Issue 19

THE TESTER

March 2007 Issue

NEXT CONFERENCE

Tuesday
13 March 2007

Agile – Your Flexible Friend

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- **Reviewing UML for Testability**
- **Agile Development Needs You**
- **Leveraging the BA and TA Skills**
- **The Test Data Challenge**
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BCS

Please note that any views expressed in this Newsletter are not necessarily those of the BCS.

FROM THE EDITOR

Well, that was an interesting audience participation session with Neil Mullarkey at December's meeting – and we really got to know our neighbours in the practical exercises to promote new approaches to communication in the workplace!

For our next Conference on Tuesday 13th March Lloyd Roden has assembled a very full and interesting programme with three parallel sessions for a large part of the day so you have plenty of choice, with several sessions geared towards Agile development.

In this issue of The Tester, Peter Morgan is trying to encourage more members to present papers or write articles of a practical nature about testing project experiences. We welcome your input.

Marty Cunnington has put pen to paper again with a sequel to his daily experiences working in Quality Assurance! Does this reflect your working day as well?!

I hope that you will print out a copy of The Tester and place it on your notice board or coffee table etc at work to spread the word about our conferences!

As always, please book early so that you can guarantee a place with us in March!

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BCS SIGIST website: www.SIGiST.org.uk

SIGIST Standards Working Party: www.testingstandards.co.uk

SIGIST UML Testers Forum: www.umltesters.org

FUTURE SIGIST CONFERENCE DATES
13 June 2007
19 September 2007
13 December 2007

BOOKING INSTRUCTIONS

1. Download a booking form from:
   http://www.SIGiST.org.uk/bookingForm.pdf

FAX TO:	*OR POST TO:*
Phil Dyson 01793 417444	Phil Dyson Specialist Groups Officer First Floor, Block D North Star House North Star Avenue Swindon SN2 1FA

NEXT MEETING – PROGRAMME

BCS SIGIST – Agile – Your Flexible Friend
Tuesday 13 March 2007
Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, 27 Sussex Place, Regent's Park, London NW1

Time			
08:30	Coffee & Registration, Exhibition opens		
09:25	**Introduction and Welcome** *Stuart Reid, SIGIST Chairman*		
09:30	**F e a t u r e d S p e a k e r** **Agile Retrospectives – Making Good Teams Great** *Esther Derby, Esther Derby Associates, Inc*		
10:30	**Networking session and commercial break**		
10:45	Coffee & opportunity to visit the exhibition		
11:15	**Agile Development Needs You** *Kevin Rutherford, Rutherford Software*	**F e a t u r e d S p e a k e r** **Workshop:** **Agile Retrospectives – making them work** *Esther Derby, Esther Derby Associates, Inc.*	**Workshop:** **Reviewing UML Analysis Models for Testability** *Richard Warden, Software Futures Ltd*
12:00	**Mini-Track** **Leveraging the BA & TA Skills** *Jenny Martin, Loyalty Management Services*		
12:20	**Mini-Track** **The Test Data Challenge** *Dave Royle, CapGemini*		
12:45	Lunch & opportunity to visit the exhibition		
13.45	**Lessons Learned From The Great Testers Of Our Time** *Clive Bates, Grove Consultants*	**Workshop:** **Agile Testing in Practice** *Kevin Rutherford, Rutherford Software*	**Workshop:** **Reviewing UML Analysis Models for Testability (continued)** *Richard Warden, Software Futures Ltd*
14:30	**Model Based Testing** *Matt Archer* *FMI Solutions*		
15:15	Tea & opportunity to visit the exhibition		
15:45	**F e a t u r e d S p e a k e r** **Congruent Feedback** *Esther Derby, Esther Derby Associates, Inc*		
16:45	Closing Remarks		

The SiGiST committee reserves the right to amend the programme if circumstances deem it necessary.

Workshops will have limited places, to avoid disappointment try to book in advance.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

SIGIST Library

Looking for a testing book but not sure which topics are covered? Or are you trying to decide which testing book to buy? Or do you simply want to increase your testing knowledge? If the answer to any of these questions is 'yes' then the SIGIST Library could help!

