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Beta Testing Industry Survey Report 2016

Research Overview

The **Centercode 2016 Beta Testing Industry Survey** assessed how technology companies are collecting and using customer feedback before product release.

338 qualified respondents completed the survey between June and August 2016, providing insight into how companies structure their Beta Testing programs, where they're seeing success, and where they're struggling.

Company Diversity

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Over **260** unique companies of all types and sizes responded to the survey. These companies produce everything from mobile apps and video games to consumer hardware and enterprise software. They were asked to provide feedback on how they collect customer feedback on their products before release.



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Job Title Diversity

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All qualified respondents had a hand in the Beta Tests being run at their company. The diversity of respondents shows how varied the industry is. Everyone from a brand manager to a UX director might be involved with collecting customer feedback on a new product. This creates an environment where a wide variety of competing objectives and opinions become involved in this critical stage of the product development lifecycle. Below is a sample of the job titles that responded to the survey:

Beta Program Manager
Beta Project Manager
Beta Test Coordinator
Beta Test Manager
Beta Product Specialist
Beta Product Manager
Chief Product Officer
Chief Technical Officer
Chief Services Officer
Co-Founder
QA Engineer
QA Analyst
QA Coordinator
Sr. QA Analyst
Lead, QA Engineer
Manager, QA

Director, QA
UX Designer
Sr. UX Designer
UX Researcher
Sr. UX Researcher
Sr. UX Consultant
UX Architect
Lead, UX Designer
Manager, Design Research
Director, UX
Director, UX Research
VP, UX
Software Engineer
Software Architect
Database Developer
Manager, Development

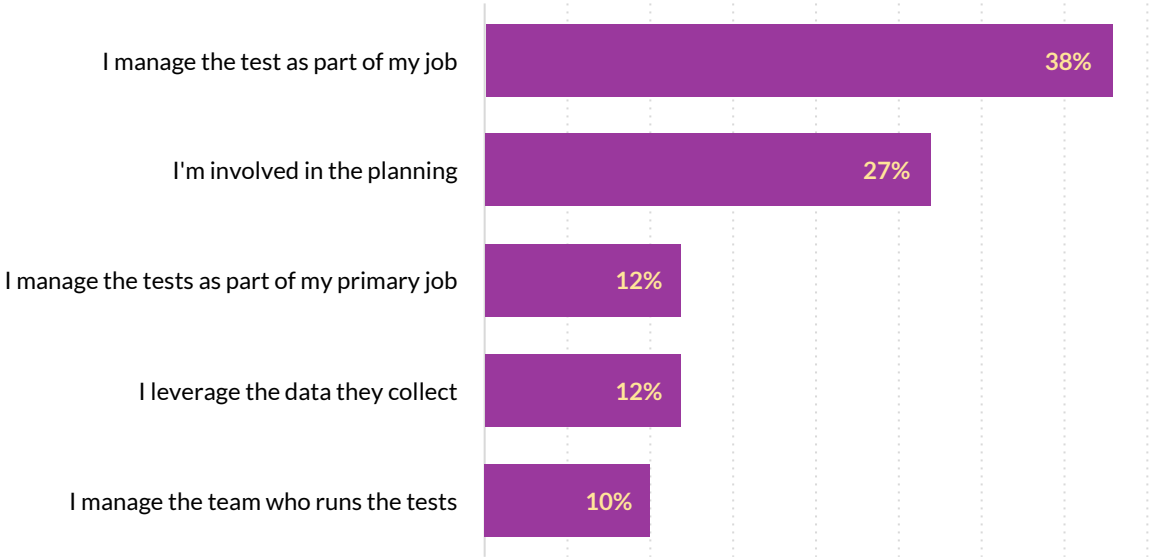
VP, Product Development
Product Evangelist
Product Owner
Product Analyst
Product Executive
Product Designer
Product Engineer
Associate Product Manager
Product Manager
Sr. Product Manager
Product Portfolio Manager
Product Quality Manager
Product Researcher
Principal Product Manager
Manager, Product Management
Director, Product Management

VP, Product Management
Project Manager
Product Sales Manager
Sr. Consultant
Manager, Strategy
Global Digital PR Representative
Brand Manager
Associate Product Marketing Manager
Product Marketing Manager
Sr. Product Marketing Manager
Strategic Partnership Manager
Sr. Director, GTM
VP, Marketing
Support Specialist
Sr. Support Specialist
Sr. Manager, CX

Role in Beta Testing

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While most respondents (**38%**) are tasked with running these tests as part of their job, only **12%** are devoted primarily to running Beta Tests. This means that for many people, they're balancing the demands of their tests with a variety of other responsibilities, along with the needs of other stakeholders who are either involved in the planning of the tests or who intend to leverage the data.



