

# How to sell your QA services on a free to play project

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# Agenda (1/2)

- About me
- A cliché about working as a video games tester
- Range of duties in QA
- Goals for QA
- Why is the benefit of QA services in doubt?!
- Why is it hard to sell QA for free to play projects?
- KPIs are your friend

# Agenda (2/2)

- Achieving great quality in your project
- Matching of QA activities and project stages
- QA strategies
- How to set up a good QA strategy for your project
- Combing community feedback and QA
- Formula of success for achieving great quality

# About Me (1/2)



Stephan Beier

39 years old

Senior project lead Travian

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10 years of experience in QA positions at developers,  
publishers, and outsourcers

# About me (2/2)

- Localization tester at EA
- Lead tester at Related Designs
- QA manager at Sunflowers
- Freelance QA manager at Keyfactor and Acony Games
- Head of QA at Gameforge
- Tester and test manager outside the games industry
- ISTQB certified tester and test manager

# A CLICHÉ ABOUT WORKING AS A VIDEO GAMES TESTER (1/2)

QA guys ...

- ... play games the whole day.
- ... get paid for playing games.
- ... are know-it-alls.
- ... can't do anything right.
- ... break everything.



# A CLICHÉ ABOUT WORKING AS A VIDEO GAMES TESTER (2/2)

QA guys ...

- ... complain all the time.
- ... always bring bad news.
- ... have shitty timing.



# Range of Duties in QA (1/2)

The field of activities of a QA department includes:

- Functionality testing
- Qualitative testing
- Localization testing
- Balancing testing
- Usability testing



# Range of Duties in QA (2/2)

- Game evaluation testing
- Technical testing
- Testing of tools and payment services
- Security testing

**Most people only recognize the functionality testing!**

# Goals for QA (1/3)

Typical goals for a QA department are:

- Finding all critical bugs and functional defects in a product and report them
- Assuring a good quality level for all builds/updates before release
- Assuring constant functionality of the payment systems
- Establishing security standards and monitor them for all projects

# Goals for QA (2/3)

- Assisting in the setup and maintenance of transparent production cycles with integrated QA stages
- Collecting and delivering qualitative feedback regarding gameplay, usability and monetization
- Assuring the correct integration of localized and culture specific content
- Assuring the quality of bug reports from internal and external sources

# Goals for QA (3/3)

**This time at least the Top 2 goals are being widely recognized.**

# Why is the benefit of QA services in doubt? (1/2)

While everybody knows, that you need a good devteam and good guys in marketing to be successful, the benefit of QA is not that obvious. One reason for this is that the effects of QA activities are not as easily traceable in the profit and loss statement as the success of a marketing campaign.

# Why is the benefit of QA services in doubt? (2/2)

Or to put it in simpler words:

If your game is successful and has only a few bugs, ...  
... then why did it cause so much QA costs.

If your game doesn't perform well and users complain, ...  
... then what was QA paid for at all?!

# WHY IS IT HARD TO SELL QA FOR FREE TO PLAY PROJECTS? (1/5)

In the age of box titles QA was a necessary evil. Without spending money on QA your chances would be very slim to pass a submission at the First Parties.

But in the age of Free to Play titles things are looking different. I have personally heard the following quotes:

# WHY IS IT HARD TO SELL QA FOR FREE TO PLAY PROJECTS? (2/5)

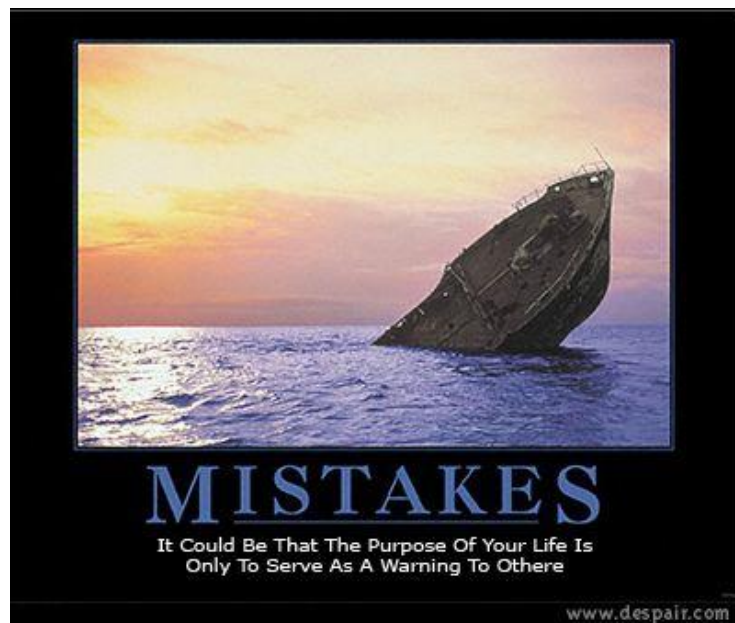
“QA is actually dispensable; we now have communities that test for us (for free).”