The SIGIST Library has lots of testing books covering a variety of topics and they are available to borrow for a period of 4 weeks - free of charge. Extended loans are allowed as long as the book has not been requested by another SIGIST member.

Topics include (amongst others) Requirements testing, Reviews/Inspections, Test Management, Techniques, Test Process Improvement

If you would like to know more about the library and books available, or for any queries, please contact Julie Gardiner on 07974 141436 or email her at gardinerjulie@yahoo.co.uk. Alternatively, download the book loan form on the SIGIST website www.SIGiST.org.uk. Happy Reading!

WE ALL HAVE A STORY TO TELL, AND I NEED TO HEAR YOURS

If you have worked on a software project for more than 3 months, or have worked on more than one project, then you probably have a story to tell. In case it has escaped your notice, experience is one of the best teachers available. Whereas personal experience is a good tutor, we can all learn from the path others have taken. That's the reason to appeal for your story.

"Hold on", I hear you saying, "surely there are lots of people out there who can create a good PowerPoint presentation, and/or have written books on Testing". That is true, but you are a unique individual, and there is no-one who has trodden the same path. There are lots of really good talks at conferences, and articles on software testing on the web, but we all need to hear from coal-face workers, who have a story to tell, and a passion with which to tell it.

I call some of those who write and speak about testing 'the professionals'; they are regulars on the speaking circuit, and often work for a test consultancy, or for a training provider. These people have got significant things to say to us all, and we can all benefit enormously from their input. My debt of gratitude extends not just to those from the "Testing Hall of Fame", but to the people who have taken time to teach me from their experience over a lunch-time walk, or a chat around the coffee machine.

Along the testing career path, some of what I have done has worked well, and some things have been dreadful. If I have had a disaster, it has been painful. I would rather that the painful lessons are shared, to help others avoid the same pitfalls, and learn from my experience. My pain is lessened by your gain!

There are several things you can communicate in a presentation at SIGiST, or article in 'The Tester'. Although not always at the same time, I am looking to be:

1. Inspired

2. Encouraged

3. Provoked

4. Warned

5. Taught

I still remember a testing friend remarking how he deals with totally missing requirements: he writes what he sees as requirements, and plays them back to the business. Sometimes, he will deliberately indicate that a list is displayed on screen in post-code order, when this is totally inappropriate. The reaction he is looking for is to get the business to say that this is wrong, and indicate what the correct order should be. This from business representatives who previously had no time to define requirements!

I hope that this example indicates that a little snippet can have a massive personal impact on friends and colleagues in the larger testing community. Your story may be about how to turn the theory that you have heard into practice, to make a real difference. Some of 'the professionals' began their path to being a regular presenter by sharing their small story, and for them, the rest is history. I need to hear your story. For you, it might just be the beginning!

Peter Morgan

Peter Morgan is a freelance tester. He can be contacted by e-mail at morganp@supanet.com, and would be honoured to help you clarify your thoughts for wider distribution. However, he is no PowerPoint expert!

If you would like to present a paper at the SIGiST (for 20 or 40 minutes) please contact:

Lloyd Roden   lloyd@lloydroden.demon.co.uk OR
Pam Frederiksen   pam@leysen.com

ABSTRACTS AND BIOGRAPHIES

Esther Derby, Esther Derby Associates, Inc

Agile Retrospectives – Featured Presentation

Abstract

Project retrospectives help teams examine what went right and what went wrong on a project. But traditionally, retrospectives (also known as "post-mortems") are only help at the end of the project-- too late to help.

In organizations where teams develop using iterative, incremental methods, Agile retrospectives at the end of each iteration or increment stimulate continuous improvement throughout the project. Exceptional software process and project improvement grows out of solid data and good planning.

Esther Derby, co-author of Agile Retrospectives: Making Good Teams Great, will introduce you to a framework for effective retrospectives, provide tips and pointers for sustaining interest in retrospectives throughout the project, and suggest ways to maintain the relevance of improvement to the work of your team.

