Cloud-based solutions are in demand everywhere. They provide fast, flexible, elastic and affordable ways to build in competitive advantage. Process automation enabled by the cloud is an important next step for IT innovation. It enables business and IT leaders to apply and control repeatable activities anywhere, anytime—easier than ever. In a recent article on CIO.com, Bernard Golden explains:

The key thing to understand about cloud computing is that it substitutes automation for manual effort. Instead of doling out work to a system administrator, who then manually completes the task and makes the resource available, cloud computing uses resource [application program interfaces (APIs)] and an orchestration engine to drive the same task.\(^1\)

Here are some real-world examples of how leading companies get the results they need from automation enabled by the cloud.

**CASE STUDY NO. 1: SAP SYSTEM COPY AND FINANCIAL CLOSE AUTOMATION IN THE CLOUD**

SAP AG, the world leader in enterprise software applications, provides solutions that run businesses of every description. To support any SAP-enabled enterprise, the company recommends conducting a system copy process at several stages of its life cycle. Most enterprises perform a system copy regularly to create test, demo and training systems. Also, a company may need to conduct a system copy if it changes its operating system and/or database and requires a migration of its SAP® system.

This process, although critical for stability and improvement, can be time consuming and difficult—especially if it is conducted manually. At one large, international media company, an outsourced SAP system copy process created problems that led IT leadership to automate it—and greatly improve it—using a cloud-based service.

The SAP manual system copy process originally took up to eight days to complete. It was an extremely hands-on process for which an outsourcer charged a hefty sum. Manual errors plagued the process and it often had to be repeated when the results were not optimal. This, of course, cost the media firm more time and money every time a problem occurred. The company needed a way to support the system copy process accurately, quickly and effectively without requiring a massive manual effort, incurring high cost or being subject to so many errors.

Another area the organization struggled to improve was the financial close. Corporate leadership had little visibility into this process as it occurred. Problems were often only found after the entire process had run. Like system copy, the financial close involved a lot of manual tasks and interdepartmental communications between an outsourcer and the media company to keep it moving. It was difficult to manage and expensive to do, and it lacked transparency.

The media firm explored its options and found that automating both processes using a cloud-based service would give it the speed, accuracy and overall quality it required. It also enabled the organization to monitor the processes more closely, because the processes themselves no longer needed to be outsourced. Automation was provided as a service that corporate and IT leadership could monitor and control autonomously. Since it was a service, it did not require additional IT resources to keep it working. Because it was delivered through the cloud, it was quick to implement and could be used across technologies, corporate silos and physical locations.

As the company began to convert from manual, outsourced processes to cloud-based automation, it noticed a rapid change. It dramatically reduced the time it took to run a system copy to a fraction of the original eight-day window. The financial close took half the time, and stakeholders could all know where the process was at any point simply by checking a web-enabled monitor. The company saved tremendous amounts of time and money while it enabled more thorough analysis of the processes and continuous improvement.
CASE STUDY NO. 2: CLOUD AUTOMATION FOR THE SUPPLY CHAIN

An international electronic parts provider needed to coordinate core supply chain tasks—including inventory processes, order-taking, order-to-cash and delivery fulfillment—from many different and disparate applications across several global time zones. The company originally relied on a traditional, local software-based job scheduling tool to coordinate the processes from order to fulfillment, but this came with significant risk and limitations.

The process ran with a required 24-hour latency built-in, which made it slow. Also, aligning processes across various platforms was a complex manual procedure, which made it even slower. Any task changes resulted in even more time delays and costly manual fixes. This led to poor response time and customer service issues. This, in turn, began to limit the company’s business growth. The company found that regardless of the time, manpower and funds it invested to improve its situation, it could not achieve the consistency and visibility it needed to coordinate operations on a global scale. Corporate leadership looked for a solution.

This organization started its transformation by implementing a cloud-based automation service to connect and coordinate every step in the supply chain and order fulfillment process. Almost instantly stakeholders could monitor, control and manage every step of the supply chain, including stock replenishment, price refresh, stock take, ordering, invoicing and order-to-pack.

The order-to-pack cycle that originally took at least 24 hours was now completed in less than 20 minutes. Web orders were processed in three minutes. The company quickly eliminated manual processes and streamlined operations. It developed a consistent task automation template for all countries that accommodated global time zone functionality—with much less effort than before.

The firm cut operational and administration costs while it reduced expenses from outsourced processes. In the end, the total cost of the cloud-based solution was far less than the price of maintenance for its original job-scheduling tool. It was also more scalable, flexible and easily connected to any application within the enterprise. The company has now successfully expanded the business on a global scale and plans on implementing cloud-based automation wherever it finds repeatable processes.

CONCLUSION
These are just two examples of how automation delivered as a cloud service has started to revolutionize the way companies use automation to their advantage. This approach provides a new perspective on infrastructure and process efficiency wherever it is applied. As with cloud storage, computational power, sharing applications and information, automation delivered as a service through the cloud gives business and IT the flexibility and power they need to grow without worrying about the usual software or infrastructure challenges. In the next few years, companies will continue to use the cloud to run every process faster, more accurately and with more control.

ENDNOTES