The Survey
Results

Key Points

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This survey highlights some significant trends in the industry:

1. A vast majority of companies conduct pre-release testing of their products to collect and implement customer feedback.
2. There's severe fragmentation in what these tests are called, who is responsible for them, and how they're executed.
3. Companies see immense potential value in collecting customer feedback before launch to better their products.
4. Many companies currently don't feel like they're gaining the full value out of this stage of the product development lifecycle.

Terminology and Fragmentation

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96% of respondents say their companies run Beta Tests.

We define these tests as:

the collection of pre-release product feedback from real customers in real environments.

Terminology and Fragmentation

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Beta testing is the dominant term for these tests, but there's still vast fragmentation. **60% of respondents use the term Beta Testing**, however, companies also use dozens of other names, including:

Beta Testing	Customer Tech Preview	Field Test	Pre-Release
Charter Program	Customer Technology Preview	Friendly User Trials (FUT)	RA Release
Client Validation	Customer Validation	Labs	Ramp Up
Controlled Release	Design Validation Test	Let the Customer Bang on It	Soft Launch
Customer Acceptance Testing (CAT)	Early Acceptance	Limited Availability	Soft Release
Customer Development Program	Early Adopter Program (EAP)	Limited Release	Trusted Testers
Customer Experience Trials	Early Preview	Market Readiness Testing (MRT)	User Acceptance Testing (UAT)
Customer Feedback Sessions	Early Release	Pilot Test	User Test
Customer Integration	Early Visibility	Play Test	User Validation
Customer Satisfaction	End User Validation	POC	Voice of the Customer

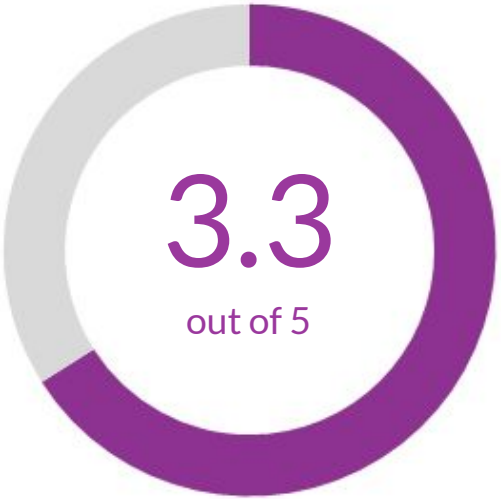
Beta Effectiveness

Overall, respondents feel their beta programs aren't effective.

Due to positive bias, a 4 out of 5 is considered average on a 5 point scale.*

A score of 3.3 shows respondents are largely unhappy with the effectiveness of their beta programs.

How effective do you feel your company's Beta Testing is?



* Nielson, Jakob and Jonathan Levy. "Measuring usability: preference vs. performance." *Communications of the ACM* April 1994: 66-75. *ACM Digital Library.*