Biography

Esther Derby is well known for her work in helping teams grow to new levels of productivity and coaching technical people who are making the transition to management. Esther started her professional career as a programmer and now focuses on interpersonal, group, and organizational dynamics.

Esther is co-author (with Johanna Rothman) of Behind Closed Doors: Secrets of Great Management. Her latest book is Agile Retrospectives: Making Good Teams Great, which she wrote with Diana Larsen. Esther is one of the founders of the Scrum Alliance and has an MA in Organizational Leadership.

Her articles have appeared in Better Software, Software Development, CrossTalk and on-line at stickyminds.com, scrumalliance.org and ayeconference.com.

Agile Retrospectives – Featured Workshop

Abstract

In this hands-on workshop, we'll build on the concepts covered in my talk about Agile Retrospectives. We'll do a short project, participate in a retrospective and discuss what happened during the retrospective and how the parts fit together.

Kevin Rutherford, www.rutherford-software.co.uk

Agile Development Needs You!

Abstract

These days more and more software development organisations are adopting "agile" or "lean" methods. Implemented properly, this means a significant shift in roles, responsibilities and attitudes for everyone concerned in the software lifecycle – including testers. For example, "extreme programmers" now practice Test-Driven Development, and some have even said that agile teams no longer need testers!

I'm here to tell you that the opposite is true. Agile teams need testers more than ever, because quality is one of the cornerstones that makes the transition to agile effective. The Agile Manifesto states, among other things, a preference for "working software over comprehensive documentation." Today we'll discuss the importance of that one word – working – and its role in the overall process of developing software.

Topics covered in this session will include:

- Does testing have the same objectives on an agile project?
- Do agile testers need to learn new skills and tools?
- Does agile development require fewer testers?
- What role(s) can testers play in the organisation's transition to agility?

Agile Testing in Practice - Workshop

Abstract

We expect that Kevin's earlier talk will generate a lot of talking points. This follow-up session will therefore be your opportunity for further discussion with Kevin, and will be driven entirely by your questions:

- Explore the expanded role of testers in an agile organisation
- Examine the agile lifecycle, and the timing of various kinds of testing
- Dig deeper into the lean concept of "mistake-proofing"
- Discuss the pros and cons of tests as specifications
- Learn what life could be like with no bugs database
- If we have time, see a brief demonstration of Test-Driven Development using tools such as FIT/FitNesse and xUnit
- ... Or anything else that concerns or interests you!
- The course of this discussion will be entirely up to you!

Biography

Dr Kevin Rutherford is an independent practitioner with twenty-five years' experience in software development, including twenty years in leadership and project management roles. Kevin is a **Chartered Engineer**, a **Certified Scrum Master** and a **Chartered IT Professional**. He has spent the last ten years coaching software development teams to increased productivity and responsiveness through the adoption of agile principles and practices, including test-driven development.

During the same period Kevin has been a leading speaker on the agile conference circuit. This has included conducting workshops, tutorials and simulations at leading industry gatherings such as XP2000, SPA2006, AgileNorth 2005 and various XPdays around Europe. He has also run workshops as invited speaker at numerous events of the British Computer Society and the Agile Alliance.

Kevin's blog (http://silkandspinach.net) is ranked in the top 25 among all agile blogs worldwide (technorati.com, July 2006).

