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Automation for the people: Low-code/no-code solutions are on the rise in business

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If you need a new software solution or to automate small tasks, do you buy a new piece of software or build it yourself? These days, many companies are opting to do the latter without hiring a team of developers, thanks to low-code and no-code solutions.

But what is low-code development, and why should you use it?

What is low-code/no-code development?

Low-code/no-code solutions allow businesses to program the software they need without having to hire a team of programmers who know all the different code languages to build them. They come with visual elements that allow users to drag and drop app components (https://www.techtarget.com/searchsoftwarequality/definition/low-code-no-code-development-platform#) or tie them together to make their own solutions. The use of these tools has grown in recent years, thanks to the lack of skilled developers and pandemic-related resignations.

What can low-code/no-code solutions do?

A lot of things! Many companies use them for business process automation (https://www.redhat.com/en/topics/automation/what-is-business-process-automation) – taking the small, tedious tasks that users do every day off the plates of employees, allowing them to focus on the more

important issues of their workflow. Think of your most annoying but simple work task, and imagine a computer can do it for you. How cool would that be?

Lexington, Ky.-based Kirk Selenberg, former IT consultant, manager and VP, said he is especially interested in the low-code/no-code revolution and its ability to make software development easier. Selenberg has researched solutions in his previous jobs, but never pulled the trigger on using them.

Starting with the software basics before you even begin the build is a benefit of using no-code solutions, he said.

"There's a common denominator of needs in a software solution: You need users, you need access control, you need password management, calendars, dates, you need fields, you need the ability to create fields, name fields, store fields in a database, and all these common denominators, no matter what you do," Selenberg said. "If you build (software) from the ground up, you're going to have to do all that. So, do you want to spend all your time building logins and the front end with web pages and all these little things that you need, like access control? Or do you just go to someone who has all that, and you spend your time on the business process? And that's where it's nice to have."

You can also take a software package that you already have and build add-ons with a no-code system.

For example, "an HR system will handle the hiring process. But the HR system might not handle the email that goes out to maintenance to set up the cubicle, the email that goes out to IT to reconfigure the phone, and set up the new phone, the email that goes out to IT to buy the cell phone, the email that goes out to IT to buy the laptop, the email that goes out to security to get the door key and the badges made, there's a whole bunch of secondary and tertiary processes that go through disparate departments, with some that require approvals and all that," Selenberg added. "And sometimes HR systems don't do that well. And so that's an example of a process that on a good no-code/low-code system would work well. And depending on how it's set up, and depending on how much visibility it has, if it's extremely usable, both to the user and the back-end person, there's a lot of value there."

Who is using low-code/no-code?

Other businesses are taking note of the broad ability of these systems to move their companies forward. In September 2022, Mendix (https://www.mendix.com/), a low-code app builder, released the results of its "2022 State of Low-Code in Key Verticals (https://www.mendix.com/press/low-code-software-development-from-crisis-technology-to-core-technology-says-new-mendix-sponsored-survey/)" survey, which showed that most organizations expect to use low-code more than traditional coding by 2024.

The Mendix report also showed that low-code has evolved from a crisis technology during the pandemic to a core technology today in 69% of respondent organizations. Nearly all (94%) of these companies use low-code, up from 77% in 2021.

Last year, Gartner estimated (https://www.computerworld.com/article/3658908/how-low-code-tools-are-filling-a-void-caused-by-the-great-resignation.html#) that, by 2025, 70% of applications developed by enterprises will be built with low-code or no-code technologies, up from less than 25% in 2020.

The worldwide market for low-code development technologies is projected to total $26.9 billion in 2023, an increase of 19.6% from 2022, according to the latest forecast from Gartner (https://www.gartner.com/en/newsroom/press-releases/2022-12-13-gartner-forecasts-worldwide-low-code-development-technologies-market-to-grow-20-percent-in-2023), released in December 2022. A rise in business technologists (https://www.gartner.com/en/newsroom/press-releases/2022-03-13-gartner-survey-

finds-rise-in-business-technologists-is-driving-funding-for-tech-purchases-outside-of-it) and a growing number of enterprise-wide hyper-automation and composable business initiatives will be the key drivers accelerating the adoption of low-code technologies through 2026, Gartner said.

"Organizations are increasingly turning to low-code development technologies to fulfill growing demands for speedy application delivery and highly customized automation workflows," said Varsha Mehta, senior market research specialist at Gartner, in a press release. "Equipping both professional IT developers and non-IT personas — business technologists — with diverse low-code tools enables organizations to reach the level of digital competency and speed of delivery required for the modern agile environment."

While Selenberg isn't working in IT right now – he created his own company and released a handy bottle-opening gadget called the MiniGrip (https://myminigrip.com/) – he still sees the value in low-code applications. "I feel like the trend, if you tie in the AI, and you tie in the code, that the trend is going there," he said. "And that a base platform could do more and could fill the gaps and connect, if it's got a good API. And if it's designed to connect other platforms, it really could bridge the gap and be extremely usable."

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