“Our customers don’t have that high expectation of quality, because they don’t pay for the titles.”

“Our customers understand the high complexity of our titles and therefore are willing to accept bugs.”



# WHY IS IT HARD TO SELL QA FOR FREE TO PLAY PROJECTS? (3/5)



# WHY IS IT HARD TO SELL QA FOR FREE TO PLAY PROJECTS? (4/5)

My personal hypothesis are:

- To be successful in a saturated market, it is definitely essential to stand out through your quality.
- If you can't assure some minimum standards of quality, you will not be successful.

# WHY IS IT HARD TO SELL QA FOR FREE TO PLAY PROJECTS? (5/5)

- The lower the entry obstacles, the lower the exit obstacles.
- Box titles only have to sell illusions; Free to Play titles have to deliver the promised quality to earn money.

# KPIs ARE YOUR FRIEND (1/6)

Example from the old world: (2006)

- Big German IP title with 10 million Euro project budget
- Extensive functional and qualitative QA including external focus groups where target audiences and game segments were matched
- Rating of 90+ in Germany, 81 on metacritic
- Sales outperformed biggest competitor in all but week 1

# KPIs ARE YOUR FRIEND (2/6)

Example from the old world: (2006)

But ...

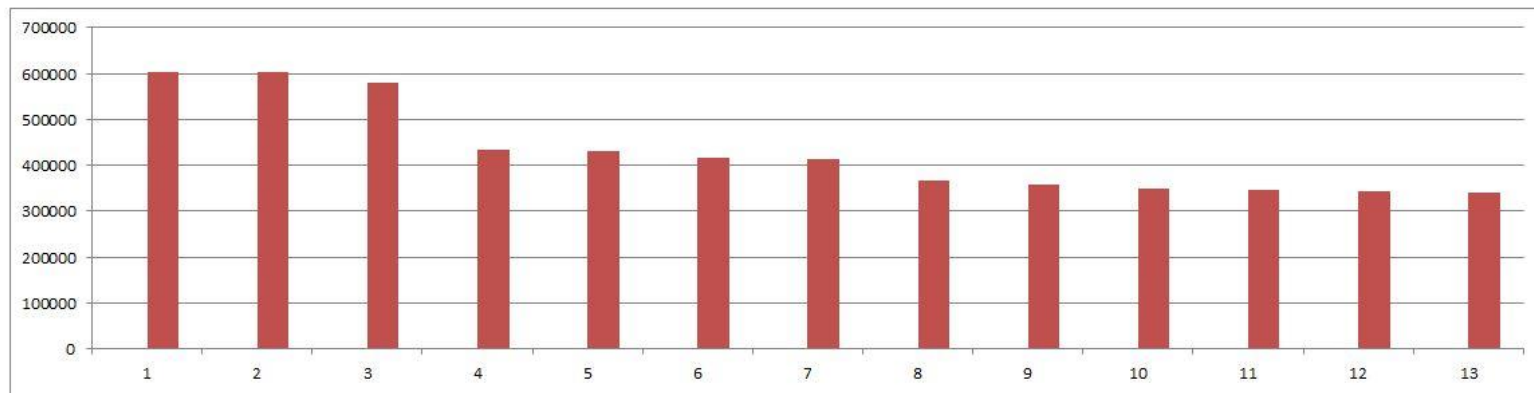
- QA budget of ~ 500.000 Euros was questioned
- Nobody knew, how the game would have performed with less QA

# KPIs ARE YOUR FRIEND (3/6)

Example from the new world: (2012)

- Successful German FTP browsergame
- Qualitative QA measures used to identify reasons, why users drop out during the tutorial
- Using of Tracking to compare the results
- The next two slides show the “before” and “after” numbers

# KPIs ARE YOUR FRIEND (4/6)



Tutorial step	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
User	603489	603489	579349	434512	430167	417262	413089	367650	356620	349488	345993	342533	339107
Funnel		96	75	99	97	99	89	97	98	99	99	99	90

Tutorial Funnel 0,56191163

[illegible]



# KPIs ARE YOUR FRIEND (6/6)

Results from the 2012 example:

- QA budget + costs of implementation of changes ~10.000 Euros
- Tutorial funnel improved from 56% to 64%
- 8% of the 300.000 users during second measuring period equal 24.000 users that didn't drop out of the tutorial
- Had we used QA before the time of the first measuring period it would have been (8% of 700.000) 56.000 users

# ACHIEVING GREAT QUALITY IN YOUR PROJECT (1/2)

Plan your QA at the beginning of the project!