Jenny Martin, Analysis and Testing Manager, LMUK

Leveraging the skills of business analysts and test analysts – how running the two teams together can drive quality up the development life cycle and maximize efficiency

Abstract

Running Analysis and Testing teams together can drive quality up the development life cycle and maximize efficiency. Whether using the V Model approach or Agile techniques, we all agree that the earlier test analysts get involved in a project the better. When running both teams together it is easy to manage the involvement of testers early. You can put a BA and a test analyst on a project during the initial requirements gathering phases and the synergy effect of 2 systems experts working together (with a slightly different approach) serves to increase the quality of the deliverable and also facilitates healthy knowledge transfer between the teams. Both teams have similar skill sets and are business facing, so they naturally work well together, they even have transferable skills and can change roles if looking to broaden their experience. Techniques and processes to improve quality and time to market i.e. risk based testing, agile methodologies are relevant to both teams and the shared understanding of each other's discipline gives a new insight to each role. As a manager, running business analysis and testing together ensures early visibility of projects and creates efficiencies in team management and planning activities. For example, metrics captured in business analysis phases i.e. no of use cases, function points, no of requirements etc. can help estimate testing activities more effectively and subsequently drawing on historical metrics for both areas further improves the process.

 Since Business Analysis and Testing activities are business facing, independence from development teams is still maintained. Working alongside a manager responsible for design and development imposes a natural quality check point for each hand off between analysis – design and development – test. On Project Boards the development manager can take the role of Senior Supplier representing the development activities whilst the Analysis and Testing Manager if appropriate can take the role of Senior User representing the business and chair User Forums etc.

Biography

Jenny is responsible for all business analysis, systems analysis and testing activities within LMS. She has 10 years of experience working with and managing cross-functional teams to deliver complex IT systems in the finance, utility and loyalty sectors. She holds professional qualifications in ITIL, ISEB Test Management, PRINCE2 and SAP.

Jenny joined Loyalty Management as Test Manager in 2003 and has been instrumental in all major projects since that time. She has built a team of experienced, professional testers and developed robust methodologies, testing techniques, tools and processes in adherence with recognised British Standards. Under her leadership, LMS has created an outstanding record of successful project delivery and the seamless deployment of new systems.

Prior to joining LMUK, Jenny worked for six years as a consultant for Perot Systems. During this time Jenny had various international assignments, including managing testing for large scale multi tier implementations (Bank of Ireland) and leading analysis activities for ERP projects (CedelBank, Luxembourg). In her career at Perot Systems, Jenny was one of only 16 selected company wide to participate in Perot System's challenging Engineering Development Program.

Jenny has a Bsc Hons Degree in Psychology from Portsmouth University.

Outside work Jenny is an accomplished hill and distance walker and has undertaken many challenges for charitable causes, including the 'three peaks challenge', the 'Moonwalk' London speed walking marathon and a sponsored 35 mile walk across the North York Moors.

Dave Royle, CapGemini
The Test Data Challenge……Enterprise Test Data?

Abstract

One key aspect to effective testing is the test data used, the more 'representative' system generated the data is the more confidence in the tests executed & the outcomes produced.

There are numerous sources of data:

- Existing systems
- Data migration/system conversions
- 3rd parties (e.g. addresses via PAF, company details via BvD)
- Tools (e.g. FileAid)
- Manual creation/amendment (e.g. insert into……)
- System/Application generated
- Live data (security & data protection consideration, sanitised/masked as appropriate)

Depending on the stage of testing, the source of the data should (will) be different:

- Component Test – Tools, Manual creation, conversions……..
- Component Integration Test - Tools, Manual creation, conversions……..
- System Test – System/Application, data migration/conversions……
- Inter System Integration Test - System/Application, data migration/conversions, 3rd parties
- Acceptance Test - System/Application, data migration/conversions, 3rd parties, live

Depending on your systems, business areas, complexity (technical & business), interfaces, dependencies on external systems – will affect how you define, maintain & get best use (re-use) from test data.

Case Study – Enterprise Test Data

Background – 20+ national/corporate systems, 50,000+ user population, regional & national basis, the same data exists in many of the systems → target to create 'single source' data items/entities that all systems use/re-use. Explain systems/technology, databases/stores, interfaces, complexity (especially while migrating to target & 'in limbo') & 'management of test data' process & use/re-use across multiple test teams.

Biography

Dave is currently Lead Assurance and Test Authority for the test community within CapGemini. His role means he is responsible for approximately 500 staff. Dave has currently over 20 years experience in IT, 15 years have been specialising in Test Domain.

