

Q&A Challenges

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Leading test automation and proactive monitoring provider Witbe has been producing hardware and software for over 20 years, in order for video service providers to test the Quality of Experience their customers receive at home and on the move. Marie-Véronique Lacaze tells us more about the fast moving landscape and what the future holds.

If Witbe is the solution, what is the problem?

The first problem is meeting expectations. Whether it's reasonable or not, the accepted expectation for a streaming video service is that it will work perfectly on any device or over any network. If a viewer is watching a video on their smart TV over their home internet, they expect to be able to pause it and immediately resume watching via catch-up on their phone over a data connection. If a video service doesn't deliver on that, then viewers won't stick around. That's why, first and foremost, it's important to measure quality of experience (QoE).

So, how do you do it? This "user-centric" reality means that providers are now expected to maintain dozens of different app builds that all work on different devices and keep them all performing consistently well. Even for the largest media conglomerates, it's too much to expect testing teams to measure all possible performance scenarios equally well. That's where the need for testing automation comes in, to

handle the workload of delivering consistent performance across devices.

Another problem is that in the streaming era, the service sent out is not always the same service received by the viewer at home. How, then, can providers measure their true QoE? That's why our technology tests exclusively on real devices and networks, the same ones that viewers are using every day. You have to know the actual performance being received by viewers in order to improve it.

What has changed over time and how do you see things looking in 5 years?

One way the landscape has developed is the prevalence of streaming ads. Five years ago, ads were on YouTube and other free video services, but paying for a subscription meant ad-free viewing. Now, top streamers like Netflix, Disney+, and Max all offer cheaper, ad-supported subscription tiers.





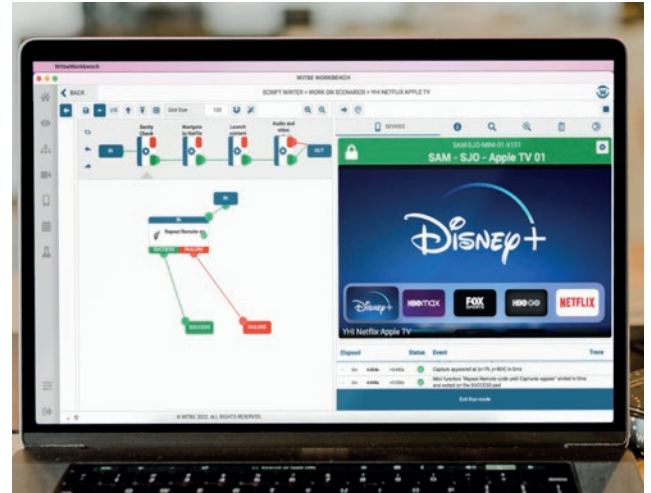
Witbe's Remote Eye Controller lets teams access real testing devices remotely.

Prime Video even announced plans to insert ads into all of its previously ad-free paid subscriptions beginning in 2024. FAST channels also boomed this year, relying on nostalgia for linear programming and revenue only from ads. While streaming initially positioned itself as a convenient alternative to cable, it's clear that in terms of ad revenue, the two are becoming closer than ever.

On the other hand, something that has remained consistent over time is the appeal of live events. The biggest of these are often sports – for plenty of people around the world, watching TV simply means watching sports. Other live events, such as newscasts, award shows, and political debates, still draw in viewers too. Recent advances in technology have improved streaming capabilities for live events, paving the way for more to be broadcast over the internet. The power of communal watching, whether around the same screen or simply at the same time as others, is alive and well and that's something I still expect to be true five years from now.

What is the biggest challenge that Witbe faces in this space and why?

Our mission is to help video service providers easily tackle the major challenges they face in delivering superior video quality across devices, networks, and markets. A challenge we face in doing that is ensuring providers understand the importance of measuring QoE. Service performance is a major deciding factor when it comes to the time and money of viewers, so measuring it should remain a top priority for all video service providers.



Witbe's Smart Navigate algorithm uses AI to help teams script test scenarios faster

How will AI impact what you're doing at Witbe?

AI has already allowed us to automate cumbersome and repetitive processes. This is where we see a lot of immediate value in the technology – freeing up human team members to focus on tasks that require more attention to detail. For example, we recently launched an AI algorithm called Smart Navigate, designed to help with scripting tests. Previously, a test scenario would have to be manually altered every time a video app's navigation was updated. If you had programmed the test to navigate to a certain menu or asset, it would have to be re-programmed every time that menu or asset moved. However, with the help of AI, the new menu is automatically analysed by the technology and the test updates itself. For major testing set-ups with several different tests, it means that weeks' worth of work is now completed automatically.

As for the future, AI seems primed to transform automated testing in the same way that automation transformed manual testing. 20 years ago, trusting an automated test to recognise the same minute differences in a video that human viewers do seemed impossible. In the near future, approaches to testing and monitoring that currently feel impossible will be made reality through AI and machine learning.



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