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ASK**T**HE

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HuibSCHOOTS

Want More?

Go to www.softwaretestpro.com and join the conversation – ‘Crew’ members can ask questions and interact with Huib Schoots directly!

Or you can go to www.huibschoots.nl/wordpress to read Huib’s blog, or follow him on twitter where he is @huibschoots.

Next issue we’ll interview John Ruberto, a quality manager at Intuit, Inc, on balancing speed and risk. You can read John’s personal opinions on software quality at <http://blog.ruberto.com/>; please email your questions, name and location with ‘Ask the tester’ as subject line to matt.heusser@gmail.com.

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With a formal training in business informatics, Huib Schoots began his professional career as a programmer, about fifteen years ago. He quickly realized that programming was not for him and transitioned into software testing.

Since that time Huib has held many roles in the ‘testing space’, including tester, test coordinator, test manager, trainer, coach, as well as stints in operational management and project management. Currently a Lead Test Analyst at Rabobank International in the Netherlands, Huib is a board member at TestNet, the Dutch Association for Software Testing, and an organizer for DEWT, the Dutch Exploratory Workshop on Testing.

His involvement in causes in testing, blogging at www.magnifiant.com and tweets @huibschoots have made him one of the more influential voices in Context-Driven Testing on the European continent. Sadly, not all of our readers are in Europe, and have not had a chance to meet Huib.

Between his experience in financial services testing, multiple roles, volunteering, and testing in different cultures, we were sure that Huib had plenty to say. We thought the best way for you to meet him might be right here, on “Ask the Tester”, with questions that come from the community.

Huib Schoots will now answer your questions.

QUESTION Given your experience as a tester in the financial services industry, I have a two part question for you relating to the string of recent high-profile software bugs impacting financial services firms (Knight Trading’s \$440 million bug, Nasdaq’s \$62 million glitch during Yahoo’s IPO, RBS reporting incorrect account balances for its users, derivatives trading on the Tokyo stock exchange down for 60 minutes, Spanish exchange down for 5 hours, etc.).

First, some commentators are calling for increased rules and regulation; others are appalled by the idea. What’s your view?

– Justin Hunter, North Carolina, USA

HUIB In the financial services industry we already have loads of rules and regulations: Basel, DFA, Solvency, Sas70, Sox, etc. Most of these regulations have nothing to do with software, they are there to protect the customers. Or to prevent that single person from blowing up a bank like Nick Leeson did in the 90's when he blew up Barrings Bank. The crisis of credit has pulled the world economy into the deepest recession since the Second World War. Underestimation of financial risks and a culture of greed are the main culprits. I don't think the kinds of bugs you mention can be prevented by more regulations. Better software testing could!

QUESTION A follow-up question, if i may — *do you have a sense as to whether these recent events are motivating CTO's at large banks to place a higher priority on testing than they have in the past?*

– Justin Hunter, North Carolina, USA

HUIB Interesting question. To be honest I don't know. In my organisation, I don't see this higher priority due to recent events you mention. It could be that on the CTO-level it is discussed, but not that I know of. My experience is that testing isn't a topic in boardrooms. Software might be a topic in boardrooms, although I believe even software isn't a topic on the boardroom level very often. If quality or risks are discussed on the boardroom level, I can't imagine executives discussing testing. Testing is "just" a part of IT or development, something that comes naturally. Therefore we must concentrate on management within IT to get more attention and higher priority on testing.

QUESTION *It seems like many areas that I would describe as "more formal" either originate or have more accepted practice in Europe than elsewhere. I would put in this category things such as ISTQB, formal methods, design by contract, model-based testing, and ISO. Is this just a misperception, are these really isolated/not common, or is there a more "formal" tradition in the EU?*

– Jon Hagar, Colorado, USA

HUIB You are right, there is a more formal tradition in Europe. Especially TMap is big in the Netherlands, but also ISTQB is quite popular. I am not sure why we have this formal tradition in Europe. But this is changing; more and more people are breaking with this tradition and think about other approaches and adapting to context. Within TestNet the interest for non-traditional testing is getting bigger. We had two events this year proving that: one about context-driven testing, the other about "testing back to basics". I also see a rising interest in peer workshops like GATE (German Agile Testing and Exploratory Workshop), SWET (Sweden), DWET (Denmark), FTPC, RoWST (Romania), PEST (Estonia) and DEWT (Dutch) of course. We also have our own context-driven testing conference in Europe: Let's Test conference in Sweden. Europe is definitely changing to less formal!

QUESTION *In the U.S., there is a lot of commotion and commentary about the move and change of software development from traditional methods to things like agile, and specific methodologies like XP, Scrum, Kanban, Lean, etc. I don't see these conversations happening as often or in the same way that they are happening in the U.S. over in Europe. Is that just my skewed perception, or is the European model more "static" in that sense? Is this an accurate description, or is there a more dynamic development environment taking place in the EU and we are just not aware of it over here in the U.S.?*

– Michael Larsen, San Bruno, CA

HUIB I do not see a lot of difference between the US and Europe here. We do have the commotion and lots of companies are implementing agile, scrum, kanban and lean. Maybe we are still running behind a little but I think Europe is closing the gap fast. As said in one of the other questions: Europe has a more formal tradition and this might be a reason why agility in testing is more difficult. But there are loads of agile conferences all around Europe and I hear more and more people talk about it. Within TestNet, the Dutch Association for Software Testing, agile is one of the most popular topics. The agile movement has started in the US, I think that was the reason Europe was behind.