Dave has experience in the full development lifecycle: Business Development, Architecture, Analysis and Design, Development, Testing, Release Management, Implementation, Support, Environment Management, Systems programming, Networks. All test stages, disciplines, techniques, functional, non-functional, system migration, infrastructure and data

Richard Warden, Software Futures

Reviewing UML Analysis Models for Testability - Workshop

Abstract

You are a systems testers and you have just been given a UML analysis model to review. What do you do next? Find the nearest shredder or sit down and try to make sense of it? Do you read the use cases and others model looking at general areas such as traceability, completeness, correctness and consistency? Or are there more specific things you can do? This workshop introduces a two-fold approach to UML reviews based on guidelines we have developed in recent years.

Firstly, decomposing a significant set of requirements into a use case-based model is neither trivial nor easy. Analysts need to exercise skill in determining a good decomposition that will lead to two outcomes – enable a sound design that will lead to a good implementation, and produce a testable model that enables a high degree of test coverage appropriate to the risks. The first set of guides describe characteristics of good and bad analysis models that we can look for during reviews, and the associated testability issues. For example, poor use case decomposition can make it difficult or impossible to identify the proper pre and post conditions that should apply to a piece of functionality.

Secondly, we can use well-known test design techniques, such as those taught in ISEB/ISTQB training, to examine the behaviour described in more depth. For example, a Sequence Diagram shows the interaction between actors, processes and domain objects. We can examine it having identified the input and output equivalence partitions to see if all the necessary behaviour is described. Another example is event-based systems, where actors and objects can have a variety of states as the processing proceeds. Use cases and supporting models can be reviewed to determine whether the states, the events causing changes of state and the actions that occur on changing state are described. As a final example, many problems we have seen arose through errors of omission, where the analyst did not think sufficiently about all the possible combinations of inputs and outputs. Applying decision tables is a long-standing technique for examining their relationships and checking if anything has been overlooked.

We know the importance of effective reviews cannot be over-stressed, as they are our primary method of finding and removing faults early in the lifecycle. Bitter experience has shown that faults in important and high-risk analysis models can be devastating if allowed to progress undetected until the very late stages of test running or, worse still, to live operation. The aim of the workshop is to give delegates sufficient knowledge and confidence to rejoin their projects the next day and make a valuable contribution to reviews. In practical terms you will be given a set of review guidelines that you can use during the workshop and take away and adapt to your projects. While we have case history examples, we strongly encourage delegates to bring along examples of UML or instances of problems so they can be included in the discussions.

Biography

Richard is an independent IT consultant who has worked in the industry for more than 30 years. He started life as an analyst, systems designer and programmer on large RAF mainframe systems followed by the higher levels of testing and commissioning. During his time he has led programming teams, developed and run test teams, served time as a project leader, and he set up and managed his first review process while a quality manager with Racal Electronics (now part of Thales). Richard first came into contact with UML by chance in 1997 when, to his surprise, he was asked to be test manager for a new UML-based trading system for the Swiss Exchange. He was told the fact that he knew nothing about UML or financial trading systems was irrelevant – it was the testing bit they needed! Since then Richard has developed and delivered UML training and consultancy to a range of clients. As a developer at heart, but with an enormous affection for testing, Richard sees his work these days as helping build bridges between the different groups within a project team. He is the founder and chairman of the UML Testers' Forum, which is affiliated to the SIGIST, and also an accredited ISEB/ISTQB tutor. His company website is at www.softwarefutures.ltd.uk and the Forum can be found at www.umltesters.org

Clive Bates, Grove Consultants

Lessons learned from the great testers of our time

Abstract

What can today's software testers learn from present and past testing masters, many of whom have put their own lives on the line to make amazing contributions to the world in which we live? Clive is thinking about serious testers such as Chuck Yeager, Yuri Gagarin, Andy Green, Leonardo da Vinci, and Isambard Kingdom Brunel. Isambard Kingdom Brunel was one of the greatest engineers in British history. A designer of bridges, tunnels, viaducts, docks, and ships, Brunel constantly battled resistance from established authorities, lack of adequate funding, changes in requirements, and project delays. In researching the achievements of past testing masters, Clive has identified important traits and characteristics that made them successful. If we acknowledge and adopt these traits in our lives, we may become more successful in our work.

