

# It's a Beta – What do You Expect?

Hal Bryan  
Software Test Lead  
Microsoft Corporation

# Disclaimer

- The opinions, ideas, suggestions, commentary, anecdotes, random interjections, irrelevant tangents, overly-complex analogies and outrageous lies expressed in this presentation are mine alone, and do not necessarily reflect the stuff and things of the Microsoft Corporation. In addition, my ideas, while brilliant, may not work for everyone.

# Who am I?

- Software Test Lead at Microsoft
- 6 Years' testing experience – Windows 98, Flight Simulator, Combat Flight Simulator, other simulation and game titles.
- Former police officer.

# What is a Beta?

- A Beta test is a program in which an unfinished application is released, under controlled circumstances, to a selected group of customers for the purpose of soliciting feedback.

# What are the Benefits?

- Consumer Relations / Corporate Image
- Market Research / Learn Your Customer
  - A good tester thinks like a customer. A great tester learns to think like all different kinds of customers.
- Leverage for Test Teams to Drive Quality Issues
- Widespread Configuration and Stability Testing
- Finding Bugs

# Ownership

- Beta Testing is Testing, ergo, should be managed by testers.
- Discuss Pros and Cons.

# Where to find Beta Testers?

- Previous Betas.
- Existing / potential customers.
- Online communities.
- Etc.

# When is it Ready?

- Not too soon.
- Not too late.

# Release Notes – Set Their Expectations Appropriately

- Include a basic README:
  - System requirements.
  - Setup instructions.
  - Known issues.
  - Areas to focus on.
- Not too much information.
- But not too little, either.
- README – Most people don't.

# Beta Testers – Set Your Expectations Appropriately

- Few, if any, will write good bug reports
- Large numbers of duplicates
- Bugs already fixed since last release
- Non-reproducible issues
- “Non-bugs”
- “Expert bugs”
- “Mega bugs”
- Narrow focus
- Many believe they are solely responsible for QA
- Many will be reluctant to file bugs
- Major feature requests

Beta Testers are not professional testers . . . But they ARE customers.

Don't judge the value of the test by the quality of the testing.

# Beta Bug Flow

- Beta tester reports a bug.
- Bug is assigned to a tester for investigation.
- If the bug is incomplete / not valid, it is sent back to the Beta tester.
- If the bug is valid, a “polished” version of it is reported by the tester, and tracked internally.
- Once the internal bug is resolved, the corresponding Beta bug is resolved and sent back to the Beta tester.

# Communication

- Email
- Face-to-face meetings
- Private newsgroups
- Etc

# Metrics

- Total number of Beta bugs entered equivalent to 15% of bugs found internally.
- Average validity percentage = 5%.
- Our average = 15%.
- These percentages do not include:
  - Automated crash reports.
  - Incidental bugs found while investigating Beta bugs.
  - Bugs found by test cases “inspired” by Beta bugs.
  - Existing bugs that can be resurrected with added leverage.

# Security, Updates, etc.

- Piracy can be a major issue – time bombs and copy protection can help.
- NDA violations (if applicable) should be dealt with quickly.
- Updates should be released at least every 6 weeks or so:
  - Downloadable builds vs. CD's
- Automated crash reporting tools are very effective.

# Conclusion

- A successful Beta brings far more than just bugs.
- Communication and interaction are key.
- If you have customers, you can probably benefit from a Beta.