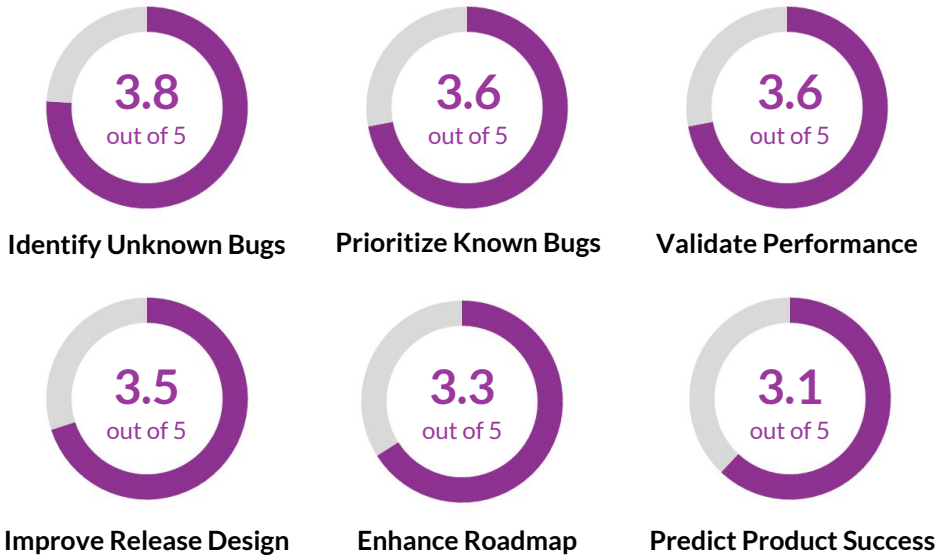
Current Effectiveness of Beta Results

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Diving deeper into the effectiveness of Beta Testing, we asked respondents how effective their Beta Tests are at achieving specific objectives.

Again, results show below average effectiveness across the board. Respondents feel their beta programs are more effective at achieving quality-related goals than design and sales-related goals, but also feel that there's a lot of room for improvement in their Beta tests.

How would you rate your Beta Tests' effectiveness at achieving these results?



Which Departments Are Involved?

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A handful of different teams are involved in Beta Testing at most companies, but Product Management stood out as the driver of all stages of Beta Testing. **75%** of respondents say Product Management is involved in planning their Beta Tests, and **53%** say they execute the tests.

These are the top teams involved in the four main stages of Beta Testing:

Planning	
Product Management	75%
User Experience	42%
Beta Test Management	39%

Recruiting	
Product Management	49%
Beta Test Management	28%
User Experience	24%

Executing	
Product Management	53%
Quality	46%
Engineering	43%

Using Results	
Product Management	76%
Engineering	71%
Quality	69%

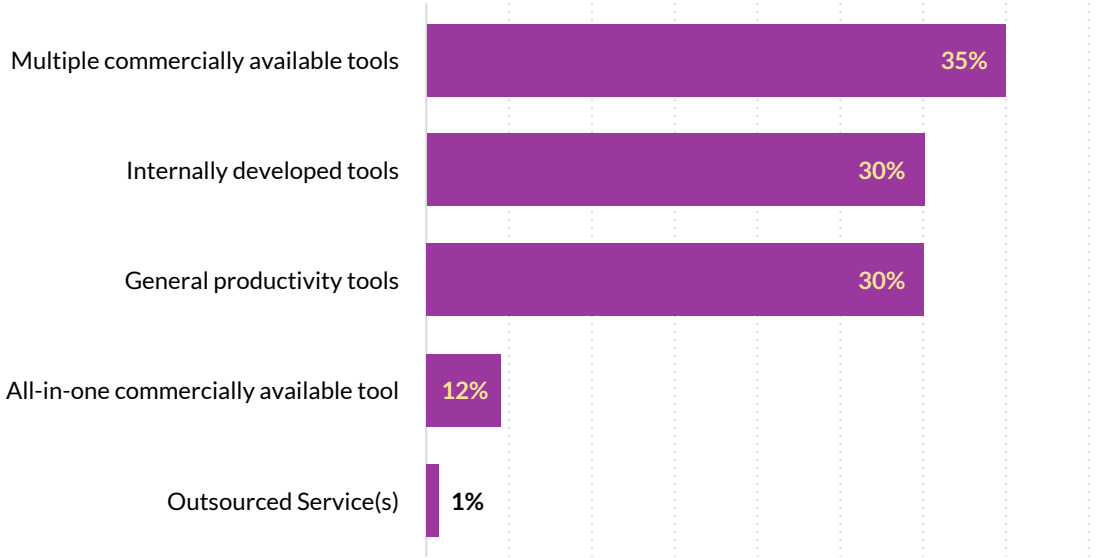
Beta Program Tools

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Most companies use a combination of tools to run their Beta Programs. These can either be a mix of commercially available tools or general productivity tools like email and spreadsheets.

A significant group also use internally developed tools, which can take a wide variety of forms and have their own significant challenges.

What tools or services are used for your Beta Tests?