- The testing secrets of masters in other disciplines
- How to adopt their practices to your work
- Embrace their enthusiasm and courage to promote innovation

Biography

Clive has been with Grove Consultants since 2002 having previous held various test management positions. Clives' experience covers testing and test management in a variety of areas such as banking, insurance, retail supply chain systems and internet applications. This has resulting in him gaining practical experience in managing the testing from multiple dependant projects to time critical systems, as well as a high degree of practical experience in both functional and non functional testing. Clive has also undertaken a number of testing assignments at client sites assessing existing test practises. This has included reporting on appropriate improvements and providing ongoing support during the implementation of recommended changes and facilitating at post testing reviews.

Clive has presented at the leading testing conferences over a number of years namely the International Testing Automation conference Washington, StarWest, StarEast and EuroStar as well as smaller specialist testing conferences in the UK, Sweden and Holland. He has also contributed articles in various magazines and journals including Better Software.

Clive is one of the founder members of the board that developed the original ISEB/ISTQB Foundation certificate and ISEB Practitioner certificate and is still fully involved with ISEB. In 2006 Clive was on the program committee for the EuroStar conference held in Manchester. In any spare time he has, Clive is a water-ski instructor and qualified ski boat driver at the British Disabled Water-ski Association.

Working with Model-Based Testing
Matthew Archer, fmisolutions

Abstract

This talk will share our story of introducing model-based testing, the challenges we faced along the way and how it delivered many unexpected benefits. In the beginning, model-based testing was little more than a buzz word. A new approach that was sporadically applied, but as we later discovered, rarely used to its full potential. Two and a half years later, I am proud to say it has changed our lives as testers.

Model-based testing brought with it a universal language that increased communication to an all-time high, not just with the developers, but with the entire project team. Yes, it made us better testers, but above all, model-based testing played a central role in achieving a long running team goal. That goal was to foster a culture where testing is seen as an indispensable part of any project that creates, customises or configures a piece of software. A culture where testing is integrated throughout the entire project and is supported by the understanding that software quality is the responsibility of everyone.

Model-based testing is here to stay. I can not envisage a future without it. Hence, this talk will provide the audience with a pragmatic guide to introducing model-based testing, the difficulties they can expect to encounter and our recommended solutions. The talk will begin by providing the audience with an overview of the models and associated diagrams we selected to support the different levels of testing, from Unit, through System, to User Acceptance. This is where we encountered our first challenge. The talk will discuss the model selection process and stress why selecting models is a task that must involve the entire project team.

Our final selection consisted of UML Activity, Use Case, Class and Sequence diagrams contained within a Business Model, a Requirements Model and a Design Model. Each model will be briefly discussed to highlight their simplicity and dispel the stigma that models are only for deeply technical testers. The second part of the talk will focus on how each model is used to support the testing effort. This will begin by explaining how models can aid the test planning process and also provide a framework for risk-based testing. Models from real projects will then be used to explain how test cases (for each level of test) can be derived from the models using combinations of traditional test case design techniques. This is where we will stress our second learning point. It will be put to the audience that creating test cases from models is not the quantum-leap in approach that many testers believe it to be.

The final part of the talk will look at how model-based testing supports measurement collection and analysis, including test coverage, risk mitigation and defect distribution. Real-life examples will be presented to the audience to show how such quality indicators can be used to guide the testing effort and also provide the project manager with information to steer the project.

The talk will close with a questions and answers session.

Biography

Matthew is the Test Strategist at fmi**solutions**, a company that provides training, consultancy and mentoring services that span the full software development lifecycle and focused on making software development teams successful through effective use of people, process and tools. He has been involved in all aspects of software testing, including the development of automated testing solutions and test process improvement initiatives. He has recently focused his attentions on model-based testing and testing within agile and iterative development lifecycles.

