Beta Test

What is Beta Testing?

Beta testing is an opportunity for real users to use a product in a production environment to uncover any bugs or issues before a general release.

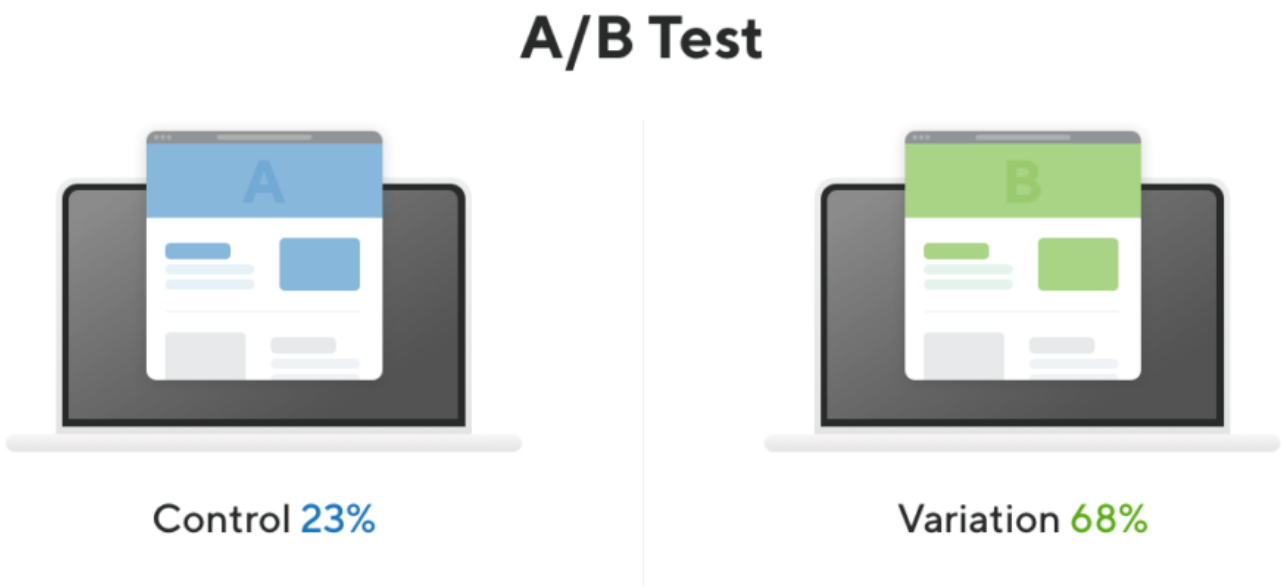
Beta testing is the final round of testing before releasing a product to a wide audience. The objective is to uncover as many bugs or usability issues as possible in this controlled setting.

Beta testers are “real” users and conduct their testing in a production environment running on the same hardware, networks, etc., as the final release. This also means it’s the first chance for full security and reliability testing because those tests can’t be conducted in a lab or stage environment.

Beta tests can either be open or closed. In an open test, anyone can use the product and is usually presented with some messaging that the product is in beta and given a method for submitting feedback. In closed beta, the testing is limited to a specific set of

testers, which may be composed of current customers, early adopters, and/or paid beta testers. Sometimes they are conducted by diverting a certain percentage of users to the beta site instead of the current release.

Testing can either last for a set period or run until new issues stop being reported and all-important ones have been addressed.



The difference between beta testing and alpha testing

The primary difference between an alpha test and a beta test is who is doing the testing —alpha tests are typically performed by internal employees in a lab or stage environment, while actual users in a production setting conduct beta tests.

The goal of the alpha test is to catch as many issues as possible before the product has any public exposure or usage. A test aims to ensure that real users can complete their tasks, get a wide range of users interacting with the product, and test the product's scalability, performance, and reliability under real-world usage scenarios.

What is the Objective?

Beta testing is the best chance to find bugs and usability issues before a product is fully released. While internal testing can uncover many problems, nothing can truly simulate real users trying to complete real tasks.

Additionally, beta testing is the first opportunity to test software in an actual production environment versus a lab or stage setting. This ensures the software can perform under real workloads and that speed, storage, and scalability all work as expected.

