The Software Development Cycle

Without software applications, it would be very hard to actually perform any meaningful task on a computer unless one was a very talented, fast, and patient programmer. Applications are meant to make users more productive and get work done faster. Their goal should be flexibility, efficiency, and user-friendliness.

Today there are thousands of applications for almost every purpose, from writing letters to playing games. Producing software is no longer the lonely profession it once was, with a few random geeks hacking away in the middle of the night. Software is a big business and the development cycle goes through certain stages and versions before it is released.

Applications are released in different versions, including *alpha* versions, *beta* versions, *release candidates*, *trial versions*, full versions, and upgrade versions. Even an application's instructions are often included in the form of another application called a *help file*.

Alpha versions of software are normally not released to the public and have known bugs. They are often seen internally as a 'proof of concept'. Avoid alphas unless you are desperate or else being paid as a 'tester'.

Beta versions, sometimes just called 'betas' for short, are a little better. It is common practice nowadays for companies to release public beta versions of software in order to get free, real-world testing and feedback. Betas are very popular and can be downloaded all over the Internet, normally for free. In general you should be wary of beta versions, especially if program stability is important to you. There are exceptions to this rule as well. For instance, Google has a history of excellent beta versions which are more stable than most company's releases.

After the beta stage of software development comes the release candidates (abbreviated RC). There can be one or more of these candidates, and they are normally called RC 1, RC 2, RC 3, etc. The release candidate is very close to what will actually go out as a feature complete 'release'.

The final stage is a 'release'. The release is the real program that you buy in a shop or download. Because of the complexity in writing PC software, it is likely that bugs will still find their way into the final release. For this reason, software companies will offer *patch*es to fix any major problems that end users complain loudly about.

Applications are distributed in many ways today. In the past most software has been bought in stores in versions called retail boxes. More and more, software is being distributed over the Internet, as open source, shareware, freeware, or traditional proprietary and *upgrade* versions.

Glossary:

alpha: the first version of a software application that is "feature ready" but still very far from "production ready".

beta: a software version which is feature-ready, has passed early testing, and ready for more widespread testing.

release candidates: a piece of software that has passed its testing stages and is close to release.

trial versions: a piece of software which is available for evaluation by customers free of charge, normally for a limited amount of time.

help file: electronic documentation included with a program. Also known as documentation.

patch: a software update intended primarily to fix bugs or security holes in a software release.

upgrade: to replace an older version of software or hardware with a newer version.

What makes people successful?

Who do you think is the most successful? Who do you think is the least successful?

In order to answer these questions, we first need to define success. Everyone has a different definition. Many of us place great value on performance, on achievements, or on reaching various goals. Others associate success with material goods, measuring it by how much one can acquire. Others measure success by how much they can contribute to the well-being of their families, or to the community and society in general. There are many other definitions, but mostly success is associated with becoming rich, famous and respected at work. Yet, it doesn't have to be that way.

Being successful could mean simply being satisfied with oneself and one's career. For many people, a successful person is someone who feels that his or her work and life in general offer an exceptionally high degree of satisfaction.

But how does one get from here to there? How does one reach this feeling of satisfaction with life and career? It seems that successful people consistently do two things:

- They use their natural abilities in their work.
- They set career and life goals.

In other words, successful people choose careers where they can use their natural abilities, or do what comes naturally to them. For example, successful teachers are people who instinctively know how to help people learn, and the best doctors are those who know how to listen to people.

Successful people know where they are starting from, and what direction they want to give their lives and careers, even if it is something as simple and wonderful as raising a happy family.

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