

A2J | TECH

DOCUMENT AUTOMATION GUIDE

Offering user-friendly online forms and documents that people can fill out by themselves is one of the most cost-effective methods for making justice accessible.



What is document automation?

Document automation is the creation of documents with an online interface that would typically be filled out by hand and creating questions that are answered by the end user. Document automation can reduce the amount of time, manpower, and cost, while simplifying legal forms for your clients.

Resources:

Sample Projects

- **Documate**
 - [Eviction Protection Declaration \(English\)](#)
 - [Eviction Protection Declaration \(Spanish\)](#)
- **PatternBuilder**
 - [Eviction Protection Declaration](#)
 - [CDC County Risk Checker](#)
 - [Eviction Moratorium Eligibility](#)

Udemy Courses

- [Document Automation \(Documate\)](#)
- [Document Automation \(Docassemble\)](#)
- [Document Automation \(Afterpattern\)](#)
- [Document Automation \(Documint\)](#)



How to get started with document automation

The document automation process will vary from platform to platform, but it follows the same basic steps:

01

Prepare

- Meet with end-users to learn about their needs
- Collect documents that will be automated
- Determine which document automation platform meets the end-user's needs
- Identify fields that can be filled in via a document automation interview
- Format the document fields with enough space for the client to fill in their information

02

Create

- Create an interview (i.e. "questionnaire") with questions that can easily be answered by a client
- Integrate the variables with your PDF or Word document
- Input necessary [business logic](#) based on variables created in the interview

03

Run & Test

- [Run the interview](#), which will populate the form with information collected from the interview
- Have clients test to make sure documents are outputting correctly
- Save any output data if applicable to your organization's needs



How to Pick a Platform

When determining which document automation platform to choose, it's important to consider the needs of both the client and developers and decide on a platform that suits both.

Developer Considerations

- Repeating items
 - Example: Listing multiple children along with their names and dates of birth
- Nested repeating items
 - Example: Listing multiple children along with their names, dates of birth, and all previous addresses
- Ability to integrate interview with documents in the same platform and automatically mapping fields
- Complexity of business logic
- Ability to transform and manipulate variables rather than simply parroting back information
- Whether you need to store data and generate it again
- Ability to log into portal allowing users to see data which is customized to their access level
- Whether the platform is subject to change in the near future
- Integration of other case management systems
- Reusability of code
- Ability to demand payment



How to Pick a Platform

Client Considerations (based on our experience)

- The volume of documents that need to be automated
- How customized the document automation process needs to be
- Platform integration with another system
- Reusability of data from one interview to another
- Ability to e-file or e-sign
- Whether the user has to pay to integrate the interview with the document
- Cost
- Technical complexity to make updates

Document Automation Platform Overviews



docassemble

Docassemble is a free, open-source expert system for guided interviews and document assembly. It provides a low-code solution that conducts interviews with users. Based on the information gathered, the interviews can present users with documents in PDF, RTF, or DOCX format, which users can download or e-mail.

Pros

- Excellent for complicated [business logic](#)
- [Customizable](#)
- Ability to reuse [code](#)
- Allows for [nested repeating items](#)

Cons

- Steeper learning curve because it requires some coding
- Requires knowledge of Python
- Requires configurations to host the platform

Resources:

- [How to Deploy](#)
- [Tutorial](#)
- [Udemy Course on Docassemble](#)



Recommended For:

Organizations with complicated business logic who need a high degree of customizability and have the resources to learn it

Document Automation Platform Overviews



Documate is a document assembly & automation platform that allows you to create templates and forms to speed up your document creation. Documate is also a fully integrated no-code document automation system that is affordable and requires little to no technical background.

Pros

- [Can transform and manipulate variables](#)
- Superior solution for formatting legal documents
- Can [reuse data internally](#)
- Considered one of the most affordable and complete document automation systems

Cons

- In the process of developing [direct integration with case management systems](#)
- No client [portals](#), but currently in development
- Limited ability to add technical enhancements with custom code

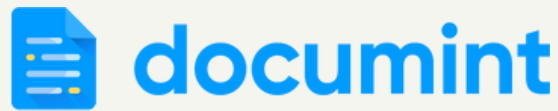
Resources:

- [Documate Learning Center](#)
- [Udemy Course on Documate](#)
- [Pricing](#)



Recommended For:
Organizations looking for a complete document automation solution that does not require heavy customization or lots of features

Document Automation Platform Overviews



Documint is a document automation software that enables users to generate multiple documents and merge data in minutes without extensive development knowledge.



