



AVIVA UK

Insurance Giant Increases Performance Testing Capacity and Efficiency



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Key Facts

Company

- Name: Aviva UK
- Location: Norwich
- Industry: Insurance
- Products and services: Long-term savings, fund management and general insurance
- Employees: 46,000
- Revenue: £51.4 billion
- Web site: www.aviva.co.uk

Challenges and Opportunities

- Improve efficiency of performance testing methodology and processes
- Provide comprehensive testing service to multiple business units
- Respond effectively to unexpected changes in workload
- Leverage investment in HP testing toolset

Objectives

- Reduce Aviva management overhead
- Control cost of essential non-Aviva testing resource
- Instill new ideas and leverage StarBase expertise in performance testing

Why StarBase?

StarBase Solutions and Services

- Performance and load testing across a wide range of applications
- HP Performance Center and LoadRunner

The right choice

- StarBase replaced an offshore company to manage stand-alone performance testing projects and transform, develop and increase testing throughput
- Consultants from StarBase could be trusted to handle meetings with business users and add a new dimension of knowledge about the HP toolset
- StarBase’s factory approach to performance testing alleviated strain on resource availability for mission-critical projects

Benefits

- Performance testing factory approach from StarBase improved efficiency and expanded capacity for longer, more complex performance tests
- Testing with the factory approach allows more flexible resource allocation, whilst maintaining quality and consistency
- Success of the methodology, allied with enhanced resilience of critical applications, has improved visibility and confidence in performance testing
- Without StarBase’s factory approach, volume of performance tests caused by change of company name (to Aviva) would have been impossible to deliver

Insurance Giant Increases Performance Testing Capacity and Efficiency

Aviva is one of the world's largest insurance groups with 53 million customers worldwide and 46,000 employees. Aviva UK – formerly Norwich Union – is the largest insurance services provider in the UK. Faced with a shortage of technicians with the skills and experience to load test an ever-increasing number of mission-critical applications, many of which are online, Aviva's performance testing team turned to StarBase to provide flexible, specialist support.

Aviva's main activities are long-term savings, fund management and general insurance, including motor, household, creditor, health, commercial motor, commercial property and commercial liability. The group also includes the RAC, one of the UK's most progressive motoring organisations, providing a comprehensive range of member services for around seven million private and business motorists.

Each individual business unit is run as a separate organisation, under the Aviva brand, and has its own IT department. Non-functional testing of applications, however, is managed centrally. "We provide a service to many different business units, including General, Life and the RAC," explains Shawn Foster, Non-Functional Test Manager at Aviva UK. "That creates its own challenges, especially in managing expectations when release patterns and planned delivery dates clash."

Scarce Resources

Performance testing is a highly complex and technical discipline, demanding a deep understanding of the IT infrastructure. Add to that the need to understand business issues and communicate with users at all levels, and it should be no surprise that professionals with the right blend of skills and experience are in short supply. Foster's team of over 20 people includes only six who are Aviva employees.



"Because performance testing is a very niche area, we struggle to recruit testers who can deliver the quality we need," says Foster. "Also, recruiting and retaining individual contract staff is time-consuming, expensive and doesn't provide the continuity we need, especially at holiday time."

Before StarBase was engaged in 2005, Aviva had been working with an offshore company that provided a wide range of testing services. In most areas, this had

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proved successful, but the challenges of performance testing were more difficult to overcome in the offshore environment. Complex tests had to be reworked on site and the quality of communication was poor. "We found ourselves having to train and develop their resources," reflects Foster. "We really needed additional expertise, on and off site, to manage stand-alone projects and add value by helping us to transform, develop and increase our throughput." Aviva took the decision to look for a specialist provider of performance testing services.

In-depth knowledge of HP's suite of testing tools, especially HP Performance Center and LoadRunner, was a key requirement of the selection process. "We have looked at other tools on the market," says Foster. "At the moment the HP tool set is the most mature product on the market and it fits our requirements." From a shortlist of four companies, StarBase was selected on the strength of its technical ability and flexibility of resource. "The StarBase proposal was the most cost effective and indicated strong support capability offsite," confirms Foster.

