
Fletcher Carson

Fletcher Carson is a dynamic, hands-on entrepreneur in the information technology arena. His new company, Omsphere, addresses the challenges that major IT projects face in developing and testing their applications across the project lifecycle. Omsphere's revolutionary tools and technology change the role of testing from a vertical gatekeeper between development and production to a horizontal demonstration vehicle to let all of the stakeholders see how the system works so far.

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--Fletcher Carson

Rhyming Planet asks ...

Can you tell us about your role at Omsphere?

FC: I am the founder and Executive Director of Omsphere, which manages all types of automated testing projects. I talk to potential clients about the types of inevitable automated testing issues they face, and how our unique technology can change their world. I also get involved in the overall design and implementation of each and every project.

You have an interesting quote on your web site: "The train arrived ... and you were on the wrong platform." What does this mean?

FC: It means that the market place doesn't wait for you to get your software ready and deployed. If you don't have your development and testing process well thought out with the right technology in place to get you to market fast with minimum risk, then when the train arrives you're going to miss it. If you try to meet or beat your competitors to market and have software failures that drive away business, then you missed the train.

What exactly is Quality Evolutionary Development?

FC: QED is the result of over 20 years of development and testing experience on both commercial and military projects, both large and small scale. Instead of building, testing, and deploying software in vertical stages, it gets all of the stakeholders involved together horizontally, from the beginning of requirements to deployment into production. It's a process that allows the product to evolve by demonstrating the current functionality to everyone (developers, testers, client, user) at any moment in time. That way it can be modified very early on if it's not meeting anyone's expectations. Most of the time, contractual obligations (who will pay for the change?) get mixed up with expectations (is this what I really want?) and the client is forced to accept a product that they're not happy with just because it was built as specified (right or wrong).

How can Quality Evolutionary Development realistically reduce software development time and the number of release cycles?

FC: QED changes the dynamics of the product lifecycle. Typically, software functionality is developed vertically. Different teams build different pieces of functionality, and then it's all integrated and then tested. QED builds software horizontally. The most fundamental building block is used to build a complete system, end to end, although it won't have much functionality. Put a single field on a browser, get it to the midtier database, then thru the batch to the mainframe, then out the door to a third party, back in again, and thru the system and redisplayed. You end up with a complete, working system, that can now be built up vertically to add functionality on a priority basis, based on time to market needs.

In addition, QED keeps the client in the loop from beginning to end. We ensure that what the engineers are building is what the client expects to see at the end of the tunnel. No surprises.

How is this different from other existing companies and products that target improving the quality and timeliness of the software development process?

FC: Typically, improvements are done by buying the most recognized flavor of development and test tools. The problems of quality and timeliness are almost universally attacked by implementing tools rather than changing the end to end process. Companies try to solve the problem with better tools that solve vertical issues, and do not change the underlying horizontal components.

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Testing changes its role from vertical gatekeeper between development and production, to a horizontal demonstration vehicle to let all of the stakeholders see how the system works so far. Testing becomes the most important part of ensuring that the expectations of the client are fulfilled.

Your Multiple Interface Testing Suite (MITS) product has the ability to test and demonstrate the functionality of a system as it is being built. What exactly does this mean to folks engaged in a massive software development effort?

FC: The developers and the testers get to use exactly the same tools for the first time. The testers can develop the tests they are going to use to demonstrate the functionality of the software, and the developers can actually use those tests to exercise their software ahead of time. It's a bit like having the answers to a test before you take it. Theoretically, the testers shouldn't find any errors. The developers should deliver code that passes all the tests that they know are going to be applied against the code. Now, for the first time, they can actually put this into practice.

What other products and services does Omsphere bring to the table?

FC: The extraordinary change that takes place within the company is what else we bring to the table. The combination of MITS and QED is very powerful, producing a transformation within companies that *combines* people and process, rather than pitting them against each other. Testing and engineering actually become friends engaged in the same goal. Most significantly, the client becomes a quite consistently happy customer because they are being delivered a product that they have seen beforehand, and they're no longer plagued by unfulfilled expectations.

What are the top three challenges facing you and your team within the North American and European markets in 2002?

FC: First, of course, is the speed that we can make this unique technology available. We are gearing up for worldwide name recognition, so that clients and potential clients will know that they have the most competitive testing tools available in the world.

Second, is creating an awareness that our technology (specifically the MITS product) works *with* automated testing tools that the client has already invested in. They do not have to decide between MITS and other leading tools. We create the ability to put other vendor tools to use in ways that produce a magnitude gain in productivity and ROI. We make both the tester and the budget owner happy.

Third, is the speed with which we can take on projects around the world from the many financial institutions and integrators that we are working with. Finding the type of expertise that we demand of our managers and implementation teams is very different from the norm. This is a very different way of providing automated testing, and we are picky about who we bring on board.

What is your message to our readers regarding Quality Evolutionary Development?

FC: QED is a no-brainer. Once you see the impact it can and does have, you'll never revert to the traditional ways of developing and testing software. This technology truly provides a competitive edge in a world of shrinking windows to get software to market.

Can you tell us about your most successful client effort to date? How did you measure its success?

FC: We just finished Phase I of implementing this technology in one of the most successful internet banks in Europe to ever come online. With only TWO MITS intelligent software engines, we were able to completely test the online GUI software. One single MITS engine was used to enter every conceivable combination of online product applications (mortgage, loan, savings, credit card, checking account). Another MITS engine was used to perform all other functionality testing (every type of money movement, over 220 call center operations, etc.). And the simulation of the Equifax real-time online interface was completed, so that it's now possible to completely eliminate Equifax from the regression testing, and at the same time perform tests directly applicable to Equifax content and format.

First, success was measured by the complete acceptance of the MITS product by all test groups and development. Testers were no longer required to record scripts, and had a 98% accuracy of converting their test data into the MITS spreadsheet format. In addition, the testers never lost a single day of testing, because the logic and roadmap for the MITS engines were developed in parallel by a separate team.

Second, MITS paid for itself before the project was even completed, simply by eliminating the need to manually enter 100's of scenarios for testing each time a new code release was dropped.

Finally, the acid test for automated testing was passed: maintainability. Ordinarily, if you have 100 automated test scripts, which all pass thru a particular screen, then all of those scripts have to be upgraded when that screen changes. For this project, when a new code release produced new fields on the main screen, and several new screens, MITS was modified and redeployed within 3 hours with all changes.

If you had to state in a single sentence the purpose of your organization, what would it be?

FC: Provide intelligent, achievable, and truly maintainable automated testing to e-business companies at high risk if their software fails.

The company name is quite unique! Where did it come from?

FC: My wife, who designs high-fashion women's apparel, actually came up with the name. "Om" is a universal sound for focusing your own energy, and a sphere is nature's perfect form for harnessing energy. She combined the sphere with the "O" in Omsphere and oversaw the development of the website flash intro that combines everything. The background is actually a piece of one of da Vinci's drawings.

How can interested parties get in touch with you or run into you at an event to learn more about what's up with Fletcher Carson and Omsphere?

FC: Visit our website at www.omsphere.com, call the US office at 707.939.7894, or you can reach me in Europe on +44 7903 119 959. I travel quite a bit to client sites so the office will always know how and where to reach me if I am not in San Francisco.

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