Pros

- Great [Airtable integration](#)
- Drag and drop, user-friendly interface
- Enhanced Application Programming Interface ("API")
- No-code solution

Cons

- Does not support interview (i.e. "questionnaire") building
- Needs to integrate with a database with data fields
- No direct integration with [case management systems](#)

Resources:

- [Contact](#)
- [Pricing](#)
- [Udemy Course on Documint](#)



Recommended For:

Organizations that have their data stored in Airtable and simply need to output the data into a document or already have interview building software and are looking for document output software

Document Automation Platform Overviews



PatternBuilder™ (previously Afterpattern)

PatternBuilder is a no-code document assembly software designed specifically for lawyers. It allows users to create complex legal documents using conditional logic, without writing any code.

Pros

- Ideal for complex workflows and applications
- Ability to create complex applications with or without document automation
- Robust database capabilities
- Ideal product for Netdocuments users

Cons

- Functionality of Afterpattern may change shortly due to acquisition by NetDocuments
- Some integrations are not available anymore (pre-existing in Afterpattern).

Resources:

- [Afterpattern University](#)
- [Pricing](#)
- [Udemy Course](#)



Recommended For:

Organizations that already use Netdocuments and want to integrate a document automation software to their ecosystem.

Document Automation Platform Comparison Chart

	 PatternBuilder	 docassemble	 documate	 documint
Repeating Items	✓	✓	✓	✓
Nested Repeating Items	✗	✓	✓	✓
Interview and Document Integration	✓	✓	✓	✗
Client Portals	✗	✗	✗	✗
Direct integration with case management systems	✗	✗	Limited - More integrations are forthcoming	✗
Reusability of Code	✓	✓	✓	✗
Airtable Integration	✓	No - However, you can customize and code the integration	✓	✓
Database Structure	✓	✗	Limited	Needs integration to database
Learning Curve	Low	Steep	Low	Low

OTHER PLATFORMS TO CONSIDER

Document Automation Platform Overviews



[Formstack](#) is a workplace productivity platform that lets legal organizations create digital workflows with no-code forms, documents, and signatures. Formstack Documents integrates with over 150 different products, ensuring you'll easily be able to upload, merge, and deliver your documents, no matter what products you're using.

On the other hand, Formstack Forms is an intuitive, drag-and-drop form and workflow builder that allows legal organizations to collect information to generate documents. Organizations can create professionally branded, mobile-friendly online forms in minutes and start gathering all the data that is needed for legal documents.

Rally

[Rally](#) is a document management and document automation platform hosted entirely on the cloud. Rally gives its users an extensive library of contract and corporate templates. Also, on Rally you create, customize, and collaborate with your team on documents as well as negotiate your deals with counter-parties before e-signing them and storing them in an active repository.

Document Automation Platform Overviews



With [Josef](#), you can easily automate the generation of any legal document to eliminate repetitive manual work. Just upload your templates and apply your logic to build the workflow. Josef also provides a document automation software platform with a chatbot interface.



[Docxpresso](#) is a document automation platform based out of Spain with no separation between the interview and the final output document. The client can see the final document as they enter information, making the document a web app itself

Glossary - 1

Airtable Integration

Definition

Some document automation systems can directly connect to Airtable databases allowing these systems to automatically move data back and forth between their databases and interviews.

Business Logic

Definition

Business logic refers to the steps that the document automation platform needs to take to correctly fill out a form. If a user needs to allow clients to produce different documents or different information within those documents based on how they fill out the interview, that is part of the business logic.

API Integrations

Definition

An application programming interface (API) is a way of moving data between different systems (databases, document automation systems, case management systems, etc.). If there is a system has an API integration with another system, it means that those systems have a way of exchanging information.

Case Management System

Definition

Case management systems are platforms designed to aid in the running of a law firm. They can manage things like billing, data storage, appointment scheduling, and much more depending on the platform.

Glossary - 2

Conditional Logic

Definition

Conditional logic is a way to tailor document based on responses to interview questions. For example if a user needs to produce a certain document if a client has children, many document automation platforms allow users to create logic that will allow clients to produce that document if they answer in the interview that they have children. Similarly, if a user needs to include a certain line within the document based on whether the client has a lawyer, many platforms allow for the user to use conditional logic to produce that line in the document.