Esther Derby, Esther Derby Associates, Inc

Congruent Feedback – Feature Presentation

Abstract

I recently spoke with a colleague who was distressed that her office mate picked his teeth and wiped the bits on the table during meetings. "Have you told him his habit distresses you?" I asked. "No, I didn't want to hurt his feelings," she said. "I just avoid him as much as I can."

Even if you've never been in this exact situation, chances are you've been in some situation where a co-worker's habits made your working relationship difficult.

I'll outline the barriers to giving feedback, the costs of withholding feedback, and offer guidelines for giving feedback to build better working relationships.

Biography

Esther Derby is well known for her work in helping teams grow to new levels of productivity and coaching technical people who are making the transition to management. Esther started her professional career as a programmer and now focuses on interpersonal, group, and organizational dynamics.

Esther is co-author (with Johanna Rothman) of Behind Closed Doors: Secrets of Great Management. Her latest book is Agile Retrospectives: Making Good Teams Great, which she wrote with Diana Larsen. Esther is one of the founders of the Scrum Alliance and has an MA in Organizational Leadership.

Her articles have appeared in Better Software, Software Development, CrossTalk and on-line at stickyminds.com, scrumalliance.org and ayeconference.com.

GONZO QA II: FEAR AND LOATHING IN THE AFTERNOON
By Martin Cunnington

Not much time to eat lunch today. When I got down to the canteen, three at the foosball table were looking for a fourth and I hate to disappoint. Twenty minutes later my partner and I have lost the tournament two games to one, but by Golly, we made them sweat. I climb the stairs back to the fourth floor thinking about the test plan I have been commissioned to write this afternoon; well, start to write this afternoon at any rate. Half a day for a test plan is always a bit optimistic; three days is more like it. Half a day is only usually long enough for a checklist. I wonder what Richard is doing sat at my desk and remember that I moved a few days ago. Finally back at my new desk on the third, I find a note on my wrist rest with "Call me" scribbled on it, no name, no number, no clue. I ask my group who put it there but they look at me blankly. Someone suggests a member of finance rumoured to own an invisibility cloak, but I find this unlikely. He last left his office in 1998 and all the evidence suggests he hasn't left it since. I bin the note and then take it out of the regular bin and put it in the recycling bin. Hey, I have a conscience, you know.

I open up Windows Explorer and access the network drive where all the client project folders have been filed since time immemorial. Odd - the client I am looking for does not have a folder. Vaguely remembering something about this, I rummage around in my Outlook inbox and find an email from support saying that we have run out of space on \\clients, so all new files will be created on \\newclients regardless of whether the client is new or not until future notice. Accessing the new network drive I find a project folder for my client and a sub-folder in it for the project I am going to work on. I open it up and find four further sub-folders: "final", "final 2", "final final" and "old". Note to self: recirculate the folder naming standards, especially those concerning manual version control. Thinking that I can at least ignore "old", I search the other three folders looking for the latest versions of the documents I need to write a test plan, namely the project scope, business requirements, functional specification, use cases, browser matrix and one or two other documents if the project warrants it. I find nothing of the sort but I do find a bookmark to the project home page on the new company wiki, Confluence. Accessing the wiki I find what I need attached to a page with a typo. I immediately correct the typo feeling pleased with myself. For a wiki to flourish, we all have to do our bit.

