

First Impressions: Promapp

Promapp's unique approach to enabling democratized enterprise process management



Author: Nathaniel Palmer
Website: <http://bpm.com>
VP and CTO

Rated as the #1 Most Influential Thought Leader in Business Process Management (BPM) by independent research, Nathaniel Palmer is recognized as one of the early originators of BPM, and has led the design for some of the industry's largest-scale and most complex projects involving investments of \$200 Million or more. Today he is the Editor-in-Chief of BPM.com, as well as the Executive Director of the Workflow Management Coalition, as well as VP and CTO of BPM, Inc. Previously he had been the BPM Practice Director of SRA International, and prior to that Director, Business Consulting for Perot Systems Corp, as well as spent over a decade with Delphi Group serving as VP and CTO.

He frequently tops the lists of the most recognized names in his field, and was the first individual named as Laureate in Workflow. Nathaniel has authored or co-authored a dozen books on process innovation and business transformation, including "Intelligent BPM" (2013), "How Knowledge Workers Get Things Done" (2012), "Social BPM" (2011), "Mastering the Unpredictable" (2008) which reached #2 on the Amazon.com Best Seller's List, "Excellence in Practice" (2007), "Encyclopedia of Database Systems" (2007) and "The X-Economy" (2001). He has been featured in numerous media ranging from Fortune to The New York Times to National Public Radio. Nathaniel holds a DISCO Secret Clearance as well as a Position of Trust with in the U.S. federal government.

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Why do process management, process improvement, and other overall BPM initiatives fail? The answer is as consistent as it is predictable – lack of stakeholder involvement. More specifically, it is the inability of process modelers to fully translate how existing processes work into the language of the process model, for that model to be fully understood by not only management and line of business stakeholders (a challenge in itself) but also the rank and file of functional workers who ultimately perform the process.

Even if and when this level of engagement and understanding is achieved, the greater challenge is keeping the process accurate and evergreen in the face of both incremental changes (which quickly can fundamentally alter the process definition) as well as regional nuances which introduce differences in semantics and the sequence of steps, even where the process is still otherwise consistent. The answer for many organizations has been to concentrate process modeling and BPM initiatives in the hand of “tiger teams” with specialized training, yet this has only served to broaden the divide in understanding.

These factors have held back the BPM industry and proved to be a challenge in the adoption of otherwise beneficial process management tools. Recently, however, the BPM.com analyst team received a demonstration of a tool designed specifically to address these issues, and it does so in notably innovative ways. This First Impression provides our assessment of Promapp and the value it offers to enterprise process management and improvement initiatives.

What's the Complete Process Picture?

