



Interviews with speakers

Rahul Verma, Jean-Paul Varwijk, Richard Bradshaw, Huib Schoots,
Stephen Blower, Erik Boelen, Rik Marselis and Martin Pol



These interview sessions were held during the first months of 2014 by Rob van Steenbergen. More information about Rob, visit his website www.chickenwings.nl - Twitter @rvansteenbergen

Some of these interviews were reviewed by Raji Bhamidipati - @peppytester - Thank you

And thanks to all interviewed testers for helping me out to learn more about testing conferences out of the perspective of the speaker!

Rahul Verma

Rahul Verma is a consulting software tester, author, speaker, coach and a serial entrepreneur from Bangalore, India. He is Director & Chief Testing Officer at Test Mile (www.testmile.com) and the founder of Talent Reboot (www.talentreboot.com). He is the author of Testing Perspective (www.testingperspective.com), one of the most referred websites in the technical areas in software testing.

He is known for his practical and unified view of the software testing subject. He is one of those rare testers in the world who have hands-on experience in software testing, development, test automation frameworks, agile testing, web security, API and white box testing, database testing, multiple programming languages (Java/Python/Perl/JavaScript) and web performance testing. He has been honored with multiple Testing Thought Leadership awards as well as Innovation in testing awards.

He has presented and published articles on a wide range of subjects related to software testing and Python. His experience of 12+ years in professional theater makes his presentations engaging and thought provoking. Some of his unique ideas to testing world presented across conferences and testing events have been around fuzzing as non-security testing technique, blending of test design techniques across multiple fields, test encapsulation & tests that think in test automation, test automation design patterns, UBPPA in the performance world, auto-regression in regression testing, notion of state in execution in test automation, introspection in test automation and so on.



There are a lot of conferences concerning testing. Do you visit other kinds of conferences and how are your thoughts about that?

I have presented and attended almost all conferences in India focused on software testing. My opinion is that most of these conferences are focused on testing services industry and lack the technical quotient needed for today's software tester. They lack presentations on serious test automation, performance testing and security testing, and most of the presentations are process oriented, even if concealing a promising technical topic.

Are you a visitor of conferences, or do you only go when you are invited to speak?

I have mostly attended conferences as an invited speaker or as a presenter selected by the process which the conferences follow. I mostly attend them for networking as most of the action happens off stage where ideas are discussed.

Why should people go to conferences?

People should go to conferences to confer, to critique, to open up their own ideas for debating and so on.

What's the best conference to go to in the world, or can you give a top 3?

I wouldn't be the right person to comment on that as I haven't attended any conference outside India apart from CONQUEST, Germany. My single vote goes for Google Test Automation Conference as that's the best I have attended. Second on my list are the conferences arranged by Testers Monthly Meet initiative in India. Even a given conference varies in its quality from one iteration to another. What I would like to attend is technical conferences in testing, which are rare to find.

Did you visit non-testing conferences, what do you consider to be the difference between those and test conferences?

I was a presenter at PyCon India, an annual conference focused on Python programming and its applications across multiple domains. The difference is the level of technical solutions that get discussed and innovative ideas that are presented. There is much lesser repetition than a typical testing conference. At testing conferences, most of the focus goes into creating fancy titles, putting old wine in a new bottle by creating new terms, discussion about processes or presenting vendor talks in the disguise of a paper.

What's your greatest success until now concerning talking at conferences?

My presentations don't move many minds as they are research oriented. When some individuals say that my talks changed their lives and their opinion about software testing profession, I consider that a success. With that parameter of a humble, non-nonsense measure of success, I have succeeded every single time.

Do you speak at non-testing conferences, if you do, is your presentation different?

I have presented at PyCon India on the topic of using Python and object oriented analysis and design for test automation. Most of my topics are a blend of development, testing and philosophies from unrelated fields like theater, movies, books, religion etc. So, frankly, I present non-testing topics at testing conferences.

What are you using for presentation tool, and why are you using that tool?

I use iMindMap, XMind for mind maps which I use for most of talks and even 4-5 day long workshops. Apart from that I use PowerPoint occasionally, Notepad++. Rest of the presentation (and most of it) involves using IDEs, command prompt, browsers and other interfaces as my presentations are demonstration oriented.

Have you got a technique in creating a presentation, or a process or procedure, can you describe that?

I use mind mapping a lot. My key technique is the lesser the text, the better the discussion. Present visually and have as much interaction, discussions and demonstrations as possible.

How to you prepare a proposal?

