Building a
Culture of Quality

How Teams Can Use Quality
to Achieve Business Goals

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What Does It Take to Create a Quality-Focused Organization?

No matter your industry, product quality and customer experience have never mattered more. It's easy to limit quality to QA testing or see it as a checkbox that needs to be ticked off before every release. But quality is a team sport; Product and Engineering design and build features, Sales and Marketing put them into the hands of customers, Customer Success ensures a delightful experience, and Recruiting and People Ops hire and maintain the talent who bring businesses to life. A well-defined process and a strategic approach to QA are bolstered with a quality-focused organizational culture.

In this guide, Rainforest and Invotra will dive into why quality is key to the success of your business. We'll explore the strategy and tactics behind building a culture of quality and examine what a quality-driven company culture looks like in action at Invotra.

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Why Quality is Essential to Success

Quality is the first, best way for growing businesses to show their impact.

"When you're a small company or a startup and you want to show the market who you are, you usually do that by offering superior quality and service. Enforcing a great culture of quality is necessary. You can't win without having a bias for quality."

- Paul Zimmerman, COO, Invotra

Whether an organization is just finding its footing in the market, or is introducing a new and innovative product, quality is often the best differentiator they can offer. As many as 73% of consumers say the reason they would consider switching providers is poor quality goods, while 65% cite poor customer service as a reason to change products.[1] Focusing on building a high-quality product from the start builds brand loyalty by delighting new users.

Good quality standards lead to good business practices.

"Quality needs to exist throughout an organization. Once it's at the heart of the product, lots of other areas will have benefits."

- Paul Zimmerman, COO, Invotra

Embedding quality into the company culture, and subsequently into every part of the business, ultimately affects the bottom line. Additionally, a quality-driven company culture empowers team members to take ownership of their role. Setting a higher bar for the quality of the organization's work leads to increased customer retention, higher levels of employee satisfaction, and a more efficient organization.

[1]Why Customers Change Brands, StayOutFront.com

Key Pillars
Creating a Culture of Quality

Communication

Getting everyone on the same page is the first step towards building quality into your processes. Misunderstandings, incomplete communications, and siloed information lead to problems that drag down quality.

Make quality a priority for internal discussions, whether that's through regular in-person discussions or an enterprise intranet designed for teams to collaborate on solving quality issues. Give customers regular opportunities to provide feedback on quality as well.

Iteration

Don't just fix bugs, fix processes. Use tools and create systems to gather and centralize data about quality. JIRA and other bug trackers are a key component of a quality-driven organization. Make sure there's someone in your organization dedicated to bug triage and squashing, too.

Now that you're tracking bugs efficiently, you can evaluate processes behind issues and find ways to improve them. When you find a regression, always ask, *"Can we automate it so this doesn't happen again?"*

Focus

There isn't a one-size-fits-all way to approach thinking about product quality. But every company benefits from tying quality initiatives to business objectives, whether by improving customer experiences, reducing bugs, or speeding up delivery timelines. The key is to narrow your team's focus to the areas of quality that will make the biggest business impact instead of trying to tackle quality holistically.

Deep Dive
Invotra's Culture of Quality

While we know having a culture of quality is important, it can be hard to understand how to apply this mindset to your organization's day-to-day activities. To get a better look at what this means in action we'll take a deep dive with Paul Zimmerman, COO and co-founder of Invotra, into how Invotra's culture of quality manifests throughout the entire organization.

A culture of quality starts (and scales) with hiring.

Quality doesn't happen in a silo. Communication is hugely important to end results and Invotra makes clear from the start that quality comes first. Be vocal about your company values during the hiring process and prioritize candidates who share the same values.

Invotra believes that no matter what your experience or background, you need to understand things from a QA perspective to care about quality. An extension of this idea is demonstrated in Invotra's apprenticeship program. "We take a lot of young folks who don't have a lot of experience. They'll work as QAs for Invotra for the whole time they're doing an approved course or bootcamp," says Paul. "This creates a strong bias for quality at the beginning of their career". Foster the team you want to build early in their careers, and you'll have a workforce (and eventually a leadership team) with a deeply ingrained affinity for your organization's values.

Culture of Quality in Action

amazon

Ecommerce giant Amazon requires every employee to take a turn answering customer support calls periodically. Keeping the customer success and satisfaction in the spotlight across the entire organization helps create a sense of ownership over the quality of these experiences from top to bottom.

Give every developer a bias towards QA

"One of the things we realized early on at Invotra is that we needed to have quality at the heart of everything we did. The easiest way to ensure quality was maintained was to prevent the occurrence of any bad issues in the first place. Internal and external software engineers must have a bias towards QA," says Paul.

Every engineer hired to Invotra, no matter what role they were hired for, spends time doing QA during onboarding. The Development team has a deep understanding that putting in the quality work early on saves them time and the business money in the long run.

Get the whole company involved in quality ownership.

Because quality is a core value at Invotra, product quality is considered to be owned by everyone. The team strives to keep quality at the forefront of big-picture conversations. For example, Invotra dedicates one company-wide all-hands per month to having internal discussions on product quality, encouraging everyone to participate.