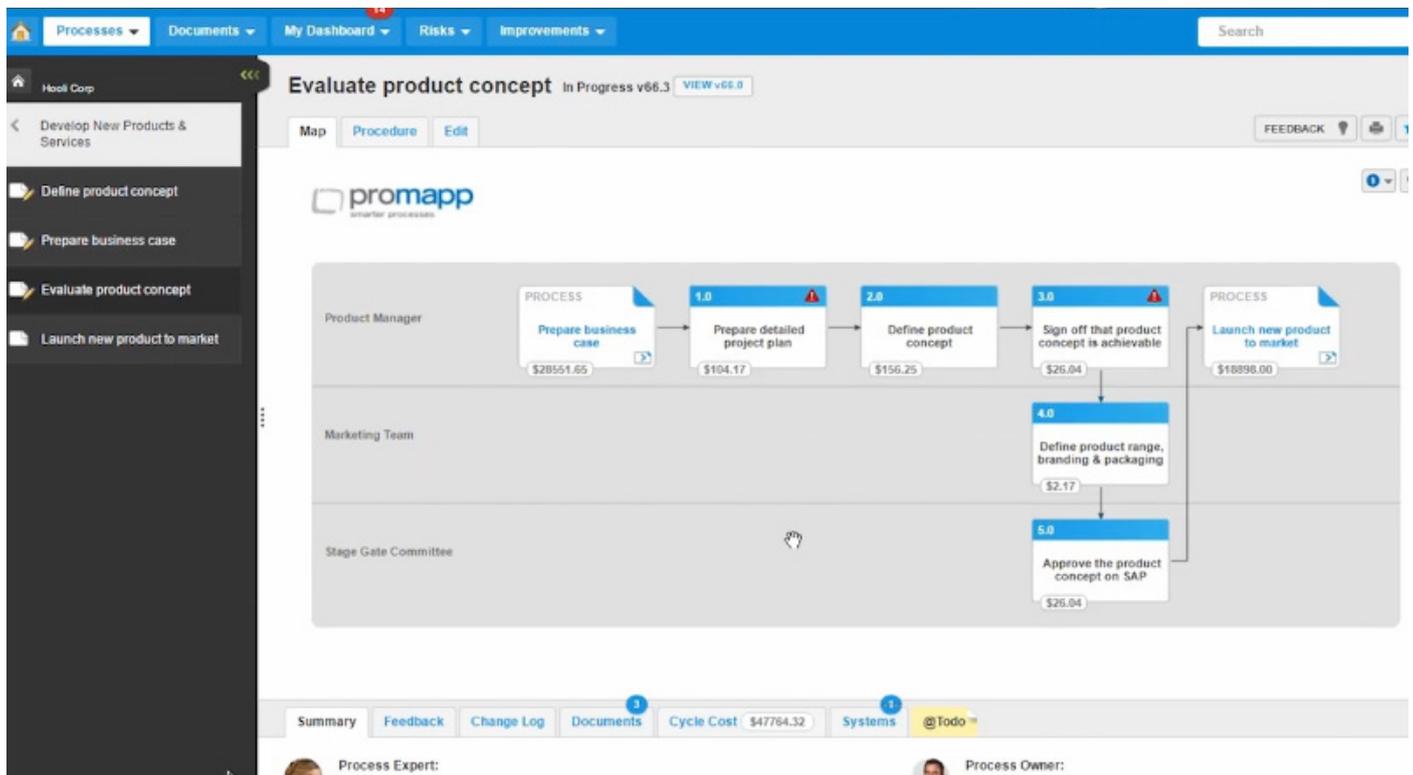
One of the more interesting, nascent evolutions in the BPM marketplace has been the emergence of platforms that see the business process as the core concept by which to understand its execution rather than as a programming motif and framework. In other words, rather than understanding the process in terms of business logic of the systems which support it, the process is understood in terms of the complete picture of the work that is done – what actually happens as opposed to application/execution syntax.

Such an approach to automating BPM can successfully address quite a large range of problem spaces and business domains, and do so without becoming subordinate to the technical context of implementation, where it can be lost amidst seemingly endless waves of other automation efforts. Promapp and its eponymously named product is such a platform. By both visualizing and leveraging the process as the overlay to the underlying business context and technical infrastructure, Promapp is an innovative entree into this marketplace.

Leveraging the Simplicity of “Low Code” Process Definition

Promapp’s low/no-code approach to BPM management is consistent with orientation of otherwise relatively new entrants to the BPM automation marketplace. What sets Promapp apart from that crop of newcomers (in addition to its greater maturity) is its value proposition - more one of ease of adoption and quick success than large-scale integration and transaction processing. Yet in common is offering a platform fully executing out of the cloud, as well as the philosophical approach of enabling simplicity out of complexity. On the latter, think in terms of delivering simplicity of understanding and control of processes otherwise obfuscated by organizational/work complexity. This is the same philosophy which has won the ‘low code’ automation tool growing favor for building “quick-and-dirty” process automation apps. Paired up with a comparatively robust modeling capability and Facebook-like collaboration platform, this presents a very enticing combination of features for an enterprise process management platform.

