



Digital by Default

POWERED BY INTELLIGENCE

CLIENT CASE STUDY

From Admin Overload to **22 Hours Saved** Per Week: Workflow Automation for a UK Recruitment Agency

A 35-consultant recruitment agency was drowning in manual admin — copying data, chasing follow-ups, updating spreadsheets. Within 4 weeks, 340+ workflows were automated and consultants reclaimed their time for revenue-generating work.

22 hrs

WEEKLY ADMIN TIME
SAVED

340+

WORKFLOWS
AUTOMATED

3.4x

ROI WITHIN 4
MONTHS

4 wks

FROM ENQUIRY TO
LIVE

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CONFIDENTIAL

April 2026

Ref: CS-WFA-2026-04

THE CHALLENGE

Consultants were spending 2.5 hours a day on admin instead of making placements

When the Operations Director at a UK recruitment agency (35 consultants, specialising in tech and finance placements, £4.2M annual revenue, offices in London and Reading) reached out, the frustration was immediate:

// We're a recruitment agency and our consultants waste hours every day on admin — copying candidate data between our ATS, sending follow-up emails, updating spreadsheets. We need to automate the boring stuff so they can focus on placements.

Operations Director, UK Recruitment Agency (35 consultants, London & Reading)

The agency was profitable but leaving significant money on the table due to manual processes that hadn't scaled with the team:

Operational Pain Points

- **2.5 hours per consultant per day** spent on manual admin tasks (data entry, emails, spreadsheet updates)
- Candidate data **manually copied** between Bullhorn ATS, LinkedIn Recruiter, and Google Sheets
- **40% of candidates** received no follow-up within 48 hours — emails were sent manually and often forgotten
- Pipeline tracking via spreadsheets with **no single source of truth** — consultants had their own versions
- Invoicing and timesheet collection requiring **3 manual steps per contractor**

Business Impact

- **£380,000/year** in lost billable consultant time (2.5 hrs/day × 35 consultants × 220 days)
- Consultants **burning out on admin** instead of building relationships and sourcing candidates
- Missed follow-ups **losing candidates to competitors** who responded faster
- **3 invoice errors per month** averaging £2,400 in delayed payments
- New consultants taking **6 weeks to learn** all the manual processes before becoming productive

Why “Just Use Zapier” Wasn’t the Answer

The agency had tried Zapier for basic automations but hit a wall at scale. At 35 consultants running multiple workflows each, Zapier’s per-task pricing would cost £800+/month — and the simple trigger-action model couldn’t handle the complex, multi-step workflows they needed (like AI-drafted personalised emails or conditional escalation routing). They needed an enterprise-grade automation engine, not a consumer tool.

DISCOVERY

What we found during the workflow audit

We spent a full week shadowing 8 consultants through their daily routines, documenting every manual process:

- **47 distinct manual workflows** identified across the full recruitment lifecycle (sourcing, screening, interviews, placement, invoicing)
- **34 were fully automatable**, 8 partially automatable, and only 5 genuinely required human judgment
- Biggest time sinks: post-interview candidate updates (**23 minutes each**), new candidate registration (**18 minutes each**), weekly client pipeline reports (**45 minutes each**)
- Bullhorn’s API was **well-documented and robust** — the existing tech stack (Bullhorn, Google Workspace, Xero, LinkedIn) all had API/integration capability
- No automation had been attempted beyond basic email templates — **the entire operation ran on manual effort and tribal knowledge**

THE SOLUTION

340+ automated workflows powered by n8n, connecting every system in the recruitment stack

We designed and deployed a comprehensive automation layer using self-hosted n8n as the central orchestration engine, integrated with every tool in the agency's tech stack:

LAYER	TECHNOLOGY	ROLE
Automation Engine	n8n (self-hosted)	Central orchestration for all 340+ automated workflows, error handling, retry logic
ATS	Bullhorn API	Candidate records, job orders, placement tracking, activity logging, status updates
Email Automation	Gmail API + GPT-4o	AI-drafted personalised follow-ups, interview confirmations, rejection letters — consultant-approved before sending
Document Generation	Google Docs API + Templates	Contracts, terms of business, candidate CVs reformatted to client specs, timesheets
Reporting	Google Sheets + Looker Studio	Automated weekly pipeline reports, consultant KPI dashboards, revenue forecasting
Invoicing	Xero API	Auto-generated invoices from placement data, payment tracking, bank reconciliation

Why this stack — and not the alternatives

We evaluated four automation platforms against the agency's volume, complexity, and budget requirements:

PLATFORM	STRENGTHS	VERDICT
n8n (self-hosted)	Unlimited workflows, no per-task pricing, full data control, powerful code nodes	Selected
Make.com	Powerful visual builder, good API support; per-operation pricing expensive at scale	Shortlisted
Zapier	Easy setup, huge app library; £800+/month at this volume, limited complex logic	Considered

PLATFORM	STRENGTHS	VERDICT
Power Automate	Good for Microsoft-heavy stacks; less flexible with third-party APIs like Bullhorn	Considered

