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CASE STUDY

Iwantoneofthose.com Protects Online Revenues with ‘Crowdsourced’ Bug Testing
Innovative e-tailer gets new payment system live in record time and at low cost with crowdsourced testing community from uTest

“Testing is a vital part of our online business, because if anything goes wrong it directly affects our bottom line,” explains Sagar Vadher, Head of IT at the leading online retailer of retailing gifts, gadgets and lifestyle accessories, Iwantoneofthose.com. “Basically, there’s a risk of us starting to lose money if there’s anything wrong with our web pages. Everything has to be easy-to-use and in full working order at all times.”



So, when a recent payment card industry (PCI) compliance initiative required changes to the payment systems of its e-commerce site, the Company needed to strike a unique balance between the cost, quality and speed of its testing and ‘de-bugging’. Inspired to innovate, the e-tailer trialled a completely new testing concept in the UK; crowdsourcing.

Arguably, any goods-producing organisation exercises a degree of quality control or testing before it goes to market. Web pages, software and mobile phone applications are no exception. While there is no such thing as defect-free software, too many bugs, particularly if they’re present in critical components, can adversely affect reputation, usability and consumer rights. Yet, too much time spent de-bugging, can soon become very expensive and slow an organisation’s time to market with applications or web content. For a high volume, high speed, high quality online retailer such as Iwantoneofthose.com, the consequences of a faulty payment systems going live, even temporarily, was unacceptable.

Innovative and Affordable

Iwantoneofthose.com turned to TCL Crowdsourcing for access to the world’s largest marketplace for testing web sites as well as desktop, mobile and gaming applications; uTest. It utilises a crowdsourced software-as-a-service (SaaS) model for providing testing services. A worldwide community of 18,000 plus software testers gives massive coverage for environments such as OS, web browser, firewall and mobile handset as well as demographics such as age, sex, language and geographic location. Crowdsourcing enables organisations to launch higher quality products, get their applications to market faster, and control the cost of testing. And, because it is truly on-demand, there are no long-term commitments or fixed cost contracts.



Stewart Noakes, Chairman at TCL Crowdsourcing explains, *“Not only is software testing being revolutionised by the idea of using a global community of professional testers, but the concept has proven to deliver compelling, real world business benefits at a fraction of the costs of traditional software testing. A one year subscription to the uTest service typically saves organisations 70 per cent, compared with the cost of hiring one additional QA engineer in-house. The testers are customer-rated and motivated by a pay-for-performance model. Unlike hiring additional in-house QA personnel or signing long-term outsourcing contracts, crowdsourcing enables real-world, massive software testing coverage. Bespoke virtual QA teams with appropriate skills are constructed by environment and demographics such as access device type, application rules, geographic location etc and deliver real-time responsiveness. In fact, a complete test cycle can be run in 48 hours or less.”*

TCL is an independent Software Testing Consultancy, started at the beginning of 2000, with offices in the UK in London, Bristol and Exeter; in Burlington, Massachusetts in the US; and in Bangalore in India.

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Vadher adds, "The cost of full time testing staff required for our aggressive delivery times are prohibitive and we were attracted by the concept of testing by a community of real live testers essentially 'on-tap'. It has been very easy to try with the simple subscription or per-project pricing structure and we were not constricted by volume minimums or long-term commitments. When, we tested changes made to our payment processing service, the crowdsourcing system delivered real-time feedback via a secure web platform in less than two days."



Fast and Furious

Testing for the payment pages began at 1.30pm one Friday afternoon, with a conference call between Iwantoneofthose.com and TCL Crowdsourcing. The pages were loaded to the TCL system at 2pm, and at 2.15pm the testing went live across 35 specialist bug hunters from the UK and USA that had been selected by the e-tailer. By 4.30pm that day the first test cycle was complete; Iwantoneofthose.com had reduced its testing process from days to just hours. All this with no compromise on quality; in fact it had expanded the diversity and experience brought to the project from its four-person, single platform in-house QA team, to 35 multi-platform, multi-national testing specialists.

The crowdsourced uTest team found 38 bugs in that time. According to Vadher a few were not within the scope of the pre-defined test parameters or were duplicates, but around 30 were completely valid and able to be addressed immediately. He adds, "Our own testing team reviewed it and said that it looked great; different bugs had been found. The crowdsourced testers seem to collaborate, but compete in a friendly way at the same time. Our test manager now has the resource she really needs through a like-minded community."

Controlled Costs

With the crowdsourced testers paid per bug they find, Iwantoneofthose.com was able to fully control its testing expenditure. It capped the first cycle, which ended up costing just \$510. The alternative would have been much more expensive.

As Vadher comments, "Even a really low level tester costs £30K per year to employ. This way, I have a completely on-demand service, with costs that I can control. It's a no brainer."

The crowdsourcing concept also benefits from working in iterative cycles. Going forward Iwantoneofthose.com will bookmark the testers in its community that it likes best, and refine their work. In practice, the testers just get better with more exposure and Iwantoneofthose.com team has since found itself building a 'virtual' relationship with them. The Company advises that the biggest lessons it has learned in the crowdsourcing experience were about understanding the test parameters; to have focus, and define what you don't want your testers to look at.

Results

With the results from the first test cycle, Iwantoneofthose.com classified its results and prioritised which got fixed first; high, medium, low or 'complete show-stopper' and fed this back into its regular bug fix cycle. The Company then ran another quicker and less expensive test cycle through a 'bug battle'. Four teams of testers competed against each other for a cash prize to find the most bugs. Approximately 30 professional testers gathered at one of TCL Crowdsourcing's regular PEST (pub exploration of software testing) events in London, for a live, 'big screen' show down. They then donated half of their winnings to the NSPCC.

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"These initiatives keep the testers highly motivated because they are so driven by technical achievement," concludes Noakes. "And of course, organisations like Iwantoneofthose.com are able to get its essential systems live quickly and cost effectively."

About TCL Crowdsourcing

TCL Crowdsourcing is the exclusive UK partner for uTest, the world's largest marketplace for testing web sites as well as desktop, mobile and gaming software applications. It utilises a crowd sourcing SaaS model for providing testing services for a truly efficient, innovative and cost effective solution.

A worldwide community of software testers (18,000 plus) gives massive coverage for both environments (OS, web browser, firewall, mobile handset, etc.) and demographics (age, sex, geographic location, etc.). The Company is based at New Broad Street House, London, EC2M 1NH. Tel: 0845 869 6079. www.tcl-global.com/software-testing/utest

TCL Crowdsourcing Media Contacts:

Natalie Sutton/Natalie McEwan
Noiseworks
+44 (0)1628 628080
Crowdsourcing@noiseworks.com

or

Stewart Noakes
TCL Crowdsourcing
Stewart.Noakes@tcl-global.com
+44 (0) 845 508 6092

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