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LOAD TESTING

What They Never Told You.

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LOAD TESTING

What they never told you

What is Load Testing?

The term “Load Testing” has evolved over the years however the core meaning still comes down to making sure that your system can handle a predefined amount of users at the same time, the load test is usually run over an extended period of time in a staggered manner, slowly ramping up the amount of users until you hit a predefined maximum that’s usually based on projected usage levels extrapolated from access logs with a buffer for surges.

Assuming the load test passes without issue you will get a number of users that the system can typically cope with, this is called the systems “concurrency level” and give you a hard number to work with when dealing with performance and optimization, growth, stability, etc.

If the system fails over before you reach the levels you were expecting you can work to resolve the issue and then perform the tests again, all within a planned window in a repeatable fashion.

Why is it important?

Load Testing is vitally important for everyone along the web design chain, from framework and CMS engineers to design agencies to end customers and should be the final step in handover between the various points. Sadly, this is a step that’s rarely taken and had it been, downtime may have been preventable when it really mattered [i.e. in a big marketing push, sales in ecommerce, going viral in social media, etc.].

Ultimately, if you need to ask yourself any of these questions...

- How many users can my CMS/framework handle at the same time? How does this compare to my competitors?
- Is my ecommerce site going to handle Black Friday?
- Will my blog handle going viral?
- Is there enough budget to handle the upgrades to the site for the next 2 years?

... then you should be doing sign-off load tests at the minimum and where possible you should really be integrating them into your development test plans [you do test, don’t you?]



How to do it?

This is where it can get complicated and my recommendations would be to start small and basic as trying to run before you can walk only results in fear, confusion and a bad time for everyone involved.

At the two ends of the load testing spectrum you have, simple page requests that typically simulate a blog entry going viral to complex session recreation with random events which would simulate a user working through an ecommerce site.

Depending on your place in the aforementioned chain you will be approaching this very differently:

For End Customers

You will likely be looking into commercial services of which there are a vast array along the spectrum mentioned above and if you are still partnered with the site designers you will likely want to talk to them as well. We do not currently partner with any specific Load Testing companies however Load Impact www.loadimpact.com seem to be the big boys in the industry, make sure you shop around and look at all of the options available.

For Design Agencies

You can either role an in-house solution by scripting something like Apache Bench or by reusing JMeter or you can look into one of the many commercial products out there. I would recommend a combination of both with use-case testing in JMeter as part of the development process as part of the regression testing phase and a customer facing commercial test at the end of project sign-off. This keeps costs down while adding value for your customer, the best of both worlds!

For Framework/CMS Engineers

If you're writing code for fun and/or profit then it's unlikely you need to look into the commercial options. I have had great success with the Apache Bench and Bash combination over the years however the complexity (as with any scripting project) can get a little daunting if you need to do full use-case testing so I would recommend having a look through what JMeter can offer you before you decide what to run with, you might also find a lot of value in checking out the feature-set that's being offered by the commercial providers as you may be surprised what they can do these days

In summary, wherever you are along the chain, you should be doing load testing and if you haven't been then you should be making it your number one priority if you have any questions about this article or would like to know more about the wonderful world of load testing please feel free to email us at support@wirehive.net

Happy Testing!



Why Wirehive?

Our purpose is to deliver uninterrupted online experiences for our customers. We provide agencies and their clients with managed hosting services, engineered to suit their exact digital requirements. We act as a critical part of the brand and agency teams that produce award-winning campaigns, websites, and applications.

We're here for you 24/7. There are no call centres, just real people who live and breathe Wirehive day-to-day.

Questions?

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