- Set up quality goals for the project
- Derive goal criteria to make your goals practicable
- Derive tasks that are necessary to achieve your goal criteria

# ACHIEVING GREAT QUALITY IN YOUR PROJECT (2/2)

- Estimate time and effort for the project stages
- Set up a ramp up plan and hire accordingly
- Hire an experienced QA guy first and let him/her build up the QA team.

# Matching of QA activities and project stages (1/6)

Pre-Production (usually ends with the First Playable or a Vertical Slice)

- Concept reviews
- Usability tests with mockups
- Set up a structure for your testing plans (as the case may be with tool support)
- Selection and setup of a bugtracking tool
- Definition, setup and coordination of the bugflow
- Establish an understanding for the vision of the title
- First functional tests of components

# Matching of QA activities and project stages (2/6)

Production (First Playable until Alpha aka Feature Complete)

- Functional tests of components, integration tests, system tests and build approvals
- Qualitative feedback for all major components of the game
- Usability tests of features
- Polling of focus groups based on a useful matching of target audience and core features
- First balancing tests
- Setup of functional test cases for complete coverage of the title
- Coordination of the processes between developer and publisher QA

# Matching of QA activities and project stages (3/6)

Post-production (Alpha until Open Beta formerly known as Live)

- Functional tests of components, integration tests, system tests and build approvals
- Qualitative feedback for all major components of the game
- Balancing tests for all features
- Performance tests
- Polling of the community regarding usability, feature evaluations and balancing
- Review and improvement of bug reports from the community
- First tests of localization, security measures, deployment processes, tool connections and payment services
- Maintenance of the test cases and setup of a build verification test

# Matching of QA activities and project stages (4/6)

Live

- Execution of build verification tests and test cases for new content
- Tests of new language versions
- Qualitative feedback und balancing tests for new content
- Review and improvement of bug reports from the community
- Monitoring of security measures, deployment processes, tool connections and payment services
- Periodic execution of the functional test cases
- Continuous maintenance of the test cases

# Matching of QA activities and project stages (5/6)

What you do right early in the project, will save you a lot of time and effort in the long run!

According to the ISTQB the costs of fixing a bug in the same milestone it was implemented is 300 times cheaper than fixing it after shipping!



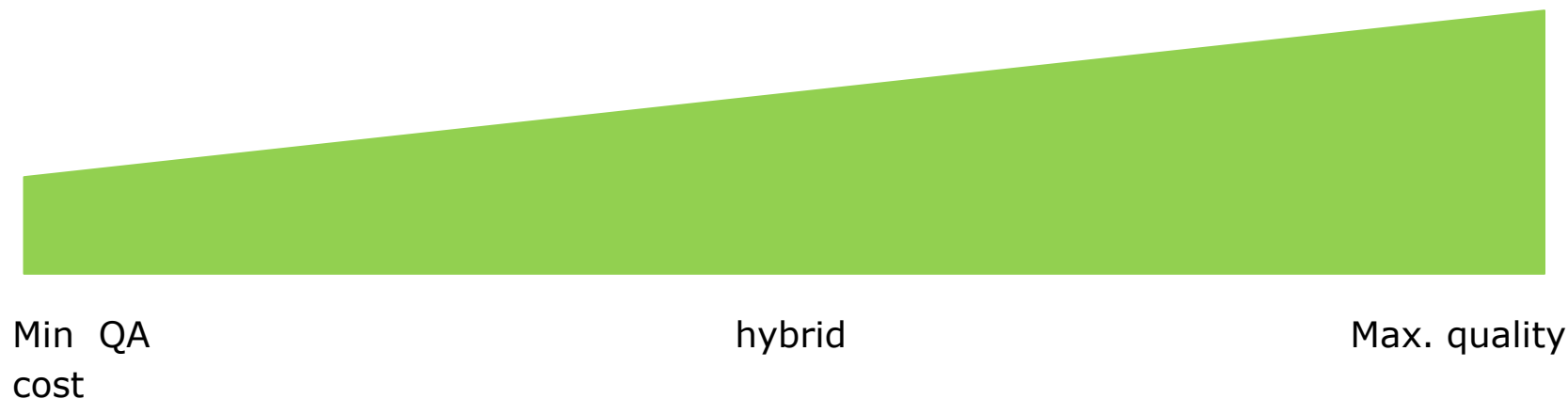
# Matching of QA activities and project stages (6/6)

This doesn't even account for the increased churn rate of games with insufficient quality and therefore frustrating experiences for the players.