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Increasing Complexity

StarBase began working alongside the non-functional test team, responsible for all performance testing throughout Aviva UK. The StarBase consultants integrated quickly into the Aviva team and began working closely with business users, as well as transferring knowledge and exchanging ideas about the HP testing tools and testing methods to Foster's team members. "It has worked incredibly well," confirms Foster. "We trust the StarBase consultants to handle project meetings with business users and they added a new dimension in terms of testing knowledge."

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Shawn Foster, Non-Functional Test Manager, Aviva UK



Aviva has entered a period of rapid, continual and extensive change. As business processes become more complex and interdependent, the level of complexity and integration required in IT applications also increases. For Foster's team, this means projects become more challenging and long-winded, so they need to be supported by more resource or will take longer to complete. "E-commerce and customer-facing applications need to be available 24/7 to an often unpredictable number of users, so performance testing is more widely perceived as mission-critical now," says Foster. Complex testing was placing an increasing strain on resource and StarBase recommended a change of methodology – the StarBase factory approach.

Factory Working

In the StarBase factory approach, testing is split

into four distinct production areas each delivering different outputs but covering multiple projects. In the planning area, experienced senior testers work on site with the business units to scope, plan and schedule each project. All scripts are written centrally – in the offsite script factory – and passed to the third area, also off site, where the actual testing takes place. The results are passed back to experienced consultants on site for reporting and feedback, which is rigorous and comprehensive. Business units involved in performance testing projects – even long-running ones – receive a daily e-mail with a summary of results, issues and risks, and next steps.

Foster often has to resource projects at very short notice. The factory approach lends itself to volatile environments; resource can be added quickly to key areas, while maintaining high quality, through consistent application of methods, standards and quality assurance. "Testing with the StarBase factory approach allows us to deploy resources at all levels much more quickly and effectively," says Foster. "For example, if there is a spike in the amount of scripts that we need, we can draft in more scripting resource, without the need to dedicate it to a single project. Better still, as we take on new projects, we don't necessarily have to incur the cost of extra project managers because the planning and scheduling process is much more efficient."

Once the factory approach had been adopted, Foster and his team worked with StarBase to embed the model and ensure its success. Both have learned and benefited from the collaboration. "StarBase has a proven methodology and our new structure is incredibly useful and efficient here and now," asserts Foster. "The success of the methodology and the extra resilience we have achieved has given performance testing a higher profile throughout the business."

Brand New Day

Aside from its cultural and commercial evolution, the company implemented its name change – from Norwich Union to Aviva – in a blaze of publicity on a single day, fondly remembered as “Aviva Day”. The impact on the company’s IT systems was immense and every application affected had to be performance tested by Foster’s team. “It was a massive piece of work,” reflects Foster, who recognises that the success of his team is still reliant on the capability and professionalism of its people. “For Aviva Day, StarBase’s consultants displayed a commitment and desire, equivalent to that of the Aviva team members, to help us meet our targets.”

Leading up to Aviva Day, the factory approach was stretched to its limits and it passed with flying colours. “Without StarBase’s factory approach, there is no way we would have been able to deliver the volume of performance testing projects created by the Aviva name change,” asserts Foster.

Foster considers the involvement of StarBase to be fundamental to the success of his team. “Even with Aviva Day behind us, there are still massive changes taking place, so we will continue to work with StarBase

for the foreseeable future,” concludes Foster. “Anything and everything that StarBase has done has been of the utmost quality. The consultants from StarBase are, without question, some of the most professional and genuinely nice people I have encountered in the IT industry. Each and every one of them is a credit to their profession.”



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

Combining the best testing tools with effective processes can improve the bottom line

Testing Tools

Guidance on testing tool selection - the right tools for your technology challenges and to improve productivity

Functional Testing

Smarter processes and greater automation will reduce cost and duration of the project

Managed Testing

Let us take responsibility for all your testing requirements

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