Alpha and Beta Testing

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What I am here to talk about

A test-centric development methodology.
Real world use cases.
“Since you know version 1 is going to suck, hurry up and ship it so you can start working on version 2.”

Google Proverb
Alpha and Beta testing is not about flushing out bugs...
It’s about enabling a feedback loop.
Stop thinking about alpha and beta testing as phases in a development cycle.
Alpha and Beta Testing is an integral part of emerging development methodologies.

And for that, you have to look at the **whole process**.
Phase One

Requirements
Wait, wait, I forgot...
Before you begin you need to:
a) define your target audience.
b) start collecting sign-ups.
Phase One
Requirements
Test on “paper.”
Iterate on paper, whiteboards, post it notes, index cards...

Test team members’ ideas with one another.
And remember:

It doesn’t have to look perfect

(It’s a frick’n wireframe)
Then, as soon as you can...
STOP
testing on paper!
Don’t get trapped in wireframe-land.
Phase Two

Development
Create a *tangible* mock up.

Use what you create.

Watch others use what you create.

Learn from that experience.
Watching others...
Select your subjects carefully. Do they align with your target market?

Get an impartial party trained to present options and collect feedback from subjects.

Record the session.
Then have the whole team watch it.
Tools I Use:

Macromedia Breeze

Ethnio
Establish a development rhythm early.
Create an engineering pipeline.
Phase Three
User Testing
The best money you will ever spend:

Hire rock stars in customer support.
Create as many open communication channels as you can.
Publish a blog.
Respond to comments.
Create a discussion forum.
Answer questions.
Buy a help ticketing system.
Build your knowledge base.
Talk to your customers.
Listen to them too.
But don’t do everything they tell you to do...
even if it is easy to do.
But definitely do *some* of the things they tell you. 😊

Make your customers feel heard.
Make it crazy-easy for customers to report bugs.
Use automated error reports.
Our apologies.

TypePad has encountered an error. The requested page could not be found or the requested action could not be completed.

Please report this error to our support team.

What were you doing when this error occurred?

☑ Request a response from our support team. (So we can follow up with you.)

Send Error Report

Your feedback is vital.

The quality of your experience using TypePad is very important to us. Please help us respond to issues quickly by using the form on the left to report errors. The more information you can provide regarding what brought you to this page, the better. Thanks.

Back to TypePad Home
Log the error anyway.

Send a daily report of all errors to the entire team.

Meet daily to review open bugs and to schedule their fix.

Schedule “bug-a-thons.”
Don’t just record errors. Record *everything*. Understand your users’ behavior.
Don’t wait for feedback to come to you.
It’s out there, you just need to know how to find it.
Don’t forget: early beta testers are perhaps your most important asset. They will form the core of your user base.
Reward your beta testers.
Praise them for helping.
Give them credit for their ideas.
Send them product discounts.
Buy them something off their wish list.
Hire some of them.
Release frequently.
Lessons from THE REAL WORLD
Sandoz Laboratory produced a method for isolating the active ingredients of medicinal plants in order to create proper dosages for patients.

And now?
“Tubes”

The Internet was created to build a communications network impervious to nuclear assault.

And now?
Dharmaville
A preponderance of tie-dyed garments, a dearth of hair cutting enterprises and a whiff of wacky green tobacco on the wind may or may not indicate the presence of a few soap-dodgers in the area.

Embryonic Journey
Midwives on acid will deliver your lovechildren. Only by appointment. (locked)
Ludicorp saw what users were really using and adapted.
And now?
Early on Friendster actively stopped people from friending movies, products and other “stuff.”

And now?
Blogspot was originally a simple news board in a larger project management software suite.

And now?
After 6 months of beta testing, Swivel shut the product down and went back to the drawing board.

And now?
The customer really is always right.
The customer really is always right.

(most of the time)
Don’t be afraid to make Hard Decisions.
Alpha and Beta Testing is not just about flushing out bugs...
It’s about testing your ideas.
It’s about testing your process.
It’s about testing your market.
And it’s about flushing out bugs.
fin.
The Slide Graveyard:
where slides go to die.
Alpha and Beta testing are not the last phases of development.
They are the last phase of every phase of development.