QUESTION *Rabobank is a multi-national. How does it manage/align/incorporate all it's diverse test teams (or does it not)?*

– Oliver Erlewein, Wellington, New Zealand

HUIB Actually we don't. It is not as bad as it sounds but there is no overall test policy to align all testing within Rabobank. On the other hand, we do have a test policy within Rabobank International and in June and July I worked 7 weeks in Jakarta to help them with the start up of testing in a huge project. The local organisation asked for my help to align with the testing we do at head quarters in the Netherlands. I see more and more aligning of testing within our organisation. Because the business and IT differ quite a bit, it is on a high level we try to align.

QUESTION *Speaking of culture — What about leadership? How do you do that and what does it mean to you?*

– Oliver Erlewein, Wellington, New Zealand

HUIB Leadership is an interesting topic. I love the TED talk by Simon Sinek called "How great leaders inspire action" where he illustrates that a cause helps people to get inspired. In his talk he says: "It is those who start with 'why', that have the ability to inspire those around them and find others who inspire them". Sinek has an interesting message: inspiration and dedication drive success. For me that is the key to leadership!

QUESTION *In more ‘recent’ times we have seen some amazing progress in Europe in relation to Context-Driven Testing and the building of very strong community. As you’re big part of that community and movement, can you provide your thoughts on the drivers for this? Do you have any tips for influencing in such a positive way?*

– David Greenlees, Adelaide, Australia

HUIB I am happy to see a growing context-driven testing community in Europe! My personal drivers are that I want to keep challenging myself and show the testing community that things can be different. I see a lot of testers who are repeatedly doing the same thing over and over again. They are not thinking and I like what Ben Kelly calls them: testing dead (see testjutsu.com). In my search for something different I found “Lessons learned in software testing” by Kaner, Bach and Pettichord years ago. Later I did Rapid Software Testing (RST). I like context-driven because it is skeptical, diversified, adaptive, empiricist, heuristic and humanist.

A lot of people who do RST start blogging or organise peer workshops encouraged by James Bach and Michael Bolton. This helps the community to grow. I recommend every tester to do rapid software testing and decide for yourself. If you want to be influential in the community start blogging, visit (or organize) peer workshops and do talks at conferences. In your daily work you can make a difference by discussing topics like heuristics, oracles, credibility or testability, organize a testing dojo or other ways to practise together.

QUESTION *You need to post a short ad (in a paper/online/etc.) for an entry level tester role in a city/region where there is not an abundance of candidates with knowledge of testing as a profession. What do you write in 2 or 3 sentences to attract people who may be good at testing but don’t know what testing is?*

– Erik L. Davis, QA Manager: Workflow, Hyland Software, Inc., Westlake, OH

HUIB Wow, tough question. A lot of things pop up in my mind. There are two things those sentences need to express: the skills we look for and the essence of the job. He (or she) must value critical thinking, be curious, ask loads of questions, have the willingness to learn and have a pleasure in finding things out. Testing is finding new information through exploration, discovery, investigation, and learning (source: <http://www.developsense.com/blog/2009/08/testing-vs-checking>). And somewhere in there we need a bit of technology. So my elevator pitch would be something like: “Do you like CSI? Are you the curious person who has pleasure in finding things out? Do you always ask questions and want to learn everything you can? You like working with cutting edge computer technology? If so, you sure will like a job as a software tester. Keywords: exploration, discovery, investigation and learning.”

QUESTION *You join a team of testers who have little knowledge or excitement about real testing (you might call them “checkers” in some groups). What do you do to show them what life beyond only checking is like?*

– Erik L. Davis, QA Manager: Workflow, Hyland Software, Inc., Westlake, OH

HUIB The first thing that I thought of was rapid software testing. That will certainly help, I have seen it work at Rabobank where it opened the eyes of some testers, changing their mind set and the way they think about testing. But there is more you can do: get the testers involved in thinking and talking about their craft, challenge them, get them out of their comfort zone. Show them that things can be different, not in theory but by doing! At Rabobank we organized intervision sessions and testing dojos (see www.testingdojo.org). Intervision is a session with a group of professionals to work on and discuss daily situations. It is a form of peer consultation with the aim of improving. Intervision is learning, from yourself, from situations and from each other.

QUESTION *Describe the risks which you think are distinctly different in financial services and financial service software testing compared to other industries or to software testing in other industries. What is it about those risks that make them more interesting in financial services or more relevant for financial services than other industries?*

– Development Manager, Parametric Technology Corporation, Colorado, United States

HUIB The risks aren’t a whole lot different than in other industries. The risks are basically the same, but the perception and exposure of those risks is often different and the impact is bigger. Banks work with people’s money. If something goes wrong with electronic banking or an ATM, it directly makes the headlines. Banks run credit and market risk, which is very typical to financial services. For example when IT systems go down, a bank can lose a lot of money when the market situations change (market risk).

Buggy medical systems can cause people to die, failing automotive systems can cause accidents, etc. Every industry has its own typical risks. Another difference I can think of is the much higher risk of employees stealing form their own company since banks work with money.