Screenshots

Conditional logic in a Word Document before running an interview:

```
TO:  {{ Recipient_Party | upper }}, {% if Recipient_HaveAttorney_vesno %}BY AND  
THROUGH THEIR ATTORNEY, {{ Recipient_Attorney | upper }}, {{  
Recipient_AttorneyAddress | upper }}, {{ Recipient_AttorneyCity | upper }}, {{  
Recipient_AttorneyState | upper }}, {{ Recipient_AttorneyZip | upper }}{% endif  
%}{% if Recipient_HaveAttorney_vesno == False %}{{ Recipient_Address | upper  
}}, {{ Recipient_City | upper }}, {{ Recipient_State | upper }}, {{ Recipient_Zip |  
upper }}{% endif %}
```

Conditional logic in a Word Document after answering questions in an interview and outputting the document:

```
TO:  RESPONDENT, BY AND THROUGH THEIR ATTORNEY, ANNA, 720  
MARSHALL AVE, MINNEAPOLIS, MN, 55101
```

Conflict Checks

Definition

Automated conflict of interest checker.

Customizability

Definition

How many different types of modifications a user can make to their interview and output document. Often used to refer to how complicated a user can make their conditional logic.

Database Integration

Definition

Some document automation platforms have built-in databases so that users don't need to find third-party database tools such as Airtable.

Glossary - 3

Document Output

Definition

Producing a completed form.

Form/Document Integration

Definition

Some document automation systems either only allow users to create an interview or output documents.

Document automation systems that have form/document integration allow users to create an interview AND output documents populated with data from information entered from the interview they created.

Hard/Custom Code

Definition

Hard/custom code refers to the use of programming languages. These systems allow users to use programming languages either to create an interview or to enhance their existing interview.

E-file

Definition

Ability to automatically send documents directly to the relevant court.

Full Stack

Definition

Full stack in this context refers to a document automation platform with a “full-set” of features. Typically, this means that a platform has form/document integration, conditional logic, and support for repeating items at the very minimum.

Glossary - 4

Interview (i.e. "questionnaire")

Definition

An interview is the questions that clients are asked to gather information that will then populate the form that will be output and eventually used in the legal field. An interview builder is where a user goes to build out an interview to produce their forms. Running an interview refers to entering information in an interview that was built on a document automation platform in order to populate a form.

Screenshots

Blank Documate interview:

The screenshot shows the 'Questions' tab of a Documate interview builder. At the top, there are tabs for 'Questions', 'Output Documents', and 'Settings'. Below these are buttons for 'Close', 'Save', and 'Run'. The interface indicates 'Page 1 - Client Information' of 1, with a section titled 'Client Information' containing '(1 questions)'. A single question is displayed with the title 'What is your client's name?'. It has a 'Variable Name' of 'Client_Name' and a 'Question Type' of 'Text'. The 'Required' checkbox is checked. To the left of the question is a sidebar with 'Edit' and 'Settings' options. At the bottom, there is an 'Add Question' button.

Documate interview with a question:

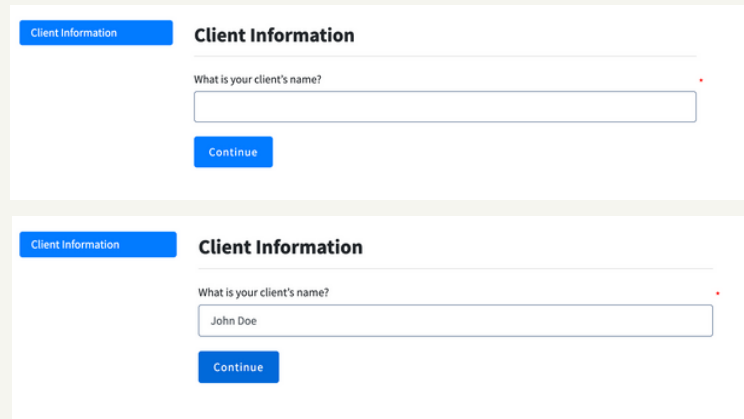
The screenshot shows the 'Questions' tab of a Documate interview builder. At the top, there are tabs for 'Questions', 'Output Documents', and 'Settings'. Below these are buttons for 'Close', 'Save', and 'Run'. The interface indicates 'Page 1 - New Page' of 1, with a section titled 'New Page' containing '(0 questions)'. An 'Add Question' button is visible. Below this, a list of question types is displayed in two columns: Text, Text Area, Dropdown, Combobox, Single Select, Multi Select, Y/N, Number, Number (with decimal), Date, Email, File Upload, Repeating item, and Signature.

