



Technology & Suppliers

On the Radar: Promapp

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Promapp, a specialist provider of cloud-based business process mapping and knowledge management tools, offers a compelling solution to the problem of managing process variants.

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Who?

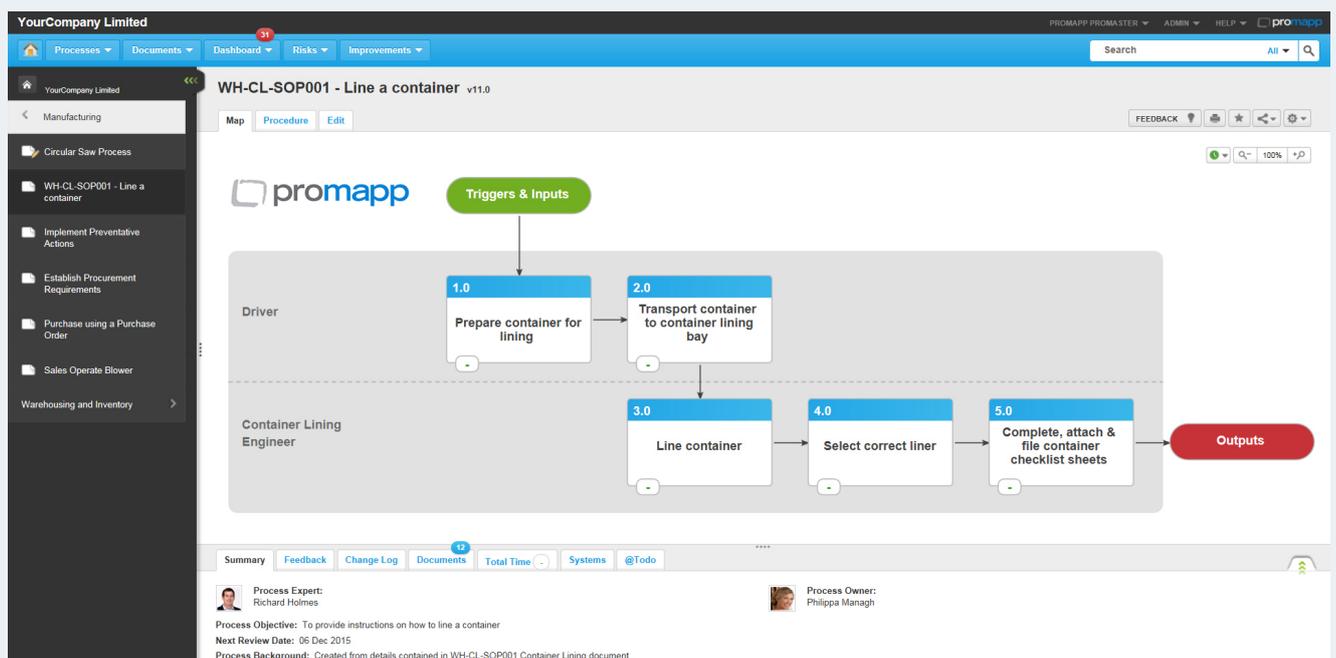
Promapp is a specialist provider of SaaS-based collaborative business process mapping and knowledge management tools. It's headquartered in New Zealand with additional offices in Australia, the US, and UK.

What does it do?

Promapp's product – also called Promapp – is a web-based, collaborative business process mapping and knowledge management tool. Its simple notation (activities/boxes, connectors/lines and simple decision points/diamonds – see figure 1 below) is designed to make it possible for the tool to be used by anyone in an organisation who can understand (or who can be quickly trained to understand) simple workflow diagrams.

In Promapp, the idea is not to express every aspect of behaviour in a process in a map itself; rather, it's the main features of end-to-end business processes, and the roles and responsibilities associated with those (and the costs of those resources and the activities they're associated with) that are the core interest. Users can navigate up and down through multi-level process maps, eventually drilling down to 'work instruction' level guidance including document attachments (including video and graphics as well as text documents).

Figure 1 Exploring a Promapp process map



Source: Promapp

As well as offering the traditional canvas-and palette graphical design space for specifying process maps, Promapp's design environment allows map creators to specify activities and processes using a text mode, in which a sequence of activities is created by simply writing a list and ordering the list items.

Promapp's value doesn't really come from its core mapping features however. It's the change management features in Promapp that really deliver its value – and these features spring from the desire to enable clients to manage process maps as living knowledge references that are constantly referenced and updated.

Underlying Promapp's change management feature set is a simple, but effective role-based control mechanism. Every process has a designated process owner and one or more process experts identified in the system; although anyone can provide process feedback and make change requests, the actual creation of changes to maps can be very tightly controlled if required. Any user can see which processes he/she is involved in, and which he/she is responsible for. Every change that anyone makes to any process map is also recorded and tracked in the system, and reported on – and there's a visual comparison tool that makes it easy to see how different process versions relate to each other.