It's only accounting the factors of cheaper costs of finding the bug, the lower risk of side effects and the logistical costs of a bugfix after release.

# QA strategies

In principles there are 3 QA strategies



# How to set up a good QA strategy for your project (1/2)

Well, uhm, I kind of have to admit something:  
Only the hybrid strategy is valid!

- There is no minimum cost strategy, because without QA the devteam has to test (more). These costs then don't count on the QA budget, but they still exist.

# How to set up a good QA strategy for your project (2/2)

- There also is no maximum quality strategy. To cover all possible combinations in a multiplayer game all people in China would have to tests for thousands of years for every new build or update.
- The only question is how close to one of these extremes you need to go, to meet the quality goals of your specific project.

# Combining community feedback and QA (1/4)

A well-managed community is a great plus in beta and live stage and delivers ... (pure QA perspective!)

- ... bug reports, that won't show up in the test environment or haven't been found.
- ... help for the prioritization of bugs.
- ... qualitative feedback for shipped features.

# Combining community feedback and QA (2/4)

- ... wishes and ideas for upcoming features.
- ... (on request) specific feedback regarding usability, balancing, robustness of individual features.

You can even set out a price for hunting down a specific bug, that you can't reproduce in your internal team.

# Combining community feedback and QA (3/4)

But obviously there are some limits, when you want to use your community for QA purposes:

- You can only start using them in the post-production, when you have the first live builds.
- Feedback from the community is mainly black box and is based on the changelogs of the builds.

# Combining community feedback and QA (4/4)

- Qualitative feedback is usually based on game areas rather than on individual balancing values.
- Bug reports should be improved by step by step reproductions, etc.

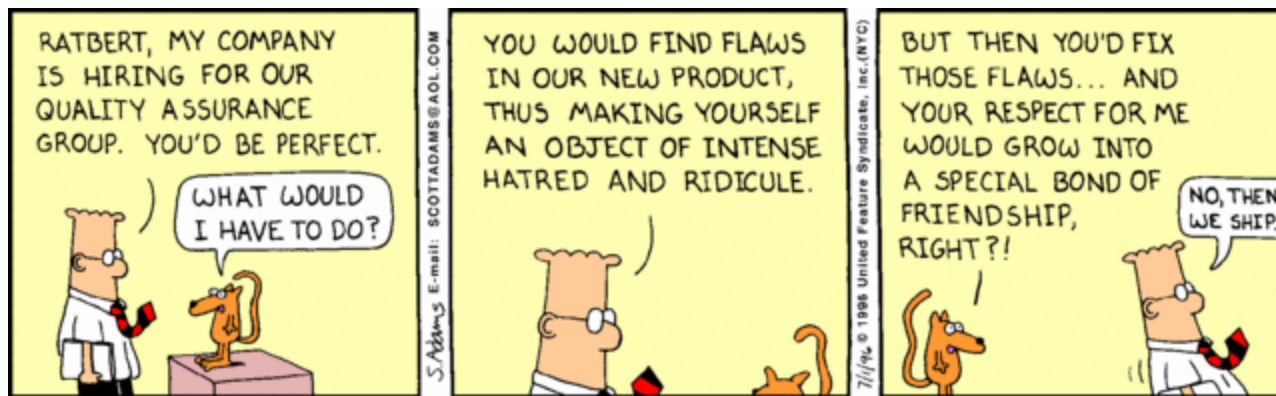
**Conclusion: A well managed community is a great addition to a systematical QA team, but can not replace it!**



# Formula of success for achieving great quality (1/3)

- Aside from the before-mentioned processes for the setup of a cost-efficient QA (goals, criteria, tasks, estimations of time and effort) there is one major aspect left:  
**Communication!**
- Without integration into the development processes a QA team can work as good as they want; if their results are being ignored, they won't help the project!

# Formula of success for achieving great quality (2/3)



# Formula of success for achieving great quality (3/3)

**Conclusion: Even though QA guys are always obligated to collect all the information they need to perform their tasks well, please take them serious and let them help you to build great games!**

# One last request

- @QA: Talk to the other departments in your project and sell your services as a support for the whole team.
- @Management: Lay out some career paths in QA! Not every good QA guy has to change into a different field. ;)

# ANY QUESTIONS?



# THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR ATTENTION!

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