continued on next page →

Glossary - 4 (cont'd)

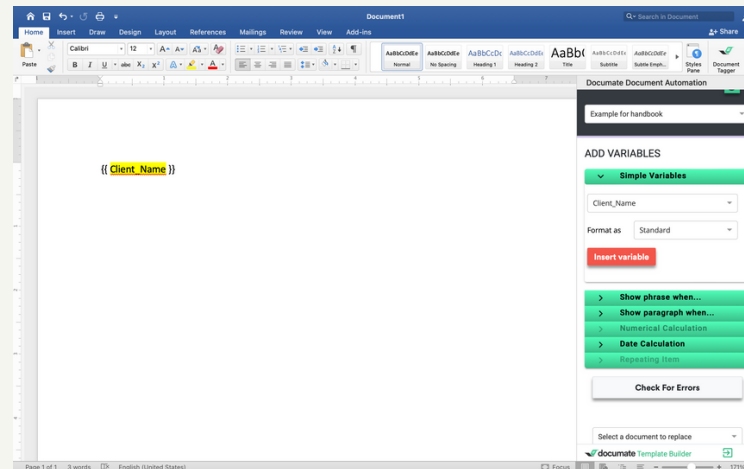
Interview

Documate interview running:

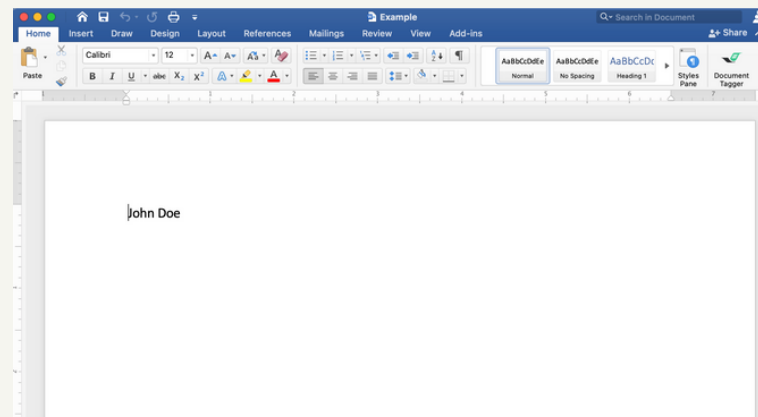


The image shows two sequential screenshots of a Documate interview form. The form is titled 'Client Information' and contains a single text input field with the label 'What is your client's name?'. In the first screenshot, the field is empty. In the second screenshot, the field contains the text 'John Doe'. A blue 'Continue' button is located below the input field in both screenshots.

Document with a variable input from Documate:



Output document after the interview was run on Documate:



Glossary - 5

Nested Repeating Items

Definition

Repeating items are fields that need to be added multiple times with multiple subfields and subfields within those subfields.

Example

Listing multiple children along with their names, dates of birth, and all previous addresses.

Relational Database

Definition

A database where the data is grouped into buckets and shares a relationship with other buckets within the database. Generally, the buckets are able to interact and share a logical connection.

Portal

Definition

Ability to customize people's access level and show them selected data accordingly

Example

You could customize access levels so that an editor can manipulate data while someone with a view-only level of access can only see the data

Repeating Items

Definition

Repeating items are fields that need to be added multiple times with multiple subfields

Screenshot

Listing multiple children along with their names and dates of birth

The screenshot shows a configuration interface for a 'Repeating Item'. At the top, there is a tab labeled '1' and an 'Edit' icon. The 'Item name' field is set to 'Children'. Below this, there are two checked options: 'Ask an initial question' with the text 'Do the petitioner and respondent have any children together?' and 'Collect items on a single page'. A table below lists the subfields for each item:

Question Title	Variable Name	Question Type	Required	Help	Delete
Child's name	Childs_Name	Text	Required	?	X
Child's DOB	Childs_DOB	Date	Required	?	X

At the bottom of the table is a '+ add another' button.

Glossary - 6

Reusability of Code

Definition

Ability to reuse blocks of code elsewhere in an interview and/or other interviews.

Syntax

Definition

In this context, syntax refers to the rules and structure of a programming language.