You can extend the core functionality of Promapp by licensing the following add-on modules, all of which are compatible with the others:

- **Process Approval Workflow.** This module enables administrators with requisite permissions to create specialised approval workflows that govern process map changes in Promapp. You can define approvers, reviewers, editors and stakeholders for each business area. There's also a status reporting interface that shows you the current status of all change approvals.
- **Standard Operating Procedures.** This module provides a simple touchscreen "player" interface for users that can be protected by PIN, enabling workers at multiple locations to secure access. You can record and store instructional videos and images for each step in a procedure, and users can quickly navigate via touch to any particular step of interest.
- **Risk & Compliance.** This module enables teams to identify and categorise risks, and associate them with controlling processes and schedules for assessment. Heat map reports show which risks are most serious and require most attention; an audit trail shows which risk treatments have been carried out and which are overdue. You can define simple workflows that help you manage signoffs for risk treatments and automate escalations, too.
- **Improvement.** This module adds the ability to record, categorise and review a pipeline of process improvement ideas or incidents. All ideas (and their links into eventual process changes) are audited, so it's straightforward to report on the effectiveness of idea and incident management initiatives over time.
- **Process Variant Management.** This module enables clients to create standard 'master' processes, and then create one or more process variants that apply in specific circumstances (perhaps for particular countries, particular subsidiaries, product lines, customer segments, and so on). Here, each standard and variant process can have its own associated owner and experts assigned to it; if you don't assign an owner or expert to a variant, then the people responsible for the global standard will also be responsible for that variant. Crucially, variants retain their links with global standards on which they're based; so if a standard process has to be changed, that change will flow down into every variant and need actioning and approval by the individuals responsible for each variant. A visual tool shows you how variants differ from the global standard, and lets you report on differences.

As well as providing its own web-based user interface, Promapp offers a SharePoint integration option. With this in place, you can use Promapp-provided SharePoint web parts to embed process maps, personal process lists, dashboards and the search widget into one or more SharePoint installations of your choosing.

Beyond its product and associated add-on modules, Promapp also offers professional services – though it's carefully avoiding growing an in-depth implementation services, preferring to pass this work to partners. It also offers a local government-specific 'shared process library': any local government organisation can use, for free, a library of processes created in Promapp that other local government organisations have created and shared.

Who is it for?

Promapp isn't aimed at any specific industry or sector, although the company has had particular success in manufacturing, financial services, utilities and local government. The company promotes the Promapp product as being useful for any organisation with greater than 100 employees; needless to say, any client also has to be comfortable with managing corporate knowledge using cloud-based software services.

Within client organisations, Promapp is designed to enable anyone to get involved – and organisations as diverse as McDonald's, Toyota, Coca-Cola Amatil and Ricoh are using Promapp to engage employees at all levels in process understanding and improvement.

Promapp is licensed on a process volume basis; the greater the number of processes documented and managed in the tool, the higher the cost. Importantly, because of this, customers are not charged based on the number of people creating or managing process maps. The entry-level Promapp monthly license fee is USD 900 / GBP 600.

Why is it interesting?

Promapp is particularly interesting for two reasons.

Firstly, it's a very easy-to-use, cloud-based process knowledge management tool that's priced not according to the number of users or authors, but according to the number of processes under management. Everything about the product is designed to promote widespread use of, and engagement with, process maps and their associated knowledge. Beyond the product itself, Promapp runs a sophisticated 'Certified Champion' scheme, where its customer success managers certify individuals within client organisations based on the degree to which they help their organisations use Promapp effectively.

Secondly, Promapp's Process Variant Management module tackles much of the real-world complexity that makes process standardisation initiatives so difficult in practice. It makes the product particularly interesting to multinational organisations, and to organisations responsible for managing and executing processes on behalf of other entities (principally, shared services operations and business process outsourcing providers). The Process Variant Management features are simple to understand and work with, but also powerful, partly because of the underlying role-driven change control and management features of the core platform.

How established is it?

Promapp was founded in 2002 by Ivan Seselj and Richard Holmes, both formerly of large consulting firms (Deloitte and KPMG respectively). The company has around 450 customers (of which over 80 were added in 2015) and currently employs around 60 people. Its customer retention rate is currently around 98%.

Promapp's revenue grew over 50% in 2015; it was named in Deloitte's Technology Fast 500 Asia-Pacific list for the last three years in a row. The company is debt-free and cashflow positive.

How open is it?

Promapp's web-based user interfaces are built using HTML5 and compatible with all leading web browsers – including IE (version 11.0 and higher), Firefox, Chrome and Safari. As stated above you can also deliver UI widgets through SharePoint or another website of your choosing (for example on your intranet). From a mapping interoperability perspective, Promapp provides a facility to enable you to import process maps from Visio.

Promapp supports single sign-on; Active Directory and Azure AD are supported, as is the third-party OneLogin service.

One other point worth noting is that although Promapp is by default offered as a hosted service, it is possible to host Promapp on your own server(s).

Who does it partner with?

Promapp partners with a growing number of specialist management and process consulting firms, the majority of which are based in Australia and New Zealand.

Are there areas for improvement?

From a business perspective, as Promapp looks to grow its business outside Australia and New Zealand, it will need to focus quickly on growing its network of partners in target countries if it is to continue with its partner-led implementation approach (right now, all its key partners are local specialists in those two countries).

From a product perspective, as it begins to promote and win business based in its Process Variant Management capabilities, and therefore targets more diverse and dispersed organisations, Promapp is going to have to prioritise multi-language support throughout the core product capabilities and the Process Variant Management module. It also needs to explore offering the tools themselves in multiple languages (not just English).

What's next?

Promapp's current product development priorities include extending the scope of its role-based notification tools to encompass learning management related events. This means that Promapp will automatically manage notifications regarding things like employee induction schedules, ongoing training requirements, certification expiry and training attendance confirmation for specified roles and responsibilities – extending the current notification system relating to process, change management and risk sign-offs.

Should I consider it?

If you're exploring how to take an existing process or quality management system or knowledge base and rapidly expand its use throughout your organisation – or indeed if you're just starting out documenting your processes and you want to involve people throughout your organisation in their implementation – then you should explore what Promapp has to offer. Because the product is licensed based on the number of processes under management, your initial outlay will be quite modest.

If you're struggling with process standardisation efforts or need a way to reflect how your organisation really operates across its various functions and operating environments, you should definitely explore whether Promapp's Process Variant Management capability might meet your needs.