation and Artificial Intelligence (IRPA AI), a global network of executives interested in recent advancements in process automation; and the Outsourcing Institute, the largest network of outsourcing professionals in the world. I met up with him this week to discuss the latest developments in AI- and what this means for the future of humanity.

Andrzej Manka: Tell us about how you got into this industry, how did it all begin?

Frank Casale: I have over 25 years experience in emerging tech and I've been in tech all my adult life; however, I'm not a technician. My focus has always been on bringing new and emerging technologies to market: sales, marketing, pricing, packaging; licensing models, and so on. What I've found over the years is there tends to be no shortage of tech, but a good bunch of it ends up on the shelf somewhere because the leaders of that company or start up didn't have the understanding of how to bring the technology to market, or how to commercialise it. In the late 1980s I began stumbling across outsourcing, which was pretty new at that point, and I became intrigued by that; as a very disruptive business model it addressed all technology and business processes. I started out as a student and then became somewhat of an expert. In 1993 I launched the outsourcing institute with the intention to create an ecosystem- a neutral, trusted clearing house if you will, where people who are interested in outsourcing can meet the experts, identify new solutions and advance their careers. So that was really my first experience in creating a platform to help accelerate the understanding and embracing of new trends. We currently have over 70,000 members in the outsourcing institute.

Then just under five years ago, I began to become intrigued by all aspects of advanced automation. I felt that here, we have another opportunity to create an ecosystem to help incubate and foster and fuel a very exciting trend, and I would say advanced automation and AI's impact will be even more significant and pervasive. This has been continuously very exciting- we have 8,000 members currently and growing- so now the bulk of my time is spent focusing on automation and AI space, working with startups, enterprises, and also some of the world's leading outsourcing providers who are looking to re-invent themselves.

A few months ago you have changed a name of your institut from Institute of Robotic Process Automation to Institute of Robotic Process Automation and AI. What happened in the industry to make you change your business name?

Well, what's happened in let's say the last 24 months is that the 'first wavers', if you will- those who first invested in Robotic Process Automation (RPA)- started looking for something more powerful, more significant and more intelligent. To many of these companies, RPA was like some kind of digital gateway drug, just something to get them started. But pretty soon they realised they needed something more powerful, a more intelligent solution. Therefore interest in AI is significant – and while I would say 90% of the deals now being done are in RPA, 90% of the conversations and the excitement is actually about AI. So the name change is to show our global members and constituents that we 'get it', that we'll continue to be in alignment with what they are seeking.

So what kind of automation is now the most important in business?

If you think of each of these as tools, then you'd say there are different tools for different projects, right? So there are some who might argue, let's skip RPA and go straight to AI, but that's not really how it works. Depending on what you want to do, RPA still may be the right approach. For another project it may be automation, and for another, AI might be needed. So it's not that RPA is 'out' and AI is 'in', it's more that if you're looking to create efficiency

and leverage some of these powerful technologies you have a much broader palette, a much wider array of actions, than at any point in history.

Can you give a few examples of those industries or processes that do require AI?

I could probably spend two hours answering that, but here; I'll give you two contrasting examples. There's a wonderful example of what IBM Watson can do in the area of healthcare and the relationship they have with hospitals to support cancer research. So, leveraging the power the depth and breadth of Watson to be almost this super-human advisor, almost like a second brain for a doctor, surgeon or a medical researcher, to help accelerate the ability to diagnose illness, to recognise symptoms, and- in several cases- to identify cures. There are thousands of documents, a significant amount of research, that has been unloaded into this system – and the important thing to remember is that this system can *read and understand* the information. This is very sophisticated technology, it cost millions of dollars, and not only is it really cool tech, but it will save lives. It's an exciting case study.

Then at the other end of the spectrum- something much simpler- let's say an IT operations or helpdesk where you have engineers receiving tickets, they're doing "the swivel chair interface" where they have two screens, and someone calls in and they want to reset a password. This is a very simple, definable, repeatable process, something that's more in line with Robotic Process Automation (RPA).

