



SMARTBEAR
Zephyr Scale

Case Study

Zephyr Scale & HCSS:

Bridging the Gap Between Developers and QA



About HCSS

HCSS is a software company trusted by more than 45,000 construction professionals across 4000 companies. Its range of software options lets companies manage all of their operations, from bid to completion. Their clients are in the heavy construction industry, which includes road building, bridge building, excavation, utilities, pipelines, etc.

Since 1986, HCSS has developed software to help construction companies streamline their operations. Today, they're recognized as a leader in their market, serving thousands of companies across the United States. Year after year, they continue to innovate and expand their products as their industry evolves. With 24/7 support and coverage for virtually every facet of heavy construction, they pride themselves as being the most trusted software in construction.

Switching to a new process

They also have software for equipment management. That is, making sure pieces of equipment are maintained and can be repaired when down, equipment tracking, and telematics.

"We developed software for keeping the workplace safe and efficient, and several other products for supporting various aspects of construction," says Zack Foster, QA Manager for HCSS."

They needed to go through the process of switching from a relatively small, dedicated QA team to something much larger. "So originally, when we had about 120 people in the company and 40 developers, we had a QA team of 5 or 6 people servicing all of the developers in the company," he adds.

Since then, HCSS has grown to over 350 employees, so naturally it would bring some challenges.

Looking for uniformity

According to Zack, once they had grown, they started switching to a process where, instead of having that siloed QA team, they embedded individual QA members in those teams. Once that happened, they lost some ability to maintain consistency in their QA processes.

"We've worked hard since then to build these frameworks that all of our development teams follow," he said. "So if people move between teams, or when we're onboarding someone with standard company processes, we can tell them this is the product or process we use. They can then go to any team and it's not radically different."

"We started looking for a tool that would allow us to gain uniformity in how our teams write and execute test cases."

Picking the right tool

"We reached a point where we had six or seven candidates. We did a very brief overview of each one, decided here are things that we like here, things that we don't like," Zack said.

He went on to say that they deliberately chose one that was highly integrated with Jira, in the case of Zephyr Scale, and another one, a standalone application, that was also integrated with Jira, but was a little bit more disconnected.

After extensive testing of both, a winner was clear. "I think it came out three to one in favor of Zephyr Scale," he said. "We had somebody that favored the standalone tool, but what really pushed us over the line, in favor of Zephyr Scale, was the accessibility and the integration with Jira."

Coming in at the Right Time

"Our main goal for the past couple years has been to get away from long development cycles," says Falk Hoepfner, QA Lead for HCSS Telematics.

"When I first started, we were doing three-month release cycles. And now we're releasing multiple times a week. So the goal was to be able to manage that change for us and to get regressions and smoke testing to a very manageable, repeatable, and easy-to-access state for everyone on the team."

"Zephyr Scale came in at a very good time for us, because we were already moving towards, 'How do we go faster? How do we go faster with quality?' And, 'How do we make sure we stay organized so we don't miss anything?' And that last piece was really giving us trouble."

Anyone can jump in

"The fact that any Jira user on the team could jump in and execute test cases made a huge difference," Zack continued.

"The other, standalone tool we evaluated was very QA-team-member focused, but it never would have penetrated with the programmers. Whereas with Zephyr Scale, now we have a product that's extremely accessible, easy to use, and directly integrated with our change management system."

"Just the fact that pretty much anyone that was a Jira user on the team could jump in and execute test cases, made a huge difference."

To them, accessible means that after a quick 30 minutes of training, developers can jump into the test player and help with regression testing, side by side with QA folks. "That comfort using the product in regression leads to new opportunities to use feature-based test casing, and actually attach feature-test cases to individual stories in the sprint. And developers potentially using those test cases while they're coding their issues."

"Definitely something that I've noticed," continues Zack. "Developers are now more willing to jump in and help out. It's more of a team collapsing on the task and taking it down together, which is just great for team building and ownership of quality within the team. As opposed to one or two people from QA getting pulled out of day-to-day work, falling behind on their testing so they can do regression for a couple of days."

"Once Zephyr Scale is set up, and you have the test cases and test player ready, presenting that to developers is way, way easier", agrees Falk. "They're way more receptive to that, I found, than 'Hey, here's my mess of a spreadsheet, talk to me if you have any questions'."

Pushing the limits

Falk reported that once they got Zephyr Scale set up and everybody comfortable using it, they could

complete regressions in an afternoon. "That was huge," he said. "It was big for us from a flexibility and speed standpoint. It got to the point where we were able to iterate a lot more quickly, and eventually start working through a backlog of issues we'd been seeing, and find a good place of stability."

"Because the entire team can get in, get out, just move through real quick, we've gone from two calendar days to about four hours," he concluded.

Zack added, "I think the flexibility and organization of Zephyr Scale makes it easier and more desirable for our teams to do more focused regressions. So we're not feeling like we have to execute our entire test plan. Previously, if we were doing it in a Google Sheet, it might've been a little bit more difficult to just focus on specific areas."

"We're trying to push the bounds with it now and see if we can release daily."

Making the change with Zephyr Scale

"It's become something very useful for us in managing our release process, in obviously speeding up our regression, and a number of other positive things," says Falk. "Really, it was a well-timed, very good organizational tool for what we needed – when we needed it. So, yeah, big positives for us."

"You're buying a product that is not insular to QA specifically," says Zack, "You're buying a product that can be used by your entire team."

"You're buying a product that can be used by your entire team. When you go about implementing Zephyr Scale, make sure that you're considering that."

They agreed that in an Agile- or scrum-like way, Zephyr Scale is a product they'll execute, inspect the results, adapt them, and make sure that it's all transparent to the team. "So organizing it in a way that's going to allow you to execute this process over and over again, and slowly improve it, is important."

"If you've been tracking in a spreadsheet or something else, Zephyr Scale is like hitting a reset button," Zack concluded. "Take advantage of it. It's not just, let's take what we have and put it into Zephyr Scale, but what do you want to change as part of that journey?"

"It's a real reset button. Take advantage of it."

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