

A Brief Explanation of Alpha and Beta Testing

If you have been in business for a couple of years, or even if your use of software is limited to strictly personal use, then you have likely seen a few terms floating around that are a bit unfamiliar to you. Specifically, you have probably seen phrases that announce that a certain program or site is in what is called an “alpha” or “beta” phase. Most of us don’t really know what the terms mean, beyond a shady suspicion that whatever they are referring to might not work properly. In this article, we will take a look at the software release process and the words that are applied to the programs during the process.

Software release

Before a program is on the market for the use of the public in general, it passes through several stages of development in order to establish and hone its capabilities. Like any other product, software must be thought up and then tested to ensure that it works in the way in which it was intended, and the whole process is called the software release.

There are several stages to a software release, including the alpha and the beta phase as well as a “pre-alpha” and “seigo” stage. Each stage includes its own specific steps, and it helps to know what is going on at these steps in order to understand what point the software is at.

Here’s a look.

Pre-Alpha: The software has been developed, but all the features have not yet been added.

Alpha: At this point, the features that are intended to be on the software are all added and the program is sent to testers. These testers are usually employees of the developing company, but in the case of open source software the testers could be anyone interested in the new program.

Beta: This is the most complicated and lengthy of the software production stages, as it refers to the stage in which the program is de-bugged. In other words, the software engineers fix any problems with the program. The beta release is used outside of the company, so no new features are added - instead the concentration lies on fixing any problems that come up.

Generally, software programs in the beta phase are available cheaper than they will be in the future, because the term beta indicates that there are still problems that need to be worked out. A complete software package occurs when all features are in place and the program works in the way it was intended to, with all features under consideration.

About the Author

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