

# Alpha Testing's Secret to Success

A product or service is only as successful as it is useful. What good is a car that hasn't been test-driven? Furthermore, what good is a test-driven car that has left the assembly line without quality assurance? This is truly what is at the crux of alpha testing and by extension, the customer validation process as a whole.

As the name suggests, Alpha Testing is step one on the journey from a build's production to its eventual launch, with technical users in real environments testing for various defects. Taking this into consideration, it is important to put your best foot forward when testing the stability and quality of your product. Simply put, the goal of Alpha Testing is to open a dialogue to the question: Does it work?

## How Alpha Testing Accomplishes its Goal

Before a product is cleared for Alpha Testing, it must pass quality assurance. It is during this phase that the build is tested by professionals in a controlled environment. Once the product has passed QA tests, select features are functioning, and the build is around 60% complete, Alpha Testing can begin. From the get-go, organization is key, which is why a clear and concise roadmap is created.

### Mapping Topics

This revolves around specific experiences categorized and mapped out by instructions or phases. For example, during the onboarding phase, specific descriptions and a universal ratings system are used to both describe and quantify each experience individually. This process can then be expanded over a period of weeks to cycle through various alpha tests, updates, and groups of testers. Planning a pipeline of topics and evolving your testing pool with new demographics ensures constant and fresh feedback every step of the way.

### Recruitment

An internal and external team of testers is assembled to take part in product testing. Keep in mind, at this stage, your target market is not necessarily needed. The objective of Alpha Testing is to get the product in someone's hands who wants to break it down and find technical bugs. Chances are this will still be a subset of your target demographic, however leave the customer-targeted research to the Beta Testing phase.

### Execution

Once the testers have been recruited, they are assigned their topics and activities. A structured bug hunt is conducted, with testers submitting prioritized feedback. The results are then analyzed and reported back to the stakeholders.

Continuous results from the test group can be broken down into four primary modes of feedback:

- Bug Reports
- Suggestions
- Private Journals
- Open Discussions

By compartmentalizing feedback, results can be analyzed in a more orderly fashion. For example, keeping suggestions separate from bug reports avoids muddying the waters and guarantees efficiently organized feedback. Allowing for open discussions provides a much-needed outlet for testers to openly discuss the build with a larger community who are still under NDA.

## **Why Alpha Testing is Necessary**

Alpha Testing applies to all types of products, including hardware, software, and services. This often-overlooked phase of product development is critical to avoiding costly missteps immediately before launch. Taking the time to collect this invaluable technical data vastly improves the longevity and customer satisfaction with your product.

Alpha Testing is unique in its ability to collect feedback from both internal employees and customers in real world environments. Allowing your customer-facing employees early access to the product will only better prepare them for questions or concerns they will eventually receive from the consumer. Conducting tests in real world environments allows you to see, first-hand, how the product performs in various ecosystems while eliminating bugs before they disrupt your Beta Test, potentially causing expensive recalls.