

Case Study

DUNCAN & SON LINES

Duncan & Son Lines Connects Dispatch Planners with Timely Logistics Data

To protect its margins, Duncan & Son Lines aims to get 6,000 containers per month on the road as soon as they arrive in port, but manually gathering this data from the web increased the risk of delays and demurrage fees. Today, the company uses Kofax RPA™ to capture the data rapidly—boosting efficiency and reducing costs.

11 Hours/Day
Saved by Automating Logistics
Data Collection

Enables
Efficient Logistics Planning
Based on Timely Data

Supports
Business Growth without an
Increase in Headcount

Work Like Tomorrow.™

KOFAX

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Meet Duncan & Son Lines

Founded in 1943, Duncan and Son Lines, Inc. is a family-owned logistics firm focused on international container drayage to and from the ports of Long Beach and Los Angeles, California. Operating over 220 trucks, Duncan and Son Lines offers complete depot services at a 26-acre container yard in Phoenix, Arizona.

Products in Use

Kofax RPA™

Focus

Robotic Process Automation,
Data Collection/Data Mining/Data Extraction,
Desktop Automation, Order Processing,
Invoice Processing

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Dorothy VanKoughnet, CIO, Duncan & Son Lines

Dorothy VanKoughnet, CIO at Duncan & Son Lines, explained, “Maximizing operational efficiency while complying with hours-of-service rules for our drivers presents a complex optimization problem. Because our drivers can only work for a certain number of hours per day, we aim to minimize the time they spend waiting at port. To achieve that goal, it’s very important to know as soon as possible when a container is available to collect.”

In the past, Duncan and Son Lines relied on a team of people to monitor around 6,000 container deliveries per month. Employees would log into each port’s website, copy the relevant data, and then email it to the operations team, who then dispatched available drivers.

“Aside from being a monotonous task, tracking containers manually meant that there was typically a significant lead time between a container landing at port and one of our drivers picking it up,” continued Dorothy VanKoughnet. “We were confident that timely access to data on container deliveries would make it far easier for our operations team to optimize their resource planning. To capture this data more effectively without driving up our costs, we looked for a way to automate the process.”

Challenge

U.S. logistics providers face challenges on several fronts. Margins are tightening, regulations are becoming increasingly complex, and service-level expectations are rising. Clients demand faster deliveries than ever—and increasingly prefer logistics providers that can also provide timely, granular data about every stage of the journey.

To protect its market-leading position, Duncan and Son Lines embarked on a digital transformation. The company has equipped its trucks with GPS transmitters, enabling it to deliver real-time data to its clients. This technology also promised to help Duncan and Son Lines increase the utilization of its fleet—a powerful way to protect its margins.

Solution

Duncan and Son Lines engaged a team from Kofax to deploy Kofax Robotic Process Automation (RPA)—enabling the company to build software robots that drive repetitive tasks rapidly.

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“One aspect of the Kofax solution that really impressed us was how quickly and easily we could create, test and deploy robots,” recalled Dorothy VanKoughnet.

“Within a month of implementing Kofax RPA, we already had six robots up and running. It’s now been a year, and we currently have 70 robots in production. As well as capturing and forwarding data about container deliveries to our operations team as soon as it becomes available, we now have robots to process orders sent to us via email, to update the status of client orders on our website, and to forward order details to our customer service team for invoicing.”

The ability to create software robots quickly, combined with a reduction in manual, time-consuming work, allowed Duncan and Son Lines to achieve return on investment in only nine months.

“What I really value about Kofax RPA is that you don’t have to be a coder to use it,” said Dorothy VanKoughnet. “This is particularly exciting for me, because it enables me to apply my business knowledge to automation scenarios without in-depth programming knowledge. Crucially, I can create workflows that include mission-critical business systems such as our transport management solution. Creating a robot is very fast, and sometimes takes as little as four hours.”

Dorothy VanKoughnet added, “Throughout the deployment process and beyond, the Kofax team has been extremely supportive. Kofax went out of their way to help us with some of our more complicated use cases, and brought a wealth of experience to the table that helped us re-engineer and improve our business processes.”

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Results

With robotic process automation at the heart of its business, Duncan and Son Lines is injecting higher levels of efficiency into its operations—helping it to maximize resource utilization and protect its margins.

“Today, we use Kofax RPA to automatically trace containers as they arrive across ports in the Los Angeles area, and immediately feed the information to our transport management system,” explained Dorothy VanKoughnet. “Now that our operations team has timely access to information, it’s far easier to co-ordinate our drivers in a safe, compliant and efficient way.”

Using software robots, Duncan and Son Lines has dramatically reduced the need for employees to perform repetitive, time-consuming work. For example, when clients email order paperwork in PDF format, a robot now scans the file, finds the order in the transport management system, and saves a copy of the document in the appropriate record—a task that used to take employees up to five minutes to complete.

“By augmenting our workforce with software robots, we’ve cut out 11 hours of work per day, which has helped us to grow the company without the need to recruit additional employees,” Dorothy VanKoughnet commented.

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“One of the soft benefits of automation is that it empowers our people to focus on more engaging work, which plays an important role in employee retention. When we do need to recruit, we think that the ability to offer rewarding roles will make us a more desirable company to work for—helping us to attract top talent in a competitive employment market.”

Based on its success with Kofax RPA, Duncan and Son Lines is exploring new use cases for automation. The company is particularly interested in using software robots to automate the testing process for new deployments of desktop software. For example, the company could use the solution to validate an upgrade to its transport management solution by designing a robot to place 1,000 orders through the system to identify errors, vulnerabilities and points of failure.

“Many of the people I’ve spoken with about robotic process automation think that it’s a technology that’s only within reach of the largest companies—but our experience with Kofax RPA shows that’s not the case at all,” concluded Dorothy VanKoughnet. “Kofax RPA is like a virtual business consultant: it allows you to break a process down, take a fresh look at the way you’re working, and find opportunities to do it better. Kofax RPA continues to grow with us, and we know we’ve only scratched the surface of what automation can do for our business.”

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