

Practical and Cost Effective Benefits of QA Outsourcing

An argument for using an outsourced software testing company

Introduction

Producing superior software isn't cheap, but testing it shouldn't drain your financial resources. Maintaining a high standard in software quality and keeping within a budget should not be mutually exclusive. One way to improve product value while keeping costs down is to use an outsourcer for specialized tasks such as Quality Assurance.

Software Quality Assurance is crucial to minimizing risk in the marketplace and ensuring customer satisfaction. Whether an organization has a large or small QA staff, there are several strong arguments in favor of outsourcing all or part of the software testing process.

What follows are few compelling reasons why the right Outsource Software Testing Lab can be crucial in getting an application to market on time, within budget, and up to standard.

Time

All too often, wasted time is wasted money. Outsourcing frees your organization to focus its energy on what it does best.

As a ship-date approaches, time is a precious commodity. Software testing is the final phase of the software development life cycle, and often continues right up to the last possible minute. The pace is frequently hectic and the pressure to be thorough can push an organization to its limits.

When working against the clock, the natural inclination is to focus on the more problematic, complicated areas of an application. The danger in this is that other sections may not receive the required amount of attention. How best to distribute available personnel is a make or break decision, and an overworked staff, spread too thin is not an effective use of resources.

One timesaving alternative is to farm out lengthy tasks such as compatibility testing. Crosschecking browsers with different software and hardware combinations is an arduous process that eats up a lot of man-hours. An experienced, capable QA lab could handle this with a minimum amount of training. Additionally, the outsourcer's staff will know which platform configurations tend to be most problematic.

Another drawn out and exhaustive aspect of the QA process involves bug regression. This is especially tiresome if an application contains a lot of low severity bugs. Revisiting open issues, sometimes more than once, interrupts the pace of work and limits time that would otherwise be spent uncovering fresh bugs.

Compatibility testing and Bug Regression are practices that apply to any organization developing software. However, companies with more entrenched QA procedures will have more leeway in what they choose to outsource.

Documentation from past testing cycles is an asset that provides direction and organizes the workload. Having an established set of steps in place is invaluable in terms of saving time and money. A QA lab can work with an organization's development staff to draw up a reliable series of test plans, test cases, and test scripts that can be instituted for future testing cycles.

Resources

With leaner and meaner staffing a trend, many organizations look to outsourcers to beef up during crunch times. The QA process is cyclical, and small and midsized companies may not have the need or budget to maintain a large testing staff year round. Outsourcing keeps costs down by eliminating fixed overhead so there is no need to retain a large full-time staff for spotty or peak times.

A positive relationship with an outsourcer, allows a project manager the luxury of applying people to a project quickly and with confidence.

Qualified test engineers are difficult to recruit, and expensive to retain. And once a team is assembled, there is no guarantee everyone will get along. Communication problems, personality clashes, and other obstacles have a way of popping up in a new group dynamic. Outsourcing eliminates these concerns; team chemistry is not an issue when a group has a history of working together.

Then there's the question of determining what needs to be delegated. Figuring this out depends on an organization's strengths and weaknesses. Technology is in a constant state of flux, and a company that doesn't stay ahead of the curve will find itself playing catch-up.

Having people available whose skill-sets are up to date is crucial. For example; if your software is integrating a Java based application, and in-house experience with this technology is limited, consult a QA Lab. Rather than adding or retraining staff, a first-rate outsourcer will provide an experienced test engineer to train employees *while* testing the application. With this option, an organization gains an additional expert team member while a permanent employee is learns *and* produces.

How an outsourcer augments human resources has been established, but what about expenses related to tools and equipment?

With the accelerating rate of technology, keeping equipment and infrastructure up to date can be costly. Sending all or part of a project offsite provides a sensible solution for small or midsized companies. By doing so an organization defrays capital investments by not having to add costly hardware and tools that may be obsolete the next time a testing cycle comes around.

The skyrocketing costs of Commercial Real Estate have driven many companies into the red. Another advantage of outsourcing is that it eliminates the need to find new space. Sending QA work offsite allows an organization to avoid paying rent on space that may lie vacant for much of the year.

Objectivity

Unlike equipment and personnel, objectivity is not something that shows up on a balance sheet, but it is priceless in terms of what it adds to your product.

Many companies are required to have an independent testing lab verify their software before release. However, even if an organization is not bound by contractual obligation, third party verification makes good business sense.

An in-house QA staff may be skilled and know an application inside and out, but such comprehensive knowledge has its drawbacks. Familiarity can breed complacency, and sometimes the best people overlook what others discover at first glance.

Superior Quality Assurance requires objectivity as well as specialized training. A fresh set of eyes provides added confidence.

Consulting

Assistance in formulating test plans and training staff are two examples of services offered by outsourcers, but what if an organization requires more intensive support.

Whether a company is starting from ground zero or simply needs a knowledgeable critique of procedures, help can be found in the consulting services offered by many testing labs.

Software testing is a relatively new discipline and instituting a competent QA Department is a priority. Advice on selecting personnel, setting up infrastructure, and putting together a lab are among some of the benefits available.

Choosing

Once the need to outsource has been established, finding a capable Test Lab is the next step. However, with so many businesses claiming to be the best, deciding which one is qualified enough can be a trying experience.

A flashy website and an aggressive sales pitch shouldn't be the only basis for your decision. Don't agree to anything before a careful review of the following:

- References
- Documentation
- Facilities

References:

Any reputable company will provide you with a list of clients. If these aren't available on the website, a simple email inquiry will get you names and phone numbers. Following up on references, not only provides information on an outsourcer's history, but also gives an idea about some of the services available.

Also, when speaking with a Testing Lab's representative, don't hesitate to ask about the *client/return rate*. Good references are important, but return business says even more about the nature of the relationship. An outsourcer might have an impressive list of clients, but if they don't come back there might be a good reason.

Documentation:

Communication is key, and an outsourcer's documentation should be clear, concise, and orderly. Since bug reports are a tangible representation of what you'll be paying for, ask to see examples. If possible, request reports concerning applications similar to the type your company is developing. Ideally, you'll be furnished with a variety of documentation that is representative of the Lab's skills, professionalism, and creativity.

Many Testing Labs will also provide clients with regular updates, such as daily or weekly summaries. Receiving these periodic progress reports allows a project manager to keep tabs on contractors without having to continually look over their shoulders.

After completion of the assignment, a first-rate Test Lab will furnish the client with a bound Project End Deliverable (PED), containing copies of all bug reports, summaries, email communication, and a brief synopsis of work. Having such a detailed record of performance on file will prove beneficial if a future need for outsourcing arises.

Facilities:

If possible, drop in and pay a prospective lab a visit. It's always wise to observe a prospective associate in their own environment, but it's also a way to insure there's more to the company than one person working out of their basement. If stopping by is inconvenient, be sure to ask questions. Learn as much as you can about infrastructure, security, testing tools, hardware and the number and types of machines available.

Conclusion

As software and high tech environments grow more complex, the challenge for a company to maintain its competitive advantage becomes greater. Dependable, high performing software is essential to business success, and ensuring excellence is a daunting task.

In an environment where one mistake can prove costly, partnering with a Testing Lab makes smart business sense. Funds budgeted for QA outsourcing is not an expense but an investment.

For more information, contact:

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Quardev is an independent software testing and web testing laboratory that offers a wide range of testing services, training, documentation writing and review, consulting, and industry expertise. Contact us to learn how we can ensure confidence in your next product release is

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