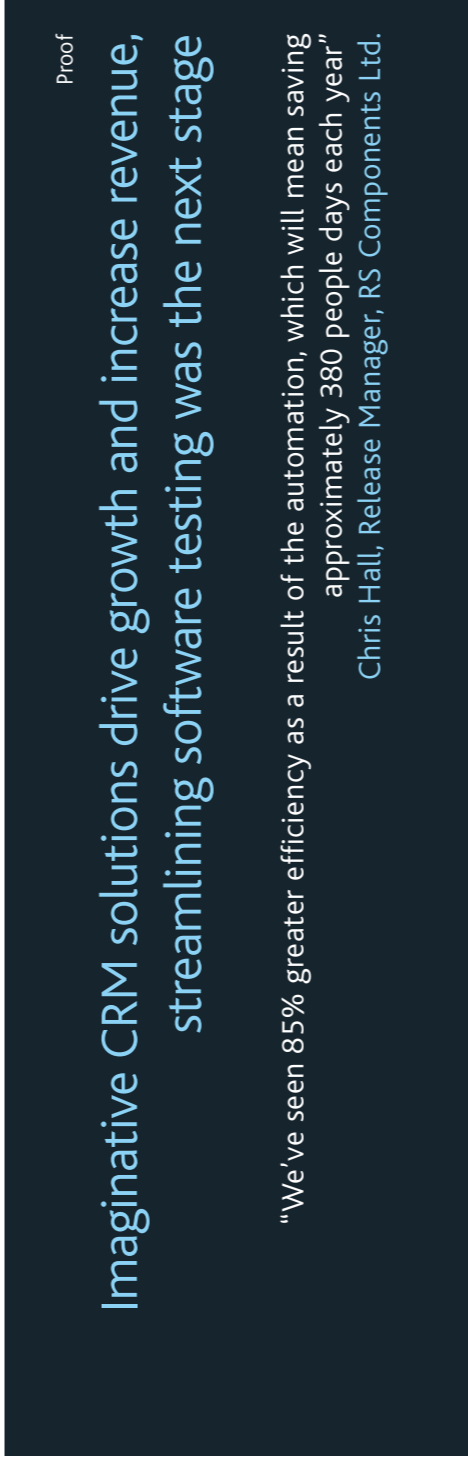




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Proof

Imaginative CRM solutions drive growth and increase revenue, streamlining software testing was the next stage

“We’ve seen 85% greater efficiency as a result of the automation, which will mean saving approximately 380 people days each year”

Chris Hall, Release Manager, RS Components Ltd.



a case study - manufacturing

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Company

- Name: RS Components Ltd
- Location: Corby, UK
- Industry: Wholesale Distribution
- Products and Services: Electronic, electrical and mechanical components, health and safety products, and associated tools
- Revenue: £850 million
- Employees: 5000
- Web site: www.rswww.com

Challenges and Opportunities

- Reduce dependence on business resource for testing new software releases
- Build knowledge of automated testing in newly formed release team
- Increase overall efficiency of regression testing

Objectives

- Automate testing scripts for 60 key business processes
- Transfer knowledge of automated testing to release team
- Implement HP testing software

Why Experior

- Deep understanding and experience of automated testing
- Extensive knowledge of SAP and integrated software

Experior Solutions and Services

- AcceleratedTesting for SAP
- HP Quality Center
- HP Quick Test Professional
- HP Business Process Testing (BPT)

Highlights

- Project completed on time and within budget
- Proactive and flexible response to tasks outside scope and unexpected challenges

Benefits

- 85% reduction in testing time, saving 380 man days each year
- 70 regression test scripts automated
- Rapid learning of automated scripting skills by in-house testing team
- Greater systems integrity through more rigorous test scripts
- Established best practice testing methodology

Imaginative CRM Solutions Drive Growth, Increased Revenue

In 1937, Radiospares Limited began supplying radio repair shops with spare parts, operating from a lock-up garage and a small building in Birchington Road, in northwest London. Since then, RS Components (RS) has become Europe’s leading distributor of electronic, electrical and mechanical components, health and safety products, and associated tools. RS employs 5,000 people, has operating companies based in over 25 countries and distributes products, ordered via catalogues or from the rswww Web site, to customers in over 160 countries.

Having implemented the European Business System (EBS), based on SAP, throughout the European region encompassing nine operating companies and associated satellites, RS began to consolidate its IS function, resources and procedures. One of the most urgent objectives was to considerably reduce dependence on resource from the business functions supporting regression testing of new software releases. Realising that outside help would be needed for such a large scale test script automation project, RS turned to Experior.

