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TESTCo - Part of the Acorn Team

Challenges

- Lack of sufficient QA resources
- Need a tightly integrated development and test team.
- Staffing needs varied over time

Solution

- Quickly build a team and process to respond to immediate needs
- Implement QA Management for autonomous operations
- Provide variable staffing with schedule overlap to address challenging issues

Benefits

- Improved software development process
- 30% cost savings and shorter development cycles
- Flexibility to adjust and respond to new projects for significant increases in revenue

Situation

Acorn Systems, a leader in profit management and optimization solutions, faced a challenge. By 2002, it had successfully transitioned from a consulting services provider with a desktop solution to a software company with an enterprise profitability analysis platform upon which it had planned to base future products.

Problem

Organizational changes left the company without any QA resources for an upcoming release. With Acorn Systems' focus on delivering top-notch products to customers across the globe – being able to thoroughly test each release prior to distribution was of critical importance. Torsten Weirich, EVP of Product Development, acted quickly. "Acorn needed to create a seamless software process for our development organization where we could develop test plans and put together the right team to meet our QA requirements," Weirich noted.

Based on Acorn's cyclical QA needs, there were several peak periods during the year when testing was needed. It also took many well-trained people to quickly and thoroughly test the products. As a result, it was hard to justify hiring full-time people in-house for testing because there were several months during the year when testing needs were low and those people wouldn't be fully utilized.

Decision

Acorn Systems determined that outsourcing the entire QA process was the best approach to increase the flexibility, scalability and speed that they needed in their software development cycle.

Torsten Weirich was referred to TESTCo by a highly regarded business colleague and scheduled a meeting. "I was very impressed with TESTCo when we spoke, they understood in detail the overall software process and were very knowledgeable about effective testing techniques." They were the right choice for Acorn Systems.

Solution

Once engaged, TESTCo's team of QA specialists learned Acorn's application and development process quickly. For the first several months, TESTCo focused on writing test cases, developing test plans, executing those plans and responding to Acorn's internal changes in their development cycle. Since testing occurred overnight, Acorn's development team gained immediate insight into problems that resulted from the previous day's coding and could react quickly to develop a solution.

"When our relationship with TESTCo first started it took some hands-on time to ramp up, but my long term goal was to be hands-off and have the entire QA function run with a fair amount of autonomy, even though they were an outsourced provider," stated Weirich, "TESTCo understood this goal and helped put together processes for an autonomous relationship."

Today TESTCo provides complete QA Management for Acorn. By overlapping the schedules of the Acorn development team and the TESTCo QA team, Acorn developers have the opportunity to work simultaneously with a TESTCo engineer to address particularly challenging issues. Additionally, TESTCo's QA Manager meets twice weekly with the software engineers in Austin to collaborate with them on the priorities, schedules and plans. "Now it is almost as if TESTCo is part of the Acorn team versus being a provider, the relationship is completely seamless even though they aren't onsite," said Weirich, "That was my goal all along."

Benefits

"Overall, the relationship with TESTCo has been extremely positive. The team provides us with an innovative approach to quality in our software process. They are very resourceful in helping us adjust the software development process and suggesting ways to continuously improve it and positively impact our products," said Weirich.

In addition to enabling a streamlined and seamless development process for Acorn Systems, working with TESTCo has provided many tangible benefits. Now Acorn Systems can quickly adjust the size and technical expertise of the QA Team at any time. The flexibility provided by outsourcing to TESTCO has shortened the development cycle, provided Acorn with a cost savings of over 30% and dramatically eased the workload of their software developers.

TESTCo has also provided Acorn with the agility needed to pursue special project opportunities for clients and prospects. "Having the ability to identify a project, scope it, start development and create test plans within a few days is priceless. These projects often represent a significant source of revenue for the company and it would be a major opportunity lost if we couldn't pursue them", said Weirich.

TESTCo
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