For these reasons, Promapp requires a different notion and scope than is most often applied to process modelers which double as the frontend to a BPMS platform. Simplification is enabled through the trades-off between execution semantics and the ability to model near-comprehensive behavioral detail and complexity in a straightforward way of describing business processes with a small set of concepts, symbols, and semantics (e.g., mostly boxes for activities and sequence flows to indicate order). It is nowhere as rich as BPMN in general, but is nearly similar in reach to what is known as the Descriptive Conformance Class in BPMN. The modeling component does support a BPMN export, although this is a standards-based representation of what Promapp’s internal modeling language can render more simply and natively.



Promapp Collaborative Process Model

Process Variant Management

What immediately impressed us with Promapp is its unique ability to track and correlate regional variations across process models, something Promapp refers to as “Process Variant Management.” As referenced earlier, this is one of the areas which most often stymies process management initiatives and prevents true enterprise process management.

Variations to processes have many reasons and forms, but for the purpose of this discussion they can be grouped into two categories:

1. Variations Introduced Over Time
2. Regional Variations

No doubt your organization encounters both, since just as there is rarely any true “one-size-fits-all” process, there is also no such thing as a process which never changes. The management of these changes requires different approaches and capabilities (both of which Promapp accommodates). For a time-based process change, there are two aspects which are key to capture and understand. Both are key to change management: 1) what are the changes (the delta between the old to new versions) and 2) whether the process change is understood. Promapp communicates this in several ways, including a tracking mechanism to ensure that process changes are being met, as well as a variation report illustrating the differences between processes.

One of the unique aspects of Promapp is the closed-loop communication (e.g., feedback loop) for capturing input on either proposing future changes, or for identifying how changes impact operation. This same mechanism can be used for capturing knowledge and voting on or accepting proposed changes.

Process Variations Report

	Travel Cost Reimbursement Form CHINA.xlsx	Added attachment		
	Final internal inspection.MTS			
	Travel Cost Reimbursement Form.xlsx	Deleted task		
2	Approve reimbursement visually. [China Country Manager]	Changed roles		
	Ensure all relevant information is supplied or attached			
	Ensure expenditure is appropriate			
	Ensure appropriate cost and account codes are used			
	Sign off reimbursement form to indicate approval			
	Submit form to Finance for processing			
Request reimbursement for travel costs				
	Variation: Europe		6.0	09 Mar 2017
-	Confirm Environmental Travel Act is complied with [Environmental Travel Officer]	Added activity		
Request reimbursement for travel costs				
	Variation: Australia		6.0	09 Mar 2017
1	Submit salesforce reimbursement form. [ALL STAFF]			
	Complete reimbursement form			
	Ensure you scan and send itemised GST receipts. Retain originals until approved			
	What are acceptable receipts? - Ensure that a GST tax invoice for amounts over \$25.			
	Note, EFTPOS receipts are not evidence enough as it doesn't show what was purchased			
	Send completed documentation to budget manager			
	Travel Cost Reimbursement Form AU.xlsx	Added attachment		
	Final internal inspection.MTS			
	Travel Cost Reimbursement Form.xlsx	Deleted task		
2	Approve reimbursement visually. [Senior Accountant]	Deleted activity		
3	Verify cost centre and all information supplied [Accounts Payable Team]	Deleted activity		
Request reimbursement for travel costs				
	Variation: New Zealand		8.0	09 Mar 2017
1	Submit paymax reimbursement form. [ALL STAFF]	Changed activity text		
	Complete reimbursement form			
	Ensure you scan and send itemised GST receipts. Retain originals until approved			
	What are acceptable receipts? - Ensure that a GST tax invoice for amounts over \$25.			
	Note, EFTPOS receipts are not evidence enough as it doesn't show what was purchased			
	Send completed documentation to budget manager			

Promapp Process Variations Report

The other type of variations can be the most difficult to manage, and that is regional variations or one-off versions of a given process, where compliance and performance against a standard process is required yet legitimate reasons exist for executing the same process differently across various parts of the enterprise.

This is where Promapp and its unique Process Variant Management capabilities stand out, providing management control and visibility into the difference between regional differences versus lack of consistency or violations of compliance. Promapp manages the regional differences as well as the access to these process variants. For example, Region A may have a different set of roles for a given process as opposed to Region B, but both can be compliant as long as they are consistent with the appropriate version of the process for their region (which is handled through definable parameters, not limited to geography or other fixed values.)