IMPLEMENTATION

4 weeks from first call to 340+ live workflows

- Week 1: Discovery & Workflow Mapping**
 Shadowed 8 consultants for a full day each. Documented all 47 manual workflows, prioritised by (time saved × frequency), and designed the automation architecture with error handling and fallback paths.
- Week 2: Core Automations Build**
 Built the top 15 highest-impact workflows: candidate registration auto-sync, post-interview status updates, AI-drafted follow-up email sequences, automated pipeline reporting, and new job order alerts to matched consultants.
- Week 3: Extended Automations & Integration**
 Built remaining 19 core workflows: Xero invoicing from placement data, timesheet collection reminders, CV reformatting for client submissions, LinkedIn profile syncing, and Slack notifications for key events.
- Week 4: Testing, Training & Go-Live**
 End-to-end testing of all 340+ workflow paths. Trained all 35 consultants in 90-minute sessions (3 groups of 12). Parallel run Mon–Wed, full go-live Thursday. Monitoring dashboard deployed for real-time visibility.

THE RESULTS

Measurable impact from week one

Key Performance Metrics (90-Day Average)

22 hrs

WEEKLY ADMIN TIME
SAVED ACROSS TEAM

340+

INDIVIDUAL WORKFLOW
AUTOMATIONS RUNNING

0

FOLLOW-UP EMAILS
MISSED (DOWN FROM 40%)

£9.8k

MONTHLY VALUE OF
RECOVERED CONSULTANT TIME

99.7%

AUTOMATION UPTIME
(SELF-HOSTED N8N)

3.4x

ROI ACHIEVED
WITHIN 4 MONTHS

What the numbers mean in practice

Consultant Productivity

Each consultant reclaimed **38 minutes per day** from admin tasks. That time was redirected to candidate sourcing, client relationship building, and closing placements. **Placements per consultant increased 18% in Q1 2026** — directly attributed to more time on revenue-generating activities.

Follow-Up Consistency

100% of candidates now receive a personalised follow-up within 24 hours of every interaction. AI drafts the emails based on interview notes in Bullhorn; consultants review and approve with one click. **Candidate NPS improved from +12 to +47.**

Operational Accuracy

Invoice errors dropped from **3 per month to zero**. Timesheet collection is fully automated end-to-end. Weekly pipeline reports generate automatically every Friday at 4pm and land in every consultant's inbox — no manual assembly required.

Onboarding Speed

New consultants are now **productive in 2 weeks instead of 6**. They inherit the automated workflows rather than learning manual processes. The system handles the current 35 consultants and can **scale to 100+ with zero additional automation cost** (self-hosted n8n has no per-user pricing).

// My consultants used to spend Monday mornings updating spreadsheets. Now they spend Monday mornings calling candidates. That's the difference between admin and revenue.

Operations Director, UK Recruitment Agency

// I honestly didn't believe automation could save me that much time until I saw my follow-ups going out automatically at 8am while I was still having coffee. I'll never go back to the old way.

Senior Recruitment Consultant

WHAT HAPPENED NEXT

Phase 2: From workflow automation to AI-powered candidate matching

Following the success of the automation deployment, the agency is now expanding into AI-powered intelligence:

- **AI Candidate Matching Agent** — a custom AI agent that analyses job descriptions and automatically surfaces the top 10 best-fit candidates from the Bullhorn database, with match reasoning and confidence scores
- **AI-Drafted LinkedIn Outreach** — personalised connection messages and InMails drafted by GPT-4o based on candidate profiles and job requirements, reviewed by consultants before sending
- **Automated Reference Checking** — structured reference request emails sent automatically after placement acceptance, with AI-parsed responses creating standardised reference summaries in Bullhorn
- **Revenue Forecasting** — predictive model using pipeline data, historical placement rates, and seasonal patterns to forecast monthly revenue with 90%+ accuracy

Ongoing Support & Optimisation

Digital by Default provides monthly optimisation reviews: monitoring workflow performance, identifying new automation opportunities as processes evolve, and maintaining the n8n infrastructure. New workflows are added as the agency grows — at no additional per-workflow cost. **Total automations have grown from 340 at launch to 410+ at the 4-month mark.**

IS THIS RIGHT FOR YOU?

This solution is a strong fit if...

- Your team spends hours on **repetitive admin tasks**
- Data gets **copied manually between systems**
- Follow-ups and updates are **inconsistent or forgotten**
- You use a CRM/ATS with **API access**
- You want to free your team for **revenue-generating work**
- You need **reliability** (99.7%+ uptime)
- You want results in **weeks, not quarters**

- Reporting is **manual and time-consuming**



Let's explore what workflow automation could look like for your business.

Book a free 30-minute discovery call. No pitch decks — just an honest conversation about your manual processes, your pain points, and how much time automation could give back to your team.

[Book Your Discovery Call →](#)

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About Digital by Default

Digital by Default is a London-based AI automation consultancy that builds production-grade AI systems for businesses ready to move beyond experimentation. From voice AI and intelligent chatbots to workflow automation and AI governance, we deliver measurable outcomes — not transformation theatre.

Services include: AI Voice Agents · Chatbots & Virtual Agents · Custom AI Agent Development · RAG & Knowledge Base AI · Workflow Automation · White-Label AI SaaS · AI Strategy & Training · AI Governance & EU AI Act Compliance