



HFS Hot Vendor: Ashling Partners

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Introduction

The HFS Hot Vendors are an exclusive group of emerging players, each with a differentiated value proposition for the HFS OneOffice or HFS OneEcosystem. HFS analysts speak with numerous exciting startups and emerging players.

We designate a select group as HFS Hot Vendors based on their offerings' distinctiveness, ecosystem robustness, client impact, financial position, and the impact in our OneOffice and/or OneEcosystem Frameworks. The HFS Hot Vendors may not (at the time of writing) have the scale and size to be featured in our Top 10 reports, but they have the vision and strategy to impact and disrupt the market.

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Ashling Partners provides thought management advice for adopting intelligent automation (IA). The provider is spread across the US in a hub-and-spoke model with additional team members in Pune, India, and a new area vision for EMEA. UiPath is its core automation partner (UiPath Americas 2020 Partner Award winner)—but Ashling is expanding beyond robotic process automation (RPA) with a vision across all things IA and has aligned its thinking to the HFS Triple-A Trifecta of automation, smart analytics, and artificial intelligence (AI). While UiPath is Ashling’s primary RPA tool of choice, it also helps clients layer on additional capabilities with intelligent document processing as a means to grapple with unstructured data challenges. Ashling is also looking to tap into the process mining acquisitions and low-code developments of its various automation partners.

Ashling goes toe-to-toe with bigger providers and service integrators (SIs) like EY, PWC, and Deloitte as a business outcome-focused provider; it seeks to compete less with the likes of TCS or Infosys, for example, and Ashling doesn’t preference prospective clients looking for a standard hourly bill. Instead, Ashling looks to achieve business value and continuous process improvement through deep engagements. Ashling’s challenge, like that of many pure-play providers, is to get on clients’ prospective lists—and then beat much bigger and better-known firms. This is the unique superpower of the specialists; they often have the most cost-effective depth of experience around, with far better relationship management.

Focusing on business outcomes forces Ashling to consider how best to run automation. It doesn’t just dump automation on clients with technical debt on top of their legacy processes. Ashling looks for clients ready to embrace a center of excellence (COE) on day one to get everyone around the same table so that business and IT are in collaboration.

We spoke with two of Ashling’s clients, a global medical instrument manufacturer and distributor and a global logistics company:

Ashling has established a deep trust with its technical expertise and relationship management, alongside proven success stories and alignment with client approaches and objectives. Both clients are continuing and expanding their relationships with Ashling into 2021.

Ashling is flexible, and its people invest in their clients’ success. Its partners proactively engage in advising clients’ leadership teams and finding additional value opportunities with its expanding technology capability portfolio. Its clients spoke highly of its relationship with UiPath. Ashling takes the time to educate firms to the point of being able to self-serve, and it is far more reasonable with billing than its larger competitors. Ashling is more willing to put in the time without charging for every minute. Ashling was there for its clients from advisory through testing and deployment to shepherd programs

along with its senior and knowledgeable staff. One client told us, “Ashling’s support was sometimes more responsive than our own employees’.”

Ashling has a strong network of clients for sharing best practices, and it actively brings clients into the room.

HFS’ take

Ashling embodies our visions for the Triple-A Trifecta and OneOffice in bringing together front, middle, and back offices around customer and employee experience, but it also embodies the traits that mean so many enterprise clients prefer to deal with a smaller, specialist service provider. It proactively invests time in its relationships, creates genuine partnerships, and focuses on outcomes and prices accordingly.

Looking to the future, HFS would like to see Ashling continue to align with our Triple-A model and help enterprises achieve our “five automation have-to-haves”: pervasive scale, unleashing people, reinvented processes, integrated

tech stacks, and outcomes aligned with the most pressing business priorities—with IT teams aligned to these goals from the start by providers getting themselves as involved throughout the whole client team immediately—and bringing them all along every step of the way. Process reinvention continues to be the hardest nut to crack, so furthering its capabilities with process intelligence as a critical starting point will only yield dividends as it continues to help clients make automation a native element of how work is done. On a more basic level, Ashling must double-down early in engagements on its design and process improvement capabilities.

Vendor factsheet

- Ashling is the pronunciation of the Gaelic word “Aisling,” meaning “vision or dream.” Ashling Partners was founded to help clients achieve their “automated vision” and delivering business outcomes through the efficient flow of data throughout people and processes
- To improve the efficiency and effectiveness of processes, organizations have spent lots of time, money, and mindshare on often less-than-desirable monolithic ERP, HCM, and customer relationship management (CRM) applications
- Many people in Ashling come from this enterprise application and process improvement background. Ashling is headquartered in Chicago, IL, and has hubs in Atlanta, GA; Boston, MA; Dallas, TX; Detroit, MI; Minneapolis, MN; San Francisco, CA; Pune, India; and Bucharest, Romania
- Ashling is privately held with no outside funding to date. It was founded by Don Sweeney and Marshall Sied
- The firm has over 70 employees and over 40 customers, including Cushman & Wakefield, Medline, Polaris, and the University of Notre Dame

Industry coverage

- Ashling is horizontal across process domains, including F&A, IT, HR, procurement, supply chain, and call centers
- Ashling's industry experience includes manufacturing and distribution, business services (professional services, banking, financial services, insurance), higher education, high tech, logistics, and transportation

Solution portfolio

- Intelligent automation COE-as-a-service
- Build-as-a-service (includes its automated code pipeline)
- The mROC (modern robotics operations center)
- Citizen DEV bar

Partnerships

- UiPath
- ABBYY
- Indico
- K2
- Celonis
- Druid, IBM
- Arria
- Hyperscience



About HFS

Insight. Inspiration. Impact.

HFS is a unique analyst organization that combines deep visionary expertise with rapid demand side analysis of the Global 2000. Its outlook for the future is admired across the global technology and business operations industries.

Its analysts are respected for their no-nonsense insights based on demand side data and engagements with industry practitioners.

HFS Research introduced the world to terms such as “RPA” (Robotic Process Automation) in 2012 and more recently, the HFS OneOffice™. The HFS mission is to provide visionary insight into the major innovations impacting business operations such as Automation, Artificial Intelligence, Blockchain, Internet of Things, Digital Business Models and Smart Analytics.

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