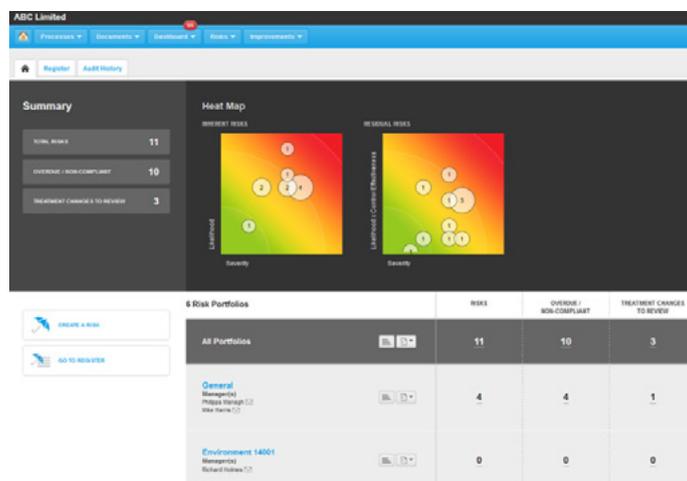
Who Are Promapp's Customers?

Existing customers are often a meaningful metric for assessing whether a given vendor will be a good fit for your own organization, and as such this is one of the most frequent questions we encounter. At a high-level, Promapp's customer base reads as a who's who of the Global 2000, with well-known brands presented such as Audi, McDonalds, Toyota, Fisher & Paykel, as well as other lesser known brands representing large, mid-sized and smaller enterprises including regional governments.

What was notable to us is that we recognized many firms we have worked with over the last decade or more, who have two defining qualities in common: 1) a formal program for process standardization, and 2) the need to support local variants of common processes. A great example of this is McDonald's (disclaimer: McDonald's is used for solely illustration purposes, not disclosing anything proprietary about work we have done on their behalf or specifically how they use Promapp).

Consider the organization of McDonald's as a corporate enterprise, as well as its restaurants (both corporate-owned and individual franchisees). What is critical to McDonald's is the horizontal scalability of processes – operations must be simultaneously consistent and measurable, as well as adjusted for local variation from restaurant to restaurant, region to region, country to country. This in most cases represents an impossible contradiction, forcing processes to be defined at such a high-level that there cannot be any meaningful comparisons or aggregation of metrics (a compliance report on a given process across multiple regions, for example.)

Yet this is where the unique capabilities of Promapp and its inherent Process Variant Management features stand out. As described earlier, the library of regional differences can be maintained and accessed by appropriate stakeholders, with control over whether the differences in process versions are transparent or opaque to the process participants. Just as important, however, is that the regional differences are normalized in reporting, so that performance and compliance across processes can be rolled up into both regional and centralized reports. For example, compliance with a given process in Region A versus Region B can be identified and analyzed, as well as with an enterprise-level view of the same process, regardless of how many local variants exist.



