

Synkron A/S

FAST FACTS

Company

Synkron A/S is the leading distributor of content management software in Scandinavia.

Industry

Technology

Geography

Scandinavia

Challenges

- Establish an automated and consistent regression test process
- Maintain application quality, while testing new functionality added to Synkron.web
- Enhance productivity of QA resources

Solution

- Borland® SilkTest®

Results

- Faster regression and smoke tests—run in hours instead of days
- Improved market responsiveness through shorter release cycle times
- Ability to run tests in unattended mode, freeing up personnel to attend to other issues

COMPANY

Synkron A/S is one of the leading suppliers of content management systems (CMS). Synkron.web has become the standard by which other content management products are judged in the Danish market. Customers include prominent organizations such as Bang & Olufsen, KPMG, Netsource, Maersk Logistics, the Danish Red Cross, the Danish government's Ministry of Research, the Danish National Museum and the Danish Dairy Board. Today Synkron's customer base comprises over 700 Danish companies and many other global companies around the world.

CHALLENGES

The Synkron.web application is entirely browser-based and is written in Visual Basic. The application environment supports Microsoft® Windows 2000 Server/IIS; SQL Server for the database engine; and for browsers, Microsoft® Internet Explorer®, versions 4 and later, and Netscape® Navigator, versions 4 and later. Significant releases are issued twice a year, with service packs as needed in between. Software testing was done in-house via manual processes; but given the complex environment, Synkron felt it was time to transition to automated testing for increased quality and productivity.

Jakob Sloth, Quality Assurance manager at Synkron, discussed the problems he wanted to solve with automation, "We needed to test more efficiently and be more consistent in our testing process. Besides our core application, we have many smaller add-on products that provide optional functionality. It was becoming a real challenge to manually test and keep track of all the products we had to support. Also, as our application grew in functionality and depth, we no longer could support the level of quality we wanted with just manual processes. With manual tests, every time we got a new build we had to start testing all over again. That just isn't efficient. QA's job just kept getting bigger and bigger and we were on the verge of not being able to keep up."

SOLUTION

Test automation would allow Synkron to speed up the release process and to be more responsive to market pressures for new functionality. Sloth looked at five vendors initially. Eventually he narrowed the choice to Borland SilkTest and one other test company's tool. His evaluation involved bringing both products in-house. Sloth described the process, "I wanted to try out the two solutions myself, in my own environment. I did not want to rely solely on a sales demonstration—anyone can make a product look good in a canned one-hour presentation. In using the two solutions, there were so many features I liked about Borland SilkTest that were lacking in the other tool. The fact that SilkTest precompiled my scripts as I was developing them meant that I did not have to wait until I was completely done with a test case before I knew whether or not it would even run.

"Additionally, Borland® 4Test®—the scripting language of SilkTest—is so powerful," added Sloth. "The flexibility offered by 4Test makes it easy to accomplish what you need to, with very concise, efficient code that is also very readable."

Sloth continued, "Borland SilkTest offers base states; this means that if a script encounters an error during the testing process, it does not prevent subsequent tests from running. SilkTest is more object-oriented too. So interacting with the objects is easier, as is script maintenance. Maintenance was a key consideration for us, because I do not want to have to reinvent the wheel every time I get a new build from development. In short, I am doing things with Borland SilkTest that I could not do with any of the other products I evaluated."

“The regressions now in place run in about 4 to 5 hours; prior to our Borland SilkTest automation, they would have taken days to perform. Likewise, I can now run smoke tests that used to take days in a couple of hours.”

— Jakob Sloth, QA Manager, Synkron

RESULTS

With Borland SilkTest for the regression and verification testing of Synkron.web, gains in the release process have been realized on several fronts. Sloth explained, “I have been focusing my initial efforts in developing a test harness with Borland SilkTest and a complete regression suite for the harness to drive. The regressions now in place run in about 4 to 5 hours; prior to our Borland SilkTest automation, they would have taken days to perform. Likewise, I can now run smoke tests that used to take days in a couple of hours.

“Perhaps most important, given the pace of our business and the demands to maintain our leading-edge functionality, I have a test environment that is easy to maintain,” continued Sloth. “The object-oriented architecture upon which Borland SilkTest is based allows for a high degree of reusability in the scripts I create. We can now keep up with the depth and breadth of our application, and with the ongoing enhancements our development group continues to add. In retrospect, the regression test nightmare was the biggest problem we had to overcome—and we have successfully done so. I now have a testing process that is verifiable and repeatable. The priority Synkron has placed on software quality and instituting improvements in the QA process translates into us being able to deliver a very reliable product to our customers.”

Sloth is proud of the higher level of software quality Synkron has realized through automation: “Manual testing could not provide us the confidence we needed to know we were releasing a quality product. Automation—with our repeatable, maintainable processes—can do so much more than we ever could manually; to be sure, our software is functioning at the levels of quality we want for our customers.”

Finally, the relationship between Synkron’s QA and development teams is a strong one. The two groups have strived to enhance the testability of the code produced. Sloth discussed the development/QA synergy, “We work very well together. QA has developed a reputation as an advocate for quality within Synkron. Development cares about quality too, so they have been very open to teaming with QA. The result is that we all work together toward the common goal of producing a reliable product.”