

te testing experience

The Magazine for Professional Testers



printed in Germany

print version 8,00 €

free digital version

www.testingexperience.com

ISSN 1866-5705

NEW:
New Columns &
Book Corner

The Skills Performance Testers Need and How to Get Them

Periodically I see pretty vigorous discussions about the skills needed by performance testers. It looks like most experts agree that performance testing requires more skills and knowledge than just creating and running scripts using a particular load testing tool. While it is still possible to imagine a performance tester in a large corporation who only creates scripts and mechanically runs them while other performance experts monitor the system and analyze results, I do not think there are many prospects for this person, nor for the approach. Systems have now become so complicated that the sum of the views of specialized experts does not give the whole performance picture.

Thinking about the skills needed for performance testing, the following areas come to mind as a minimum in addition to load testing proper:

What is going on with the system?

→ *Monitoring and performance analysis.*

We see an issue. What should we do?

→ *Diagnostics, tuning, and system performance engineering.*

Tuning doesn't help; is there something wrong with the application?

→ *Software performance engineering.*

What if?

→ *Modeling and capacity planning.*

And, of course, how can we get it all done?

→ *Communication, presentation, and project management.*

You probably need to know something about all these areas to be a good performance tester (often more qualified professionals in this area are referred to as performance engineers or performance architects, even if performance testing remains their main focus – although the use of these terms varies). You do not need to be an expert in, for example, database tuning – most companies have DBAs for that – but you do need to be able to speak to a DBA in his or her language to coordinate efforts effectively; or raise concerns about the performance consequences of the current application design. Unfortunately this is not easy – you need to know enough to understand what is going on and communicate effectively.

The question is how to get such skills. Through constant self-learning and gaining experience gradually? Yes, of course, but that takes a lot of time. Moreover, many areas are pretty hard to jump into from scratch. You need to gain some basic understanding before you will be comfortable enough to learn further on your own. Go to a class? Definitely – go to a class for performance testing and for your main tool. But what about the many other different products you are working with? This might mean several week-long performance-related classes for each product. But these are developed for specialists making a living tuning these particular products and you do not have time to go to all these classes and do not normally need to go into so much depth. Talk to an expert? Sure, if you find one around. Performance experts are scarce and busy, so you had better have some well-prepared questions, which is hard to do if you only know a little about the subject.

When you have gone far enough along the road, you will fall into another trap. You already know enough that basic training will not be beneficial, but there are almost no advanced classes at all for performance testers. When you go beyond the basics, things such as details of environments, tools, systems, applications, etc. become so different that it makes no sense to create a class for specific combinations. You know areas where you need more information, you need to verify your approaches and practices against other experts, you need more advanced tips and tricks, and you need to find somebody you can discuss your problems with.

I believe that a good conference is a solution in both cases. Somebody digests information and presents it back to you. Not that it is absolutely ideal, as the quality of the presentations and presenters varies, but it is probably still the most effective way when you need to jump into many different topics.

However, there is no perfect event for a performance tester. I believe that the closest is the Performance and Capacity conference run by CMG (www.cmg.org) – a practical conference devoted to performance engineering and capacity planning with a strong performance testing track, although the emphasis of the conference is more on performance than on testing.

Workshop on Performance and Reliability (WOPR) www.performance-workshop.org is probably the only event devoted exclusively to performance testing (and some adjacent areas), but due to its format it is limited to 20-25 people, by invitation only.

There are many great testing conferences such as STAR conferences (www.sqe.com/Conferences), Agile Testing Days (www.agiletestingdays.com), or CAST (www.associationforsoftwaretesting.org) where you may find some presentations related to performance testing – but they are rather few and far between.

A little more performance-related material can be found at the Software Test Professionals (STP) conference (www.stpcon.com) (I still remember time when STP stood for Software Test and Performance) – but the emphasis is much more on testing than on performance, and there is usually not much on performance engineering.

The Velocity conference (velocityconf.com) is the primary event for web performance. At Velocity you see quite a few performance testers and many vendors showcasing their performance tools, but very

few sessions actually touch on classical performance testing. Surge (surge.omniti.com) is another good web performance and scalability conference with stress on scalability – but you probably won't hear much about testing there.

There are several more specialized and academic conferences related to different aspects of performance, which you could consider if you are interested in a specific aspect of performance, but testing aspects are not usually covered.

And, of course, there are many vendor events covering their particular products, which may interest you if you are using these products. ■

Have I missed any good events related to performance testing? Let me know if I have by sending an email to me at apodelko@yahoo.com.

> about the author



For the last 17 years, **Alex Podelko** has worked as a performance engineer and architect for several companies. Currently he is a Consulting Member of Technical Staff at Oracle, responsible for performance testing and optimization of Enterprise Performance Management and Business Intelligence (a.k.a. Hyperion) products. Alex periodically talks and writes about performance-related topics, advocating tearing down silo walls between different groups of performance professionals. His collection of performance-related links and documents (including his recent papers and presentations) can be found at www.alexanderpodelko.com. He blogs at www.alexanderpodelko.com/blog and can be found on Twitter as [@apodelko](https://twitter.com/apodelko). Alex currently serves as a director of the Computer Measurement Group (CMG) www.cmg.org, an organization of performance and capacity planning professionals.