Some people would say RPA is more in line with automating things that people do with their hands, and AI is in line with automating things that people do with their brains. I'm not sure if that's a perfect analogy, but it's an interesting one.

Moving on to the book you co-authored, ["Introduction to Robotic Process Automation: a Primer"](#), can you explain why you collaborated with universities when preparing the book? Does it mean that automation is so complex and sophisticated that requires participation of scientists?

There's two reasons we went to universities. First of all, it's always good to partner with academia, in order to leverage cutting edge research and understanding on any topic. Reason number two, students are free (Frank chuckles at this). Our friends allowed us to tap into a graduate student team who were very passionate about these subjects. And from a practical standpoint, rather than create a document we could sell, we wanted to create a document we can give away.

Is automation reserved for specialist only or do we all need to know something about automation?

That's a good question. Whether you're doing medical research, building an IT desk, or you're a manager of claims processing at a healthcare insurance company, there's plenty of opportunities. Within your home, how you schedule travel, deal with your doctor or your lawyer, how you educate yourself and your children- all of that. I believe these advanced technologies will drive the tipping point for the long-overdue evolution of our education system. So that's the significant impact of what now is just seen as a disruptive technology.

What do you think about the mainstream media's claim that AI will destroy jobs- should we be afraid that humanity will one day be redundant? I hope not! In your book there is an interesting opinion: "It has been said that dull and unfulfilling tasks take up about 80 percent of people's day-to-day lives. By using technology that mimics human behaviors, humans can be free to redirect their talents toward actions that have higher value results." So automation will remove us from job markets or just free us from unfulfilling tasks?

I believe that the only thing we know for sure is that hundreds of thousands of jobs will be eliminated. That's the only thing we know for certain. We *believe* that new jobs will be created, but we're not exactly sure what those jobs will be, or where they will be. So I think it would be foolish for people to think this is a no-brainer, positive outcome. The number of jobs lost – and how quickly they will be lost in the next two to five years – will be significant. This technology is disruptive, and it will be disruptive for industries and the people working in those industries. I think the key here is to be cautious and mildly paranoid- but hopeful. I guess that describes me.

Some say automation has a deeper impact on business models and processes themselves. Is that an overstatement?

Wow. Well firstly I would disagree with anyone who say this is being over-hyped, I think this is being under-hyped. This is *not* just a technology story. This is a re-invention of how work gets done. It is a re-invention of how we work. So we can anticipate organisations will initially use this technology in a tactical way- reducing costs and increasing efficiency, for example- but fairly quickly they will realise the magic, and they will revisit how work gets done within their organisation- who does it, how it gets done. They will also leverage the power of this new tech to change their business models, to launch new offerings, new products and services, and so on. So it is a game-changer, as corny as that sounds. In fact, I'd go as far as to say this is as big- if not bigger- than the internet itself. I've never claimed that AI is all good. Automation is a double-edged sword. we are creating opportunities in certain arenas and stress in others. How it ultimately pans out cannot be determined, whether you're an optimist or a pessimist, you can't afford to be passive. You need to understand the impact it has on your company, your industry, your job, and your family.

Source: www.thefinancialmanifesto.com

3rd Annual Automation Innovation Conference

The 3rd Annual Automation Innovation Conference, on 12/13 at etc.venues St. Paul's 200 Aldersgate in London, is put together by IRPA AI, and is the first and only association-run automation event, focusing on "Exploiting the Second Wave" of automation, including RPA, intelligent automation and artificial intelligence.

This is the ideal platform to meet members and industry peers who are focused on building a foundation of knowledge, and get first-hand insight from case studies, industry successes

and lessons learned through thought-provoking discussions, interactive panels, hours of valuable content and networking with thought leaders, influencers and potential resources. To learn more, take a look at the [agenda](#). Registration is closing soon, so make sure you save your spot. Buyers can [register](#) for free. Providers and influencers can [register](#) for as low as 880 GBP. To learn about more IRPA AI events, visit www.irpaai.com/events.