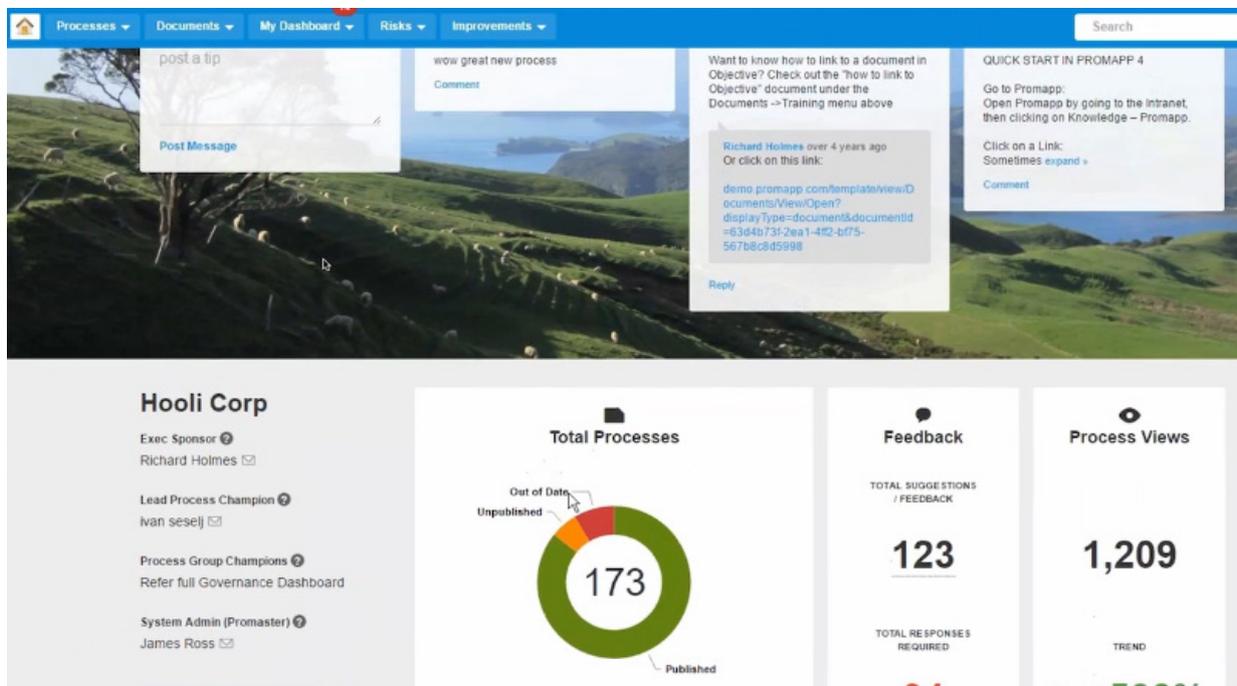
Promapp Operational Intelligence and Risk Heat Map

Promapp as a Process Management Platform

In terms of what kind of application Promapp is, with regard to technical specs, it is a Microsoft .Net MVC 5 web app, fully cloud-based with 100% HTML design and run-time environments, with all data stored in Microsoft SQL Server 2014 database. It is notable that while fully cloud based, the platform is geo located so customer data stays within their originating country boundaries. There is separation between the actual application platform and repository, supporting a multitenant application with a single tenant per database. Host is provided through Promapp's CSTAR level 1 accredited environment and/or cloud partners such as AWS.

Conclusion

Promapp is well-suited for managing many types of business processes that can represent pain points for an organization but not quite justify or be appropriate for more expensive and expansive forms of BPM automation. If one is looking for a set of tools to quickly reengineer and automate these kinds of business processes, Promapp represents a most viable candidate for supporting such exercises.



Promapp Management Dashboard

Most important of all, Promapp has a very powerful approach to supporting multiple variations of the same model, which allows one to establish the global baseline while also establishing its local variants. It does this by not just keeping them tethered together in the same repository, but by supporting this tethering through intuitive visualization of the models in a way that enables the analysis, management, and reengineering/redesign of these processes.

Promapp's rather unique model management features and documentation support, paired with its simple and easy to use modeling, provides a compelling offer we have not seen to date. Our impression was that this vision is perhaps most closely related to what BlueWorks Live might have evolved into, had it not been absorbed into the IBM BPM stack. Yet otherwise, we believe Promapp is a unique offering with capabilities and differentiating features worthy of serious consideration for any organization seeking a true "enterprise" process management framework, designed to support all involved roles, rather than concentrating on specialized analyst teams or IT staff.

About Promapp

At Promapp, we believe that expressing and managing process knowledge simply is crucial to sustaining an on-going culture of process improvement. With Promapp's intuitive cloud-based BPM software, used by hundreds of organizations worldwide, anyone can create, navigate and change business processes.

Sign up for a 30-day free trial or join an intro webinar to see Promapp in action and how simple smarter processes can be.

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