

The bottom line

RadView's senior sales executive Nick Blamey's tips on making the case for automated web testing and measuring the return on investment in it

How does your company measure the value of testing their web applications? Do they only notice when an application fails or when a business partner or end user calls with a complaint? What if tests could provide management and marketing with information to directly affect the company's bottom line? QA and testing teams would be feted as heroes.

Let's face it, most companies measure the value of web application testing in simple terms: usually fewer tech-support calls and emails to the webmaster. In fact, management probably doesn't consider the role that testing plays until an application slows, fails, or exhibits a glitch.

Solving problems during these moments proves your worth, but what if you could provide your boss with return-on-investment (ROI) numbers from testing and provide strategic information to the marketing department? Companies are constantly looking at possible actions and purchases with business value.

Test and QA engineers can participate in strategic business goals by providing ROI data. This article presents ideas for strategically evaluating software test vendors, examples of ROI from testing scenarios, and some of the benefits realised by automated testing.

Evaluating software test vendors for ROI:

Space requirements

Carefully consider the resource footprint of the test software as well as the ability of the software to scale. Will you have to buy additional machines or memory to run the test software? What's the memory usage per virtual client? One company was able to cut hardware and memory needs in half by getting more virtual users out of each PC. This was because the test software vendor they chose had a smaller footprint and additional functionality for easy scalability.

Consider the hidden costs of Testing

How much time will a test engineer need for training? Will the engineer have to spend a week away from the office to learn a new system or a proprietary scripting language? Can they get up to speed and be productive quickly, or will it take a month or so of time,

in the office, jammed in between other projects, which will slow the start of the web application testing?

Once testing is underway, will it require constant rework to continue to run? Look for testing software that offers flexible options and uses standard languages, such as JavaScript, as well as visual point-and-click recording to create and manage test scripts, in order to shorten the learning curve, jump-start the testing process, and keep it moving.

ROI discovered through testing:

Before testing begins, what's your hardware capacity?

If you load test your web application with the idea of optimising your company's hardware configuration, you may find you have more capacity for testing than you thought. One international investment research firm was planning to outsource the testing of a new web site to verify the performance and reliability of the application and to determine the hardware requirements. They decided to perform the testing in-house. Through the load testing process, they determined that its base hardware estimate was sufficient to operate the web site.

Testing for memory leaks

In the same way that a leaking roof drains money from a homeowner, memory leaks on a web application can tie up a team with needless technical tasks. For example, a major financial services firm discovered through load testing that cookie verification in the production web site was causing site instability. Prior to this discovery the testing team was scheduling daily reboots of twenty-two of the site's servers. With the new testing results, the company saved time and energy each day.

Benchmarking information for sales and marketing

Sales and marketing don't usually make the commute to the test department. If they knew what you could offer, you might see them more often. For example, one customer used load-testing software to collect data on competitors' sites' performance. This provided the marketing and development departments with hard data for competitive response times for their company's application. In another

case, a multinational company was working on a major sale of its software, but the buyer would not budge until it had scalability results. Testing of the vendor's application on a simulated environment sold the product. If you work for a software vendor, does marketing have or need scalability information on the company's products?

ROI benefits of moving to automated testing:

Move to automated testing

While moving to automated testing may require a capital outlay to purchase new software, there is an easy-to-compute equation to support this time-and-money-saving method. Just consider the average manual testing labor costs versus automated testing labor costs. For example, if you are testing an e-commerce site, it's easy to compile the figures for money lost if the site goes down for a half day. Compare this possible business loss to the salaries of your testing staff for a six-month period. Now compare the business loss figure again to the salaries of your testing staff over a three-month (automated) testing period. This should yield a return on investment in your staff and any additional software purchases.

Test productivity

Everyone talks about productivity, but how do you calculate the cost savings realised through improved testing efficiency? There are two ways to tackle this issue, one is to compare a prior project's work to a current engagement (in terms of the length of time it took to write the test scripts, etc). The second method is to examine the test cycle. Can the team reuse scripts? If yes, this would limit the amount of new coding work needed and would improve productivity by reducing the amount of time needed to develop tests.

What's needed is an internal evaluation of the approximate amount of time it takes to write scripts versus reuse of existing scripts. The results of good test procedures ensure a company's reputation through a quality product – and make a bottom-line impact by saving and making money. PT



Beware of imitations

Unfortunately, being able to spot when you've been sold a dummy isn't always so easy. Certainly, we have all suffered the experience of buying a copy or imitation item. They rarely last and unfortunately never retain their value like the real thing. At IS Integration, we understand the value you put on your business, we know that quality comes first and we know you can't afford to take risks.

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