

Case Study

Occasion Brands: Centering ecommerce customers in an agile development process



OCCASION
BRANDS

Company size:	Over 150 employees
Company location:	New York, New York; Secaucus, New Jersey; & Middletown, Delaware
Testing type:	Functional, Regression & Usability
App type:	Web, Android, iOS

About Occasion Brands

Occasion Brands is an online retailer focused on fashion for special occasions. Founded in 1998 to offer teenage girls an exceptional shopping experience for prom, today they provide dresses for all kinds of special events through three brands: PromGirl, Simply Dresses, and Kleinfeld Bridal Party. In the last 20 years, Occasion Brands has become the premier online retailer in the special-occasion dress market. Collectively, their retail brands receive millions of visitors online, through their mobile applications, and now, in their retail stores.

Occasion Brands has an agile development process for the websites and mobile applications of their three brands. We interviewed **Chelsie-Jean Fernandez, Director of Product Management** about how Occasion Brands works and how test IO fits into their development process and business objectives.

Customer-Centered Ecommerce in an Agile Organization

For all software development for all of their brands, from website to iOS to Android, Occasion Brands has four environments: sandbox, backstage, stage, and production. Developers start in individual sandbox environments isolated from production and repositories. This protects live servers from code changes that could impact customers negatively. Each developer then merges their code into the backstage environment to test cohesion with development data. Once the code has been verified to work in the backstage environment and passes a peer review code process, it is then merged into the staging environment for stakeholder testing with production data to determine whether the build meets the business' needs. After this, there is a final code review before the code is released to production.



“We’re not just building software to build it, we’re building what our users want and what they need, what’s beneficial to them.”

“Developers working on their own code can only test it so much, there can be tunnel vision in regards to what can and cannot be tested.”

Can QA match the sprint pace?

Occasion Brands’ disciplined development sprint schedule gives the team a framework for shipping software on a regular cadence, leading to equally ambitious testing cycles to keep up with the pace of development. Product and project leads found that over time, it’s neither effective nor productive for QA to consist only of developers testing their own code. Developers know how their code works and fall into the habit of testing their code according to this knowledge. This makes it difficult for developers to remove themselves from the mindset of “how it works” as opposed to “how it should work.”

These twin constraints lead to QA becoming a bottleneck in the sprint: Manual software testing alone doesn’t reasonably fit into the tight sprint schedules; having fresh eyes testing software greatly improved the final quality of software output.

As it was, Fernandez herself ended up representing the stakeholder to ensure new features received the testing required prior to being released to customers.

A Helping (Human) Hand for QA

Software quality and customer experience are key components of Occasion Brands’ consumer-centric philosophy. While evaluating the options to augment their QA capacity, the company’s decision-making criteria focused on maintaining that quality.

- Real people’s feedback
- Turnaround time within hours
- Different types of testing, including functional and usability
- Visual documentation of issues, i.e. video screencasts; and unlimited tests.

“We can build automated testing, but the human feedback was really important.”

Occasion Brands’ development team does incorporate automated testing, but getting feedback and gauging the reception of new features from real people isn’t something that they can create to scale



Speed Up Iteration

Unblock the QA bottleneck with an army of graded testers, and allow for faster deployment by letting developers focus on development.



Test On Real Devices

Make sure your software works under real-world conditions. Check apps and websites on a vast variety of everyday devices, 24/7.

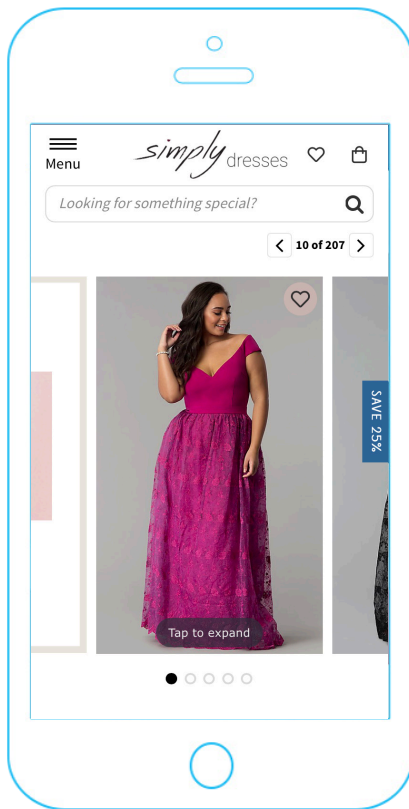


Discover Critical Bugs

Let our professional human testers find bugs no autoamted test would find.

– any serious QA solution would need to provide that. It is key that final acceptance tests are conducted by someone as close to the client as possible.

Fast turnaround times are also essential, to avoid hindering progress from one development phase to the next.



“There’s nothing like real people testing.”

Choosing the Customer: Real Human Feedback

By working with a trusted testing solution, Occasion Brands has successfully launched multiple products to deadline, including two website redesigns, a new ecommerce website, as well as iOS and Android mobile applications. They were able to stay agile and customer-focused while creating capacity for their Director of Product Management to focus on high-level strategy. test IO’s crowdtesting service supports the Occasion Brand’s customer-centered development strategy, providing professional testing by real people at a level of availability – on demand – that aligns with the team’s pace of development.

In turn, this has enabled Chelsie-Jean Fernandez, Occasion Brands’ Director of Product Management, to focus on more strategic concerns like developing the company’s overall product vision and roadmap, and establishing goals for every change and feature released.

About test IO

test IO helps software teams ship high-quality software faster.

As a global leader in software crowdtesting, we speed up fast-moving software development teams with a platform for on-demand QA testing throughout the entire development cycle.


Test setup takes just minutes, and we dynamically allocate human testers in real-world conditions to fit your specific testing needs. No more QA bottlenecks at the end of your sprints -- test IO makes software teams both faster, and more flexible.

Our community of tens of thousands of professional QA testers ensures on-demand availability when you need testing, and guarantees coverage across all the devices, operating systems, regions and languages that matter to you. Test results are delivered in as little as an hour within the development tools you already have in place, or via web app.

Founded in Berlin in 2011, test IO is headquartered in San Francisco, and is the trusted testing partner of leading companies such as Lonely Planet, Barneys New York, SoundCloud, Headspace, and Carnival Cruise Line.

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