Brave New World

Keeping abreast of new product introductions and innovations that enter the market, RS has always moved with the times and embraced new technologies, dedicated to a single purpose: service excellence. Unsurprisingly, EBS was a strategy to help RS stay ahead of the game and deliver excellent service in an increasingly competitive environment. Following completion of this project, Chris Hall was appointed as Release Manager, tasked with assembling a team to plan, manage and test new software releases, which appear at the rate of one every eight weeks and include multiple software updates. “We had good controls in place for the testing procedure, but we had always called upon business resource to support regression testing,” explains Chris. “Post-EBS, we decided to include regression testing within the remit of the test team, simply because that would be more efficient for the business as a whole.”

To introduce the necessary level of automation in the required timeframe, Chris realised that the newly formed test team would need external expertise and support. Experior had previously carried out a proof of concept for RS, successfully automating some regression tests, using HP QuickTest Professional (QTP). “We were approached by some companies that were much bigger than Experior and could offer more consultancy resource if we needed it,” says Chris. “But Experior were able to demonstrate a much greater depth of SAP knowledge and experience. Experior’s expertise, in fact, extends well beyond SAP. This is crucial as we have non-SAP software for planning, warehouse management, Web site and catalogue management, to name but a few.”

Pushing Boundaries

The regression tests in place at RS were split into process areas, the biggest of which is the order-to-cash process. “Order-to-cash is our outbound process, where someone places an order, we process it, despatch the goods and ultimately collect the money from the customer,” outlines Chris. The plan, to be executed over a 3-month period, was for Experior to automate around 60 of the order-to-cash regression tests and the RS testing team would be responsible for the other 40. At the same time, Chris and Experior planned to transfer knowledge that would enable RS to script their own tests once Experior consultants were no longer on site. Although the testing team had been recruited internally, understood the RS business, benefited from extensive process knowledge and had experienced testing during the EBS roll out, they had never worked with testing tools such as QTP and HP Quality Center.

“The parameters we all signed up to seemed entirely reasonable at the beginning,” says Chris. “But additional challenges appeared almost immediately.” The main issue for Chris and his team was an unexpectedly complex release that was being prepared at the same time the Experior team was on site, diverting testing resource away from the automation project.

It was almost immediately apparent, therefore, that the target of automating 101 test scripts was unattainable in the time available. “Experior operated very professionally and proactively managed expectations extremely well, although they were clearly concerned and frustrated by the situation,” reflects Chris. “Apart from the regular weekly project review meetings, they were very quick to raise issues informally with me when it was appropriate to do so. Also, their SAP expertise, and their closeness with SAP, was evident throughout.”

Experior’s ability to add value and achieve results for their client became apparent at the beginning of the project as, due to other priorities, the HP software testing tools had not been installed as planned onto a dedicated server. “Although this installation was definitely outside their remit, Experior took it in their stride, rolled up their sleeves and worked long hours with our infrastructure team until the project was up and running. That was highly commendable in my opinion.”

Increased Efficiency and Better Quality

Chris estimates that, prior to automation, 15 people from the business functions at RS spent six weeks per year on regression testing. “We’ve seen 85% greater efficiency as a result of the automation, which will mean saving approximately 380 people days each year,” he confirms. “And we’ve changed the dynamic – until now, the business users have been heavily involved in the nitty-gritty of testing. Going forward, there will be just a few steps where we need manual intervention and the main responsibility for our colleagues in the business will be to sign off the test results.”

By the end of the assignment with Experior, 70 of the original scope of 101 tests were scripted. “Without question, Experior delivered everything they had committed to,” says Chris. As well as limiting the amount of scripts that could be automated, diverting RS resource onto other commitments inevitably restricted the transfer of knowledge into Chris’s team from the Experior consultants. The planned knowledge transfer programme was delivered to varying degrees with one of the team taking the

lead on the toolset usage and methodology. On completion of the project, Chris considered - with Experior - how to address this skills gap in the long term. “We are implementing a training programme, to develop the knowledge within the team to the level Experior would have achieved, had we been able to allocate our resource as expected,” explains Chris. “This emphasises a key learning from this project: it had been very clear throughout that to benefit fully from this kind of engagement, the allocation of the right level of dedicated resource is essential.”

Ultimately, Chris is convinced the RS systems have greater integrity as a result of the automated scripting. “This process has caused us to challenge the validity of some of our regression tests,” observes Chris. “So, in a small number of cases, we are rewriting or improving the quality of the scripts and removing duplication, which ensures that our testing going forward delivers the maximum business benefit.”

Despite the freely acknowledged challenges, Chris values the experience his team gained from working with the Experior consultants. “For a new team, it was invaluable to be able to work together on this project and be exposed to the methodology, experience and quality of Experior at the same time,” Chris states. “We’re now in a position to consolidate what we have developed and learned, as well as exploring the automation of further aspects of testing – such as volume testing. And if we need additional resource or guidance, I’m sure Experior will be our first port of call.”

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