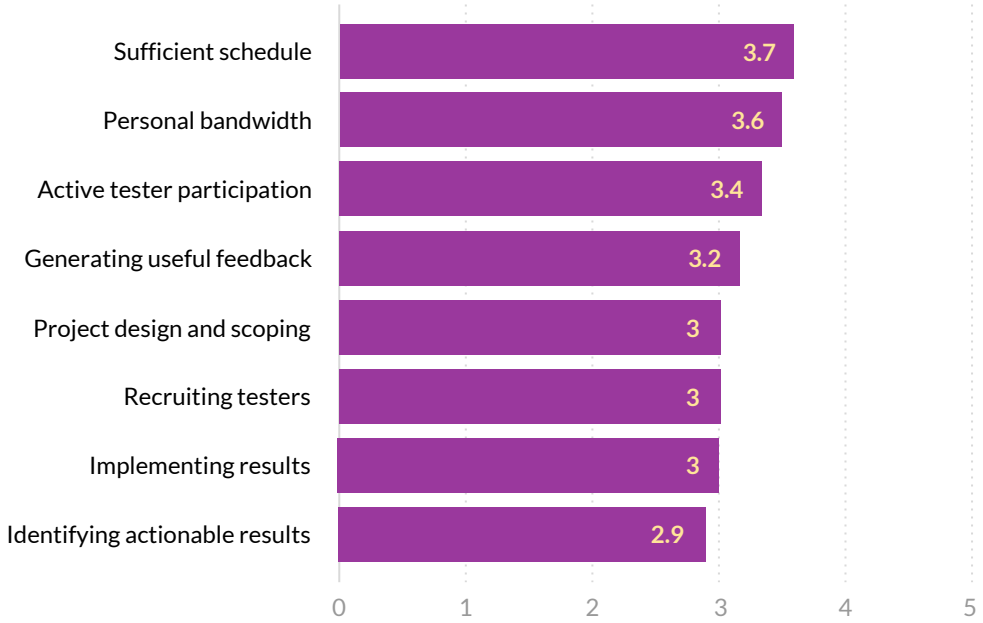
Challenges of Beta Testing

When asked how challenging different aspects of Beta Testing are, we found that respondents struggle with an array of elements in their programs.

Having sufficient time and bandwidth to complete the tests are the most challenging areas, but respondents also struggle with getting testers to participate and generating useful feedback from that participation.

Overall, the results show that there are currently no aspects of Beta Testing that companies find easy to achieve.

How challenging are the following aspects of Beta Testing?



Perceived Value of Beta Tests

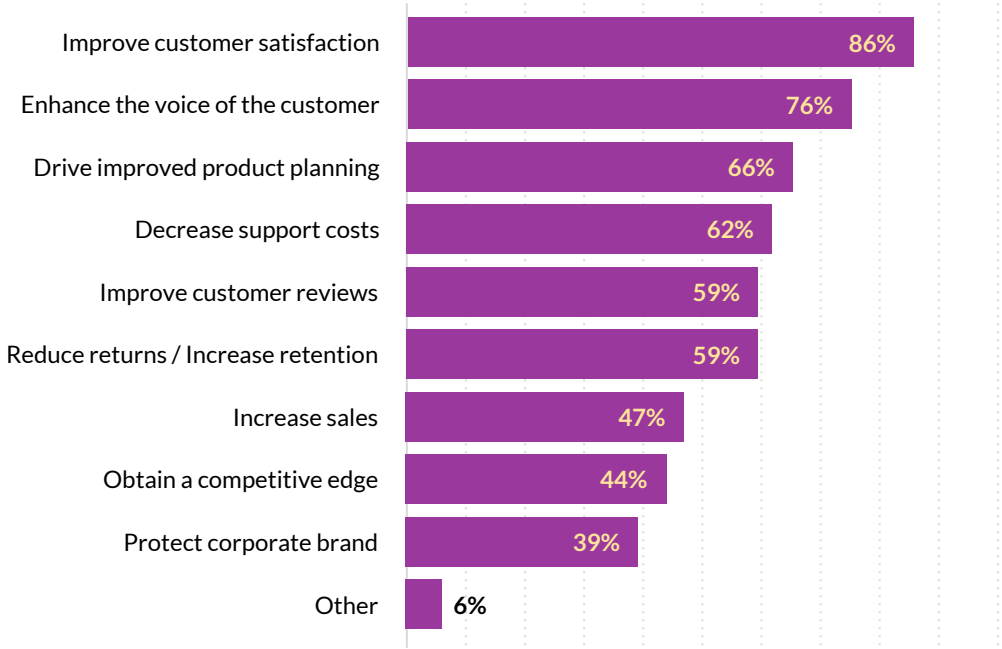
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While respondents feel their current beta programs aren't as effective as they wish they were, the industry sees the potential and value of Beta Testing.