I look at my experience, recent research, mistakes, and projects and identify the idea I would like to present about. Then the rest of the proposal unfolds. My proposals have been rejected a lot of times. For example, I wanted to undertake a full day workshop on Parsing and Anti-Parsing and it was rejected with the reason – 'It won't sell'. So, sometimes people don't buy what they need as they don't know what they need. On the other hand sometimes unconventional proposals got selected, for example, my workshop called 'Anti-Boxing',

which focuses on various boxes testers are confined to and how to break out of it, with technical discussions.

When did you start as a speaker at conferences?

I owe my public speaking not to conferences but to theater. I have done professional theater since I was a child. Presentations are an extension to the same. My first talk at a conference, though, was in the year 2007. It was titled User Behavior & Performance Perception Analysis, which discussed how user's experience should drive the design of performance tests.

Have you got a golden tip for someone who wants to start speaking at conferences?

Speak!

Fear of speaking is something a lot of people have. Have you got tips to overcome these?

Fear is a good thing. Every time I speak I get afraid for the first 2-3 minutes, my throat is dry. I have learnt to hide it. Fear of delivering a bad quality presentation drives me. So, my tip is – Be afraid, but tame your fears.

Why do you want to speak on conferences?

On a lighter note, I like talking in general. Conferences are a good place to discuss and present one's ideas. It is also a great way to build one's own brand beyond his/her employer's name.

Have you got a 'favorite' subject, something you talk about regularly??

- Testing in relation to Object oriented programming, design and analysis.
- Breaking myths, challenging industry norms, debating about ideas floated by testing gurus

Do you think there are certain subjects missing at test conferences, which are they and why do you think so?

Technical topics are just not there. For example, there is a lot of focus on how testers should learn from music, religion, culture, doctors and so on, but no focus on how and why testers should learn programming. We are a community that believes in learning from the abstract rather than the obvious.

Have you got a tip for someone who wants to react on a Call For papers?

Suggest an idea that you would like to present on, not what the conference would shortlist.

Are there any book or blog tips for new (want to be) speakers?

Better than a book or blog or public speaking course, I would advise people to join a theater workshop for 2-3 months. It changed my life.

Jean-Paul Varwijk

Jean-Paul Varwijk is a senior test analyst at Rabobank International and owner of Arborosa Software Consultancy.



Jean-Paul has a broad experience in software testing in the financial sector and has for example tested and managed testing of Financial Data Warehouses, Risk Models, Payment Services and Mobile banking.

Jean-Paul considers himself to be a member of the Context-Driven School of testing and is a member of the Dutch Exploratory Workshop on Testing (dewt.wordpress.com). He regularly participates in workgroups, he has a blog (www.arborosa.org), he can be found on twitter (@arborosa) and Skype (arborosa). Jean-Paul regularly speaks at international software testing conferences and welcomes people to approach him for questions. And finally Jean-Paul is one of the founding members of the International Society for Software Testing (www.commonsetesting.org) and promotes an approach to software testing that emphasizes value and the role that skilled testers play in its delivery.

You are speaking on a lot of conferences the last few years. Do you always need to write proposals for them? Or are you also invited for events?

For most of them I have written proposals. My first international conference, Belgium Testing Days 2012, was kind of an invitation. The conference chair saw me present at a TestNet theme evening and approached me during the drinks afterwards. She then invited me to write a proposal. For two conferences I have gotten an invitation.

What was your first conference on which you did a presentation?

The first conference on which I did a presentation all by myself was at the TestNet autumn event 2011. I had done a few presentations and workshops before but those were always as a member of one of the TestNet workgroups or similar. I must say that I am not counting in company presentations. I did a number of them prior to the TestNet event but I haven't really been keeping track of those and I think they do not count in conference terms.

You remember your first time at a public conference, do you remember you being nervous?

I have always had a bit of stage fright when the need arose to stand in front of a group. And even today I still am nervous from a few hours before right up to the moment I walk into the room. But I believe that you should occasionally face your demons and just go for it. On my first conference I had really over prepared and afterwards even felt a bit disappointed that it hadn't been more difficult. Over time I have learned to handle the nervousness. And usually with the right level of preparation I am able to get myself into a kind of flow. That isn't to say that I always succeed in doing that or that it hasn't gone wrong in the past. I remember a talk where I was overconfident and miserably failed by my own standards. Luckily for me the audience did not share my disappointment and actually gave a pretty good evaluation score.



What was it that you thought you had failed that moment?

