State Street Global Advisors' bid to speed up client onboarding

By Catherine Leffert | February 24, 2023

State Street Global Advisors aims to cut the average time it takes to sign up new customers by 10% in the next year through a partnership with Appian, a software company that uses automation to enhance workflows.

The investment arm of Boston-based State Street Corp. has been using low-code technology from Appian, which analyzes the companies' workflows to find where actions can be automated or streamlined, since 2011. Automating processes and incorporating artificial intelligence is a high priority for financial institutions, said Joe Davey, a partner at the technology consulting firm West Monroe.

"Banks and financial institutions are interested in low-code solutions, like automation, that allow them to deploy in a framework that can be managed, has standard tools people can be trained on, and doesn't really require engineering time and investment," said Davey, who isn't involved in the State Street-Appian effort.

State Street Global Advisors, which has $3.48 trillion of assets under management, has already shaved the average customer onboarding time by 20% since 2016 with Appian. Dennis Mackey, who heads business process management, reference data and data governance at State Street Global Advisors, said the software company has been "integral" to its current data-population process.

Mike Beckley, co-founder and chief technology officer of Appian, seen speaking at the Appian Sales Kick Off last month in Orlando, Florida. "People are being forced to do more with less," he says in an interview. "Every CIO or CTO is looking for ways to save to cut costs."

"Appian has been able to build with us a dynamic workflow where we can pull in the right people and get the right data at the right time so we can implement these products in a timely manner," Mackey said. "Given the breadth of offerings that we have, you can't do one size fits all. It has to be very dynamic in the way that the workflow responds to the questions that you're asking stakeholders."

Now, State Street Global Advisors will utilize a technology feature that McLean, Virginia-based Appian rolled out last year, called process mining, to find other bottlenecks in its customer

onboarding workflow and trim down the process even further by the first quarter of 2024.

Here's how process mining works. Appian extracts data collected during the onboarding process, which includes attributes like time stamps and product types, from the logs of underlying systems that State Street Global Advisors operates, such as Salesforce. The software company then applies machine-learning algorithms to find the causes of slowdowns in processes, offer solutions and monitor progress.

Appian co-founder and Chief Technology Officer Mike Beckley said the

software company's goal is to delegate work to the most efficient actor, whether that's a robotic process automation bot, AI algorithm or a human. He added that he's seen a rise in demand for automated processes, like straight-through processing, at financial institutions.

"People are demanding that efficiency, and they're demanding more automation," Beckley said. "There's enthusiasm for process mining so that [Appian clients] can prioritize their investments because you can't automate everything. You have to find those most beneficial opportunities. People are being forced to do more with less. …Every CIO or CTO is looking for ways to save to cut costs."

Mackey said customer onboarding is an iterative process, in which the firm collects a series of information points, like the type of strategy or asset class of the customer. He said he wants State Street Global Advisors to increase automation use to gather and populate customer data fields in its records, which would also free up employees' time to have conversations with clients.

State Street Global Advisors has developed 18 applications with Appian, used by more than 900 employees. Mackey added that the firm is planning on integrating another Appian feature, intelligent document processing, to ex-tract key information from contacts and putting that data in its records.

West Monroe's Davey also said that banks are eager to incorporate AI in their systems, which can improve operating efficiency, service more customers and offer additional business lines, but not mandate changing existing infrastructure.

"Automation is how you plug those interfaces in to realize your operational efficiency," Davey said. "Banks are super excited about this because they want to offload more mundane tasks, standardize those tasks."

Davey said Appian is a strong offering for automation solutions, but not the only option. UiPath, another software company, also offers low-code workflow automation software. Microsoft PowerToys can provide similar products, though primarily to clients who operate Microsoft products across platforms. Low-code software, like Appian's, also increases accessibility and time to market on application development.

Beckley said Appian's differentiators are its ability to pull data for clients from different systems, and its longevity, with nearly 24 years in the market.

In 2021, Appian launched its data fabric, which can effectively merge data from different sources, like customer growth and compliance metrics, into one dashboard. For example, In State Street's customer onboarding process, Mackey said Appian helps unite data from Salesforce and the firm's product master into one record. Beckley said the data fabric is an alternative to migrating data to a public cloud or single provider.

"Banks today are not like banks 25 years ago. They're full of engineers who are building very complex systems," Beckley said. "They're also very useful to us in providing very specific requirements for how they want to manage their data, how they want their systems to work together, how security needs to work and how demanding their users are going to be. That translates into a very specific set of requirements that we have to build into our new product launch process."

Beckley said Appian's products also need to be agile, because the best fit for State Street won't align with the software company's other clients, which include National Westminster Bank, Citibank, Goldman Sachs and the Securities and Exchange Commission. London-based NatWest recently announced that it wanted to use Appian to trim its risk governance process from 73 days to 73 minutes by the end of the year.

About Appian

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