

Customer Story

Epic Games gets Unreal Results with TestTrack Pro

by Allan McNaughton

Just as computer gaming has largely become a team sport, so has the task of developing games. Creating a best-selling game now takes years of effort, costs millions of dollars, and requires the collaboration of a diverse group of individuals at companies spanning the globe.

Effectively managing this complexity requires intelligent decision making, efficient processes, and great tools. Epic Games, the Raleigh-based developer of the Unreal franchise, was looking for a better way to track product issues encountered by developers and game publishing partners.

With users ranging from artists and game designers to engineers, testers and project managers, Epic Games wanted an issue management system that could be used by all—regardless of geography. To reach this goal Epic turned to Seapine Software's TestTrack Pro for an affordable yet powerful solution to its issue management needs.

Unreal Complexity

Epic Games is a powerhouse in the game development community. It creates winning products and has fostered deep partnerships with game publishing heavyweights such as Atari, Microsoft, and Midway Games. These partnerships are typically structured so that Epic develops the game and the publishing partner

handles the tasks of quality assurance, localization, documentation, marketing and distribution.

While Epic reaps obvious benefits from this model, it tends to exacerbate shortcomings in communication and coordination between the company and its publishing partners. Epic's developers must effectively manage the flow of bug reports and change requests from its partners. This was not simple as each partner had its own issue tracking system.

"Although we support many platforms with a single code base, there was no corresponding central bug repository," said Jeff Morris, Product Manager, Epic Games. "Developers had to use whatever bug tracking tool the partner had chosen. This required learning the intricacies of yet another tool.



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In addition, many of these systems were painfully slow when used remotely.”

“To simplify life we decided to create a single issue management system that we controlled and that our partners would use. The challenge was finding a capable tool that met our needs and those of our partners. We found freeware tools too immature and most commercial products too expensive. At least that was until we found our ideal solution, Seapine Software's TestTrack Pro.”

Many Problems, One Solution

Epic Games needed a capable, easy-to-use issue management system that worked well for all participants in the game development process. “The success of this effort ultimately required acceptance by our publishing partners. After all, we were asking them to move from their standard tool to ours.”

“It was crucial that the tool we chose provided a good experience for remote users. We knew from past experience how poorly many applications perform when used remotely. TestTrack Pro uses a client/server architecture so it works well in situations involving remote users. A partner installs the client on their desktop and manages bugs just as if the server was hosted locally. Our partners are pleased with the end-user experience.”

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TestTrack Pro’s ease of administration was also a selling point for Epic. “We want developers writing games, not administering complex tools. TestTrack Pro was up and running in no time as minimal customization was required. All we did was modify bug categories and create auto-assignment rules. That way when an issue is filed it is automatically assigned to the right individual. This person also receives an email notification that the issue is pending—which dramatically shortens response times.”

One of the key features Epic sought was a flexible licensing model. “We analyzed usage patterns and decided it would be wise to have both named and floating licenses. This way we could allocate licenses based on expected usage. Partners receive named licenses as they must be guaranteed access. Lead developers and project managers also receive named licenses while casual users share a pool of floating licenses.”

Epic put TestTrack Pro’s reporting features to good use. “We used to consolidate bug lists using email and spreadsheets. Now any issue submitted by a partner or developer is accurately tracked and easily reported on. TestTrack Pro lets us generate reports by bug source, problem type, priority, and innumerable other ways. With this

information we know exactly how many bugs remain at each point in the release cycle.”

TestTrack Pro’s straightforward user interface effectively eliminated the need for end-user training. “We had no trouble getting users up to speed. The tool is so easy to use there have been few installation or usability questions. This lets us focus on doing our real job, not handholding users. It actually works so well we have not had a reason to contact Seapine for technical support—and cannot foresee one either.”

Real Results

Epic found that TestTrack Pro did more than just manage the flow of issues between the company and its partners. It made Epic a more effective organization. “TestTrack Pro is a winner for Epic Games,” concluded Morris. “Developer productivity has increased markedly as crucial information is now located in one place. Since bug reports are accessed more easily, problems are fixed more quickly. TestTrack Pro fits into the organization so seamlessly that we rely on it almost as much as email—and that’s saying a lot.”

Lessons Learned

- Choose a licensing model appropriate for your needs – “Don’t gloss over licensing decisions. You can save real money by ensuring a tool supports the way your business actually works. This may mean using named licenses, floating licenses, or possibly a mix of both.”
- Plan for the needs of remote users – “If you don’t have remote users now, you will soon enough. Make sure the tool you select meets this need. This precludes many so-called “client/server” tools that actually do most of the work in the client.”
- Ease of use is important for the end-user and the administrator – “People often just focus on one or the other. If the tool is hard to administer, it costs money. If it is hard to use, it costs even more money. TestTrack Pro is easy to use for everyone.”

About the Author

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