"We allow anyone to say anything in the business to us, it doesn't matter if they're new or junior," says Paul. "Being a meritocracy is hugely important to us. If you marry the desire to be the greatest you can be to a meritocracy, then somebody can come in from any walk of life and in a week demonstrate that they are capable of having responsibility."

Make customer input the backbone of your quality strategy.

Invotra's customers and end users are largely concerned with accessibility and security, so they have made these issues the focus of their quality initiatives. Paul's team has designed their quality strategy to address these goals. "From a quality standpoint, accessibility testing is something we do religiously. We have to figure out how to scale. We have a dedicated

product manager for accessibility, who won the national apprentice award for his work."

Invotra's design mantra is, "User Experience for the 100%". They focus on creating a UX that will work for all users, including those with sight issues or disabilities.

"We're really invested in our quality around accessibility. We had our largest customer ask us just how accessible we really were. They knew we were compliant, but they questioned how seriously we took the issue of quality in accessibility and asked us to see some of their 90,000 users. A significant number of their users have sight issues. We traveled to Leeds, York, Blackpool, and London to speak with these users. They turned off their monitor and asked us to use our intranet using a screen reader only. Accessibility is often overlooked in technology companies," says Paul.

"Security is always at the front of our quality. Everything from our facilities to our environments to the quality of the code itself has to be very secure. Due to the nature of our customers' work, security is everything to Invotra."

Culture of Quality in Action

Spotify lets quality drive its deliveries, rather than the other way around. This practice prevents arbitrary release deadlines from eroding the quality of their application.

Spotify also believes that great products become amazing products by treating quality as a process and endlessly tweaking and iterating after the product has been released.

Enabling Quality with Rainforest

How Invotra Uses Rainforest to Promote Quality in Development Processes

Fostering a company-wide bias towards quality is just one key to Invotra's product success. Additionally, the company empowers their QA team by investing in technologies and services backed by a strategic approach to QA.

To learn more about their QA processes and workflows, we sat down with Ben Taylor, Manual QA Team Lead, Billy Clackers, Product Manager, and Mireille Helle, Development Manager.

Build strategic partnerships across Product, Development, and QA Teams.

Over time, the QA industry has developed many effective practices that ensure product quality. But in a market that's increasingly full of software solutions, some QA practices are in need of innovation to keep up with customer demands.

A common challenge QA teams still face today is not having insight into all the activities that go on during development. With so many places where problems can crop up, having QA sit outside of Product and Development teams opens opportunities for quality issues to arise.

Instead, Invotra fosters strategic partnerships between Product, Development, and QA, making the QA team a part of each stage of development. Through these close cross-team relationships, Invotra's manual QA team gains awareness of what's happening to the left and right of them and can strategically manage testing.

Prioritize integrating testing throughout each stage of the development process.

Having a company-wide culture of quality gives Invotra a leg up when it comes to building high-quality products, as testing is integrated into each stage of the development process. "Quality is important at every level. The end result is Invotra having happy customers. The way to get to that internally is the delivery quality at every stage. The sooner we know that something isn't meeting our quality standards, the cheaper and easier it is to fix it," says Mireille.

Additionally, prioritizing QA before development begins enables QEs to create a strategic testing plan that helps developers solve issues that arise in their code. After all, it's easier to fix something you worked on yesterday than it is to fix something you worked on two weeks ago. Billy notes that "it's about injecting quality in every stage in the process."

Invotra's development-driven QA process features these three steps:

- **Speccing** - Anytime a decision to change the product has been made, it goes through speccing where the QA team determines testing needs and creates a plan.
- **Development** - Development starts after quality needs have been determined.
- **Testing** - There are three phases of testing:
  - **First Phase**: Internal QA on a topic branch (just one change);
  - **Second Phase**: Integration Testing for all of the changes;
  - **Third Phase**: Pre-production testing, clients do user acceptance testing.

"We have a QA blocker," says Ben. Ben's team is involved in sprint planning and has the authority to determine if a change should not be introduced if it will sacrifice product quality, ultimately putting a higher quality product into the hands of customers.

Invest in technologies and services backed by a strategic approach to quality.

Invotra sets their QA team up for success by investing in technical solutions like Rainforest that keep the quality and feedback processes smooth. Furthermore, they take a strategic approach to managing the technology solutions they use for QA. Taking a balanced approach to testing, Invotra strategically manages test automation with Selenium-based front-end tests as well as unit and Frisby API tests, while leveraging Rainforest for tests that are not a good fit for traditional test automation.

Rainforest empowers Invotra QEs to focus on high-value testing by automating the manual process. "Rainforest takes the burden away from integration regression testing. It's not just about us knowing, it's about having a proactive focus on quality" says Ben. .

Conclusion
The Quality Mindset

As you kick off your journey towards becoming a quality-first organization, it's important to remember that quality requires a shift in the way you approach your business.

Quality doesn't happen in a vacuum. Whether you have a QA team of one or one hundred; every person in your organization must buy into your focus on quality, and infuse their day-to-day work with a quality ethic.

It's also worth noting that there's no such thing as "done" when it comes to quality. The best quality products are constantly being iterated upon to find new ways to serve and delight their users. Instead of thinking of quality as a goal, think of it as a process that your team must continually refine.

We hope that this guide has inspired you to start fostering a culture of quality for your team!

Special thanks to the team at Invotra for their contributions to this guide.