StarBase

Integrity, Knowledge and Delivery

If You're Performance Testing Offshore, You're Paying Too Much

"It's taken us 6 months, we've spent £200,000, and we have no confidence in the testing." **– FTSE100 UK client.**

As a specialist provider of performance testing, StarBase has long been the first port of call for large corporates for critical projects or where their testing is failing.

We've recently been asked by three FTSE 100 companies to review performance testing projects, each run by one of the 6 largest offshore outsourcers. StarBase was brought in because the performance testing programmes were not delivering realistic, timely and accurate results. In each case, months of time from many testing resources had been incurred by the time StarBase was engaged.

Having reviewed a number of these projects, we see the failure points consistently falling into three categories:

1. Offshorers have few people who understand performance testing

Performance testing is generally sold by offshore companies on the back of manual functional testing engagements they are already executing for a client.

While the offshorers have large numbers of manual functional testers, we have consistently found that they have a low number of experienced performance testers. It is not unusual for there to be only one performance testing specialist on a multi-person performance project.

One UK FTSE 100 organisation we recently reviewed has just hired one of the outsourcers to run a performance testing programme, driven by a board mandate to maximise offshoring.

The incoming team, sold as all having 'three to eight years of performance testing experience', turned out to be functional testers who had been given a two-week boot camp course on how to performance test.

The result has been:
- Incorrect setup and use of the testing tool
- Poor or inappropriate preparation of test data
- Poor scripting, leading to poor tests
- Inability to judge whether the scripts created are working correctly or not
- Inability to understand the test results and draw meaningful conclusions

We have seen similar situations before: in every case, the client has to pay for many more people than would be necessary to deliver the work if using specialists. The scripts that the offshorers produce need to be reworked and re-run. Tests are run that are inconclusive, resulting in more testing being needed and delivery dates being missed.

The day rates charged by offshorers may be low, but by the time all the days are counted, the client has paid handsomely for what is, at best, sub-standard testing.

The "highly experienced" team turned out to have had a two-week training course only

2. There is a culture of not questioning

Also known as "I did what I was told to do", this is a major source of wastage of time and money for clients. It manifests in a number of ways:

- Not asking whether the tests being run will give the information that the client needs
- Not questioning why a test has succeeded or failed and therefore whether it might be a false positive or negative
- Not revisiting the non-functional requirements or project scope when the scope of the project changes or new information comes to light
- Not alerting the client when testing is going wrong or will not be delivered on time

Here is a real example of this, taken from an interview we conducted with the offshore performance testing provider at a FTSE100 company:

Interviewee: "We ran the soak test for 3 days at a time"
StarBase: "But it had failed first time…?"
Interviewee: "Yes"
StarBase: "Did you investigate why it failed?"
Interviewee: "No"
StarBase: "Do you know why it failed?"
Interviewee: "No. We assumed it was due to the data"
StarBase: "And you continued to run the test for several more weeks. Why?"
Interviewee: "Because the client requirements said to"
StarBase: "Did the test ever run through to the end without failing?"
Interviewee: "No."
StarBase: "Did you alert the client to the fact that the approach wasn't working?"
Interviewee: <no reply>

Our review found that the work should have required three to four people for four months if it had been staffed by a specialist onshore performance testing consultancy.

The client had paid circa £200,000 for seven people for eight months of testing that did not generate realistic or useful results. That is 42 more man months of cost, not including the costs of keeping the environments running for four extra months, the support staff involved, and late deployment.

> *72 man-months of testing on a project that was critical for the client had yielded no usable results*

3. The testers do not understand the business context

Performance testers need to understand not just how the application being tested works but also the business context in which it is being used.

The offshore delivery model is based on a small number of people that interact with the client and then a larger number that follow a fixed process. The people writing the scripts and running the tests generally have very limited exposure to, and knowledge of, the client's business and the business process in question.

This lack of exposure manifests throughout the testing: scripts that are not realistic because they don't reflect the business processes being tested; an inability on the part of the testers to understand why scripts are failing, or worse still, to notice that tests are passing that should not be.

The net result is that the client is paying for a lot of testing which turns out a waste of time because it cannot give meaningful results. Even if this is noticed by the provider, it will take a significant amount of time to correct what did not work and to run the right tests. By this time, the project will be well over time and over budget.

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Are You Paying Too Much?

Onshore is better value than offshore

Lack of understanding of performance testing, a culture of not questioning and a lack of understanding of the business context are the common issues that we find in all the performance testing projects run by offshorers that we have reviewed. In combination, they result in very poor quality testing that is achieved at much greater expense than necessary.

Offshoring successfully is all about taking activities which are well enough characterised that they can be turned into predictable processes, supported by technology, that can use lower-skilled resources from lower cost locations. Performance testing is an investigative, interactive process that depends on expertise and judgment. It cannot be trained for in a two-week course.

Until offshorers have a large enough group of employees with enough experience of critical, investigative performance testing, they cannot hope to deliver the quality required. (And our experience is that the people who get to this level leave their offshore employers to come onshore and work for onshore companies on local terms.)

StarBase has been in situations recently where it has been able to demonstrate that it can deliver large testing projects more cost-effectively than offshore competitors. Procurement took a while to reconcile this with StarBase's day rates appearing to be higher than the offshore companies. The disbelief was that they could get the quality of a specialist onshore consultancy at a lower total cost than using offshore.

StarBase is the UK's leading performance testing consultancy, trusted by major enterprises to mitigate IT systems risk since 1992. We ensure the consistent performance of our clients' key systems. As specialists, we possess an unrivalled depth of experience, knowledge and insight, creating smart and value-adding solutions for complex situations.

Performance Testing	Testing Tools	Functional Testing	Managed Testing
Combining the best testing tools with effective processes can improve the bottom line	Guidance on testing tool selection - the right tools for your technology challenges and to improve productivity	Smarter processes and greater automation will reduce cost and duration of the project	Let us take responsibility for all your testing requirements

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