



## **Beta Testing: Failure is Not an Option**

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Picture this: months have gone by since you first contacted a consultant to build a new application for your business. The discovery process took longer than you imagined – although, admittedly, it was valuable on many levels. Your consultant has called you several times with insightful questions, some of them involving difficult choices, but you know that they are on the job, and your anticipation is growing. Your staff, who know that the new system is coming, frequently ask you when it will be delivered. Every day, you encounter another limitation in your current way of doing things, but hey, at least you know you won't be doing it that way much longer.

Now, you've gotten the call; your brand-spanking-new database system is ready for you to begin beta testing. Yay!

Wait. What? Testing? Yes, your consultant says, testing. You are gently reminded that you did, indeed, discuss this at the beginning, but now that the time has come, you are unsure of how to proceed. Is this a matter of trust? You hired your consultant because you trusted that you would receive a good finished product. And why should *you* have to test? Didn't they test it already, as part of development? If so, surely, they did a good job. Besides, this will take a lot of time; wasn't the new system supposed to save time?

Without a doubt, these are valid concerns. However, there are very good reasons why your involvement is essential at this stage of the process.

Reason 1: We don't know what we don't know.

No, I'm not channeling Donald Rumsfeld. But remember that Discovery phase? It seemed pretty thorough at the beginning, yet there is a strong possibility that we missed something. That guy in the corner that quietly does his unique and critical job was never consulted; your business rules changed while your system was in development and you forgot to let us know; we misunderstood something. These are all possible reasons why "My New Widget Manager 1.0" won't be perfect. Only you can tell us which aspects still need a little more TLC.

Reason 2: You are more creative than you think.

No matter how much our QC testers hammer on it, you will try to do things with your new software that we never dreamed of, and those things will break it somehow. It always happens – every user is different.

Reason 3: Panic is futile.

From what we have seen, the impulse to “go live” with minimal testing is a strong one. This is a terrible idea. In most cases, the new system takes the place of the old. Even if the old system remains in place for the short term, the second you enter data into the new one, the old is out of date. If something goes wrong, your business may be adversely affected to the point of being dead in the water until the problem is fixed. We do not want to be in this position any more than you do. We do everything in our power to avoid panic situations that cause stress for everyone involved.

Reason 4: Familiarity breeds... love!

An essential by-product of beta testing is the chance for you to become familiar with the minutiae of your brand new database. When you are ready to go live, we want you to feel comfortable with the numerous elements that make up this significant step forward. Because everyone learns at a different pace, and absorbs information in his own unique way, having time to poke around and learn things one step at a time is the best way to really learn how it all works. And when you come to know it, we are confident that you will love it.

I would like to conclude this brief overview by sharing my experiences regarding software testing and client expectations. Over the years, I have delivered many solutions to many clients. Overall, the ones who patiently undertook beta testing were significantly happier with the finished product. When you expect excellence with the understanding that you are a part of the equation, everyone involved is empowered to be successful.