A majority of respondents believe successful Beta Testing increases customer satisfaction, retention, and perception of the product. It also helps companies plan, build, and release better products.

So while companies aren't necessarily seeing the results they'd like from their current Beta Programs, they see the potential of a successful Beta Program.

What initiatives would a successful Beta Test achieve?



How Can Your Beta Program Improve?

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There are a variety of aspects that make Beta Testing challenging. The three elements that stood out as primary detractors were: **people**, **processes**, and **technology**.

Respondents with ineffective beta programs say they don't have enough resources dedicated to their beta program; there are few or no established processes; and juggling so many tools is difficult for managing both the test and the testers.

"A more focused and dedicated team whose primary job was Beta Test management, and probably some tools to better manage/interact with Beta testers."
QA Manager

"I think we mostly throw it out there and see what we get back. If we had an actual plan and strategy, we would be able to leverage our beta testing stage better."
QA Project Manager

"A dedicated resource to manage the beta testers to keep them involved, engaged, and analyze the results and do follow up. We are incomplete at this point."
Market Research Lead

"Consistency and repeatability. We don't have a process right now."
Head of Product Development

"It's been a major challenge to recruit active testers from our current subscriber base. Participation rates were so low and recruiting took so much effort that we have largely abandoned betas."
Manager, Product Strategy

"Improvements to the tooling that's used for participants to file feedback and defects. Enabling the beta management team to more effectively respond to feedback and provide ranked, consolidated reports to product management and engineering teams."
Product Manager

What Sets Great Beta Programs Apart?

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Some companies feel that their beta programs are extremely effective. With these respondents, they credit their success with having standardized processes, engaged testers, and great tools in place.

"Our team is very good at what we do. Our challenge is leveraging the data from the beta test in a way that will promote our company to act upon the information."
Supervisor, Project Engineer

"We use a Quality Management System that includes a standard set of strict procedures for beta and general availability."
Manager, Product Marketing

"[We have a] complete, repeatable process, [and require] high customer satisfaction from feedback on beta products before we release them."
Manager, Product Management

"Our users are very engaged. It's easy to recruit them and they are always willing to give lots of nuanced feedback. That makes beta testing really effective for us."
Manager, UX Research

"I think it's the streamlined process we have. Only a few people need to be involved, and they don't need to be involved full time. The process is very well 'baked'."
Lead, QA Engineer

"Rapid response to tester feedback, and implementing solutions and improvements in a timely manner."
Beta Manager

Final Takeaways

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Customer Validation as an industry is in its infancy. While a vast majority of companies run these tests, there's virtually no standardization in terminology and processes.

While everyone sees the value of a strong Beta Testing program, few companies feel like they're currently achieving those goals. The ones that do credit their processes and tools for their success.

Companies that are able to harness the potential of Customer Validation will gain a competitive advantage and become industry trailblazers in the years to come.

About Centercode

What We Do

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Delta Testing Solutions

WHY CENTERCODE?

Increase Revenue
½ ☆ INCREASE
in product ratings

Release Sooner
50% FASTER
test cycles

Gain Participation
75% INCREASE
in tester engagement

Save Time
40%+ DECREASE
in time managing tests



The Centercode Platform equips you with the automation and best practices you need to get actionable user insights for any use case.

PRODUCT LAUNCH

Engage your **Target Market** to successfully bring new products and services to market

USE CASES:

- Beta Tests
- User Acceptance Tests
- Field Tests

PRODUCT GROWTH

Recruit **Existing Customers** to continuously mature live products and services

USE CASES:

- Progressive Delivery
- Early Access
- Customer Advisory Boards

CUSTOMER ZERO

Gather **Employee** feedback to enhance your products while fostering a product culture

USE CASES:

- Alpha Tests
- Dogfooding
- Employee Tests

COMPETITIVE EDGE

Enlist **Competitors' Customers** to rapidly gain actionable intel about their products

USE CASES:

- Competitive Intelligence
- Market Testing
- Comparative Research