

How smoothly does a website launch usually go for you?

Asked 16 years, 2 months ago Modified 16 years, 2 months ago

Viewed 393 times



4



My coworkers and I were having a discussion about this yesterday. It seems that no matter how well we prepare and no matter how much we test and no matter what the client says immediately before the site becomes public, initial site launches almost always seem to be somewhat rocky. Some clients are better than others, but often things that were just fine during testing suddenly go horribly wrong when the site becomes public.

Is this a common experience? I'm not just talking about functionality breaking down (although that's often a problem as well). I'm also talking about sites that work exactly the way we wanted them to, but suddenly are not satisfactory to the client when it's time to make the site public. And I'm talking about clients that have been familiar with the site during most of the development process. Meaning, the public launch is definitely not the first time they've seen the site.

If you've dealt with this problem before, have you found a way to improve the situation? Or is this just something that will always be somewhat of a problem?

[Share](#)[Improve this question](#)[Follow](#)

asked Oct 22, 2008 at 21:32

[Matt Ephraim](#)

1,360 ● 1 ● 11 ● 15

8 Answers

Sorted by:

Highest score (default)



2



Don't worry. This is completely and entirely normal and happens with every piece of software. Everything that can go wrong will go wrong, and the most volatile entity in the development process, the client, will be the cause of these things.



You could do all the Requirements Gathering in the world, write a 100 page Proposal, provide screenshots and updates to the project hourly and the client will still not approve. On a personal note, I feel that the Internet is one of the worst mediums for this, as designs are a lot more free-flowing nowadays and the client will always have a certain picture in his/her mind; one that won't look like the finished product.

I find that a **bulletproof contact** with defined stages and sign-off sheets are the best way to handle such a situation. Assuming that your work is contracted you should ensure that at each stage the client is shown the work and is forced to approve each and every change made. At least that way if the client wants something

changed you can tell them that they've already signed off that section and the additional work will cost them extra (also defined within the contract).

Not only did this approach work for me, it made the client stop and think about what he/she REALLY wanted. Luckily for me many of my clients are already tech-oriented, so they understand that these things can take time, but those that haven't a clue about Web Development expect things to be perfect within a couple of days. As long as you make sure that everything is covered in the contract the client will think about what they want and won't pester you with issues after.

Of course, anything you can do in regards to Quality Control would be fantastic and help the project move along nicely. Also ensure that some form of methodology is planned out before the project and that this methodology is known by the client(s). Often changes in fundamental areas can be costly and many clients do not seem to realise that a small change can require many things to be changed.

[Share](#) [Improve this answer](#)

answered Oct 22, 2008 at 21:42

[Follow](#)



[Mike B](#)

12.8k ● 20 ● 84 ● 109



Yes, saw this several times on our projects (human beings are fickle).

1



Something that helps us in these situations is a good PM/Account Manager that can handle the customer, which makes things a little bit bearable on the technical level.



Share Improve this answer

answered Oct 22, 2008 at 21:40

Follow



SMB

673 ● 4 ● 7



0



Web site launches are usually fairly smooth for us. Of course, we do extensive validation including code inspections, deployments to proto-servers (identical to our production servers), and mountains of documentation.



After every launch, we have a meeting to discuss what went well and what didn't so that we can make adjustments to our overall process and best-known-methods documents.

As for clients that change their minds at the last minute... sigh... we minimize that by having them sign off on the beta version. That way, there is no disagreement when the project is launched. If there is a disagreement, there is always a next release.

Share Improve this answer

edited Oct 22, 2008 at 21:43

Follow

answered Oct 22, 2008 at 21:38



BoltBait

11.5k ● 9 ● 60 ● 91



0



For what it's worth, the last site launch I did went off without a hitch. Now, it wasn't a high-traffic site, and there were some bugs that I did eventually fix, but there wasn't anything troubling on the day of the actual launch.

This was an ASP.NET/C# site. It wasn't terribly large or complicated, but it wasn't trivial either. Probably the most notable thing is that it was 100% designed, implemented, and tested by myself, from the database schema all the way up to the CSS. It was also my first time using ASP.NET. There were plenty of bumps in development but by the time I launched it I was pretty familiar with them and so knew what to expect.

I think the lesson to be learned from this is to have a good design up-front, solid implementation skills, and good testing, and a new site doesn't have to be a nightmare. There's at least a *possibility* of a trouble-free launch.

Share Improve this answer

answered Oct 22, 2008 at 21:55

Follow



Craig Walker

51.6k ● 57 ● 155 ● 212



0

I wouldn't limit your statement to just web sites. I have worked on a lot of projects over the years and there are always details that get "discovered" when going live. No



amount of testing removes all the fun things that can happen.



One thing I will say is what you learn in the first couple of hours of a new system going "on-line" is way more valuable than all the stuff learned during development. It's show time when the real cool problems and scenarios appear. Learn to love them and use these times as a learning point for the next time. Then each time it will be just as fun!

Share Improve this answer

answered Oct 22, 2008 at 21:59

Follow



John Dyer

2,348 ● 1 ● 21 ● 31



We used to have this problem a lot, but much less recently.

0



Partly for us it is about firmer project management and documenting the specification (as suggested in other answers here) but I believe more of the difference came from:



- Expectation management - getting the client to accept that iterative changes are still to be expected *after* launch, that this is normal and not to worry about it
- Increasing authority - we are now a well established (13 years) web developer and we can speak with a lot of expertise

- Simply being more experienced - we can now predict in advance most of the queries that are likely to come up, and either resolve them, mitigate them or bring them to the client's attention so they don't sting us on the day

Plus, we rarely do big fanfare launches - a soft launch makes things much less stressful.

Share Improve this answer

answered Oct 22, 2008 at 22:03

Follow



Leigh Caldwell

11k ● 4 ● 26 ● 31



0



My experience is that web site launches are almost always rocky. I've only had two exceptions to this common truth. The first was a site developed for a small business ran by one person. This went smoothly because, well there was only one person to please so it was fairly easy to track what they wanted. The other was a multi-million dollar website launched by a fortune 500 company. This happened to go smoothly because there were 2 PMs and a small army of consultants there to manage the needs of the customer. That coupled with a one month of straight application load testing and a 1,000 user beta launch meant when the site finally went "live", I was able to get a full nights sleep (which is fairly uncommon). Neither of these situations constitute the norm though. Of course, there's nothing better than several thousand beta testers hitting your site to help find those contingencies that you never thought of.



0



I'm sure you can figure out the kind of errors that always sneak in, so for example is it due to rather *superficial* testing? E.g. randomly clicking around and checking if things appear to be right.

In order to improve I propose something along the following:

- Create documents/checklists that specify all testing procedures.
- Get *regular* people to test, not just the folks who built the application.
- Setup a staging environment which closely resembles *production*.
- Post-launch, analyze what went wrong and why it went wrong.
- Maybe get external QA to check on your procedures.

Now, all those suggestions are of course very obvious but implementing them into your launch procedures will require time.

In general this really is an ongoing process which will help you and your colleagues to improve. And also be happier, because fixing bugs in production just makes you age rapidly. ;-)

Keep in mind, you won't be done the first time.

Documents are heavy which is why people don't read them. People are also lazy and don't follow the procedures. This means that you always have to analyze what happened, go back and improve the procedures.

If you have the opportunity I'd also spend some time on looking why nothing went wrong with another launch and comparing this to the usual.

[Share](#) [Improve this answer](#)

answered Oct 22, 2008 at 22:28

[Follow](#)



[Till](#)

22.4k ● 4 ● 60 ● 89