Reusability of Data

Definition

Ability to automatically reuse data entered from one interview in another interview.

Example

If the client has already input their average monthly income on one interview, a system may be able to use that information to auto-populate that information into another interview. This way, the client does not need to be asked the same question twice.

Transforming and Manipulating Variables

Definition

Some systems only allow for users to input a value and parrot it back directly onto a Word document. Other systems allow for users to change the variable in some way. Commonly, systems allow users to do calculations with number variables. See definition of value/variable below.

Example

The client inputs all of their sources of monthly income. A system that allows users to transform and manipulate variables will typically allow the user to add up all of the sources of income to get a total monthly income. Similarly, they may be able to add up expenses and subtract them from the gross monthly income to get a net monthly income.

Glossary - 7

Value/Variable

Definition

In document automation, a variable is a name that will be used as a placeholder for a value. The value is the actual piece of information that the client wants the variable to store and eventually put on the output document.

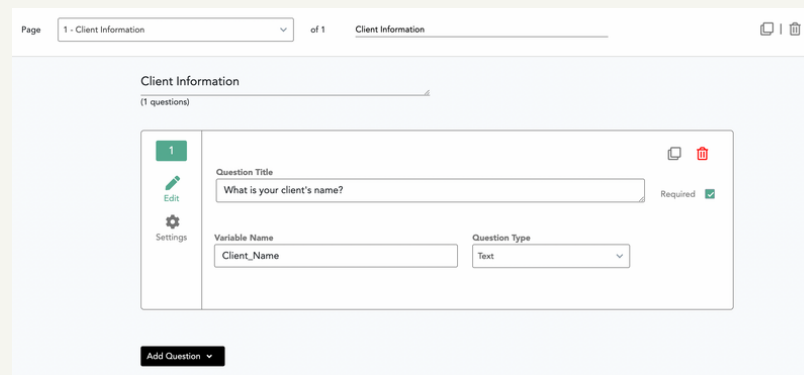
Example

$X = 2 \rightarrow X$ is the variable and 2 is the value

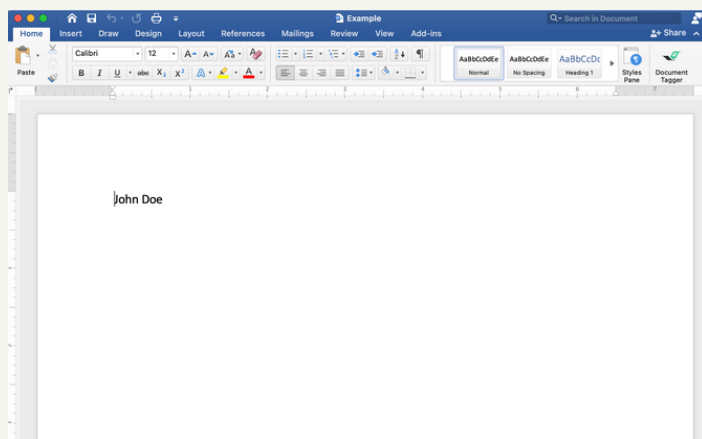
Client_Name = "John Doe" \rightarrow Client_Name is the variable and John Doe is the value

Screenshots

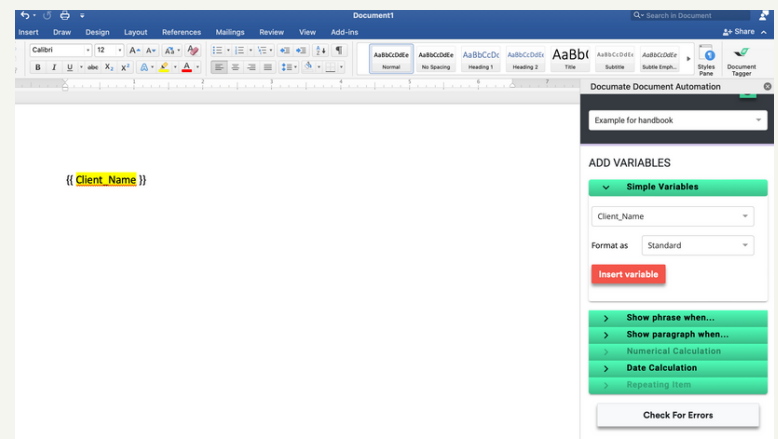
Creating a variable:



Outputting the value entered from the interview onto a Word document:



Inputting the variable onto a Word document:





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