As I reread the project scope, my part in its creation comes back to me. I remember having to estimate how long I would require to write and execute the test plan for an essentially flat web site powered by Ektron, a content management system. I will also need to conduct one round of user training prior to hand-over. I am not sure that combining quality assurance and training works for every agency, but it certainly works for us. Unfortunately, the finished business requirements document at 100 pages is twice as long as I expected and the same goes for the 200 page functional specification. This translates into either more job satisfaction for me and my team or a great big time and money crunch coming right at me. I make a note to have a word with the project manager. I notice that the browser matrix was written around Easter 2006 and contains no commitment to test the site on either Firefox 2, Microsoft Internet Explorer 7 or Windows Vista. I think we can live without testing on Vista for another few months but Firefox 2 and IE 7 are here and now and usage is climbing. I make a note to ask the project manager to raise a change request. We will probably need to check the password reminder email is readable in Outlook 2007 too. Realising as I write it that this task is easy to describe, I add it to Jira, our new issue management system. We got it when we bought the new wiki software in some kind of two-for-one deal at Morrisons. Actually, I don't know how we got it, but Jira is a heck of a lot more powerful than UltraApps, our poor old issue manager – and there's the rub; it's also a lot more complex to operate. Still, it's early days and we have already had much success with it. I dispel the cloud of untapped Jira potential gathering over my head and read on, losing myself in the, I must say, rather well written project documentation. I make a note to congratulate the project Information Architect next time I see her; this doesn't seem like something I should put in Jira though.

I am a big fan of separating development, staging and live environments. I think developers should have the freedom to do whatever they want in the development environment, safe in the knowledge that they can do no harm to anyone except themselves and each other. The staging environment is where it all comes together and should be as close a copy of the live environment as possible. The live environment should be sacrosanct, heavily protected and fiercely guarded. Unfortunately, many content management system (CMS) implementations tend not to play by these rules. Not all clients

aspire to an academically-satisfying fully staffed author, editor, publisher model and all the roles end up delegated to a lady called Jo who works three days a week, who has too much to do and who does it straight onto live.

I am mulling over the ways we can prevent omnipotent CMS users from publishing stuff live just to see what it looks like. I'm thinking education, I'm thinking preview functions, I'm thinking thumb-screws, when I become aware of someone hovering just on the edge of my field of vision. That will be Mr. Call Me, then and I'm still thinking thumb-screws.

Call Me explains that he has a five or six (he's not sure) -page micro-site that really needs to go live this afternoon because the online media promotion starts tomorrow at 9 a.m. and it is too late to stop it. He asks me to take a quick look at the site, saying it is in English and Russian and each version shouldn't take me more than five minutes to approve. It occurs to me to ask him whether anyone has checked the online media banners. He says no and adds it to my verbal brief. After a very short, very intense discussion it turns out that the project has no scope, no budget, no job code and isn't scheduled via the resourcing system. It also turns out that despite this, Call Me has somehow got it built and promised the client we would deliver it last Friday so it is in fact all on staging and late. This is wrong on so many levels that it is difficult to know where to begin. However, needs must when the devil drives, so I park the CMS test plan task and pick up this one instead. I make a note to talk to Call Me about his project management skills during the evaluation phase of this project (should there be one - ha!) and prepare for a bout of what I call exploratory testing when the muse is with me and ad hoc testing should she be otherwise engaged.

I start by visiting the home page of the English site on the staging server using MS-IE 6. What joy! I am looking at a competition site which means there will be a form on it somewhere and a database back-end that needs checking too. While I manually browse the site, I run a bunch of automated tools over it in the background including XENU link-checker, CSE HTML Validator and Watchfire WebQA (R.I.P.). Cheap as chips XENU finishes first, ah bless, and the report is not only red but much longer than you would expect for a five or six page site. The HTML validator spits out its usual super-wordy report and a quick glance tells me there's a lot of red in there as well. As the mighty Watchfire weighs in with its final, damning verdict, I reach for the phone and make two calls. I call Call Me to postpone tomorrow's online media promotion because this won't be going live tonight and I call home to say I will be late.

Next episode: Fear and loathing after dark.

About the author

Martin Cunnington is Head of Quality Assurance at MRM Worldwide, a leading digital marketing agency servicing some of the world's bluest of blue chip companies. Martin joined MRM Worldwide (then Zentropy Partners) in 2000 from HP (then Compaq) after 10 years Marketing IT service in Munich (then München), Germany. A recently Chartered IT Professional, his influences include Grace Hopper, René Magritte, Gary Numan and Hunter S Thompson.