In addition to finding problems, testing is an opportunity to validate hypotheses about how users will use new functionality and ensure the product meets requirements and expectations. While beta testing is not typically a period when new features or

functionality is introduced, it can inform any “fast follows” required to satisfy users’ needs fully.

Beta testing is also a chance to refine the positioning, marketing, and communication about the product, as these can be tested out against people who are now using it.

Another potential objective of testing comes when invitations to the beta are “exclusive.” This is because it’s more relevant for new products than for subsequent releases. However, getting some early-adopting influencers into the beta testing pool can build some buzz and anticipation for the general release.

How do Product Managers use Beta Testing?

Product managers can tap into the feedback flood of beta testing to collect a host of ideas and suggestions to consider for future releases. In addition, because testers are encouraged (and sometimes incentivized) to provide feedback, they are far more likely to make requests and comments than typical users proactively.

Beta testing is also a chance to begin looking at usage behavior and analytics to confirm that users interact with the product as expected or discover unexpected usage patterns. Gathering these learnings before a general release can inform priorities about user education, onboarding, user help, and documentation to make it a smoother experience for the general user base.

How to Use the Beta Test Feedback

Feedback from testing can also be used as ammunition if there is a dispute over how big a deal a “known issue” might be. For example, if product development was resistant to address something, the input from beta testers can help product management make a stronger case that it should be resolved.

Product managers can also run experiments and a/b tests during beta tests, seeing which different prompts, notifications, messaging, layouts, and featured content move the needle and drive the desired behavior.

Looking at the performance of the production environment during testing can also contribute to how aggressively the product should be rolled out. For example, if scalability appears to be an issue during the beta test, the rollout can be slowed down to avoid a major outage or performance issues. At the same time, the infrastructure is ramped up for a more significant load.

Finally, it can validate that any KPIs or OKRs correlate to the expected behavior. For example, a user completing a particular task may be expected to lead to increased usage or repeat visits. Yet, if the numbers don’t bear that out, those metrics may need to be adjusted or deprioritized.

Conclusion

Beta testing is precious to product teams and should be a checklist item for any major release. But, unfortunately, there's simply nothing that can replace real users using the real product in a real environment.

The feedback collected will improve the current release and help drive priorities for future releases and ensure the roadmap and planning are as responsive as possible to what's being learned from the market. In addition, tester input comes in much larger quantities and often with more detail than typical product feedback, which arrives somewhat randomly and via various channels.

It does require some work and commitment to support a beta test environment parallel to the current production release and recruiting and managing the beta testers, including communication and feedback collection and analysis. But the rewards of a beta test usually outweigh the resource costs and time-to-market delay, ensuring the final release is top quality, fully vetted, and ready for prime time.

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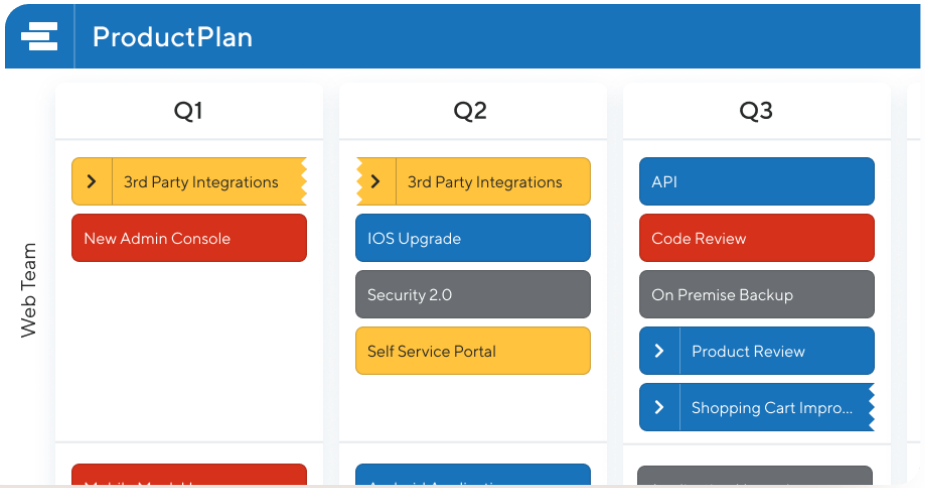

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