I was looking at the slides of my presentation and for the better part had lost the intended thread of my talk. You know the feeling when there is something you should know and it on the tip of your tongue and it doesn't come out. That is how felt after just a few slides. The slides consisted mainly of pictures with little to none text and

didn't help me at all. I was sure everybody in the audience was feeling cheated seeing my improvisation. Eventually I managed to pick myself up and deliver a story that didn't have the gripping storyline I had intended. It wasn't of topic but it just didn't have the extra that I normally like to add to my talks.

But still a good evaluation. So by means of the audience there was not a real problem. What would be the lesson learned for you?

The key lesson I learned was that for the better part the audience doesn't know what you were planning to tell or how you had planned to tell it. So if you manage to deliver a coherent, entertaining on topic story that offers the audience something they can take home they will, based on that, already appreciate the effort and the content. Or in other words. You do not have to stick to the script. You have to stick to the story.

Lately it seems more and more presentations shorter in time and then followed by longer discussion time. For example 30 minute talk and 20 minute discussion. What do you think about this development?

I think that generally speaking this is a good idea. However there seem to be a few preconditions to make it a success. First the audience needs to know that interaction and participation is expected. Secondly the presenter should have a talk that invites questions and reactions. And finally it requires good facilitation.

In my opinion if done well these kind of presentations deliver more practically useful information. But in order for it to be useful you as a listener you should be willing to go from passive to active.

Did you see such presentation style and participated as audience?

Yes I have both as audience and as presenter.

Is the way you write presentations for that form is different then?

Yes. In general I use less text in those kind of presentations. The content is, as a result of steering towards discussion, sometimes a bit more controversial or provocative. I like to get people to think and be critical.

I want to get back to writing of proposals. Could you explain how you 'develop' a proposal?

Usually I start a proposal in one of three ways. In order of preference / occurrence these are:

1. There is a subject I am knowledgeable about, have experience of and I am willing and able to share to world. I start collecting reference material and write bits and pieces that sometimes also end up as a blog post. And when I am lucky it fits to one of the conference themes and I write a proposal about it.

2. There is a subject I have general knowledge of and I would like to know more about or I want to be able to better use it in practice. And it so happens that there is a conference that is looking for that kind of subject. I get started to collect additional information for it enabling me to write the proposal. At that time I might not have much more than a general model of a presentation in my head. So getting a proposal accepted forces me to dig into it, learn and use it. (I never want to talk about something I do not know about and haven't actually use, to some extent, in practice.)

3. I really want to go to a particular conference and look up the conference topic. I go out and look for something that might fit the topic and in my opinion is possible to learn and get experience in between now and the conference and go for it.

Then there is the actual proposal. In my opinion a good proposal reflects that you understand the subject. You have gained understanding of it through practice. You are than able to link it either to the conference topic or you are able to convince that it is interesting even if it is not on topic.



Is in your opinion a proposal is a marketing tool?

To me it is not. In my opinion that would be a side effect. Personally I believe a proposal is a way of selling the story you want to tell. If, like myself, you want to either share what you already know and have used or if you need some incentive to learn more than getting yourself to do a talk at a conference is very good way of doing that. In order to get a slot on a conference you need to get past the initial hurdle of getting your proposal accepted. Well at least I still do most of the times.

Obviously there are presenters who get asked on a regular basis and it might be different for them. Also there are presenters who use talks to market their companies' ideas in order to get new customers.

Have you got more tips for writing proposals?

There are a few good blog posts on writing proposals I can recommend:

<http://didegrood.wordpress.com/2012/12/12/conference-proposals/>

[http://www.eurostarconferences.com/blog/2013/5/1/a-view-from-the-chair-with-michael-bolton-\(volume-4\)-\(1\)](http://www.eurostarconferences.com/blog/2013/5/1/a-view-from-the-chair-with-michael-bolton-(volume-4)-(1))

<http://blog.eviltester.com/2012/12/you-can-submit-to-eurostar-2013.html>

The most obvious tip I can give to anyone is:

RTFM – Read the conference theme, the proposal guidelines, or anything on the review process.

Can I ask you if you did write proposals that fit in your third category?

I have done twice of which one in the last few months. Neither of them have been accepted by the way. So it seems to be a poor strategy. But then again not trying is a sure miss.

So what are your favorite conferences or most anticipated to go to?

In general I like to go to conferences that have an active community element. So conferences that make people talk and do things beyond the presentations and workshops. Obviously the content matters but having good conversations, personal challenges and stuff to learn from others seems to be more rewarding. Also I prefer conferences where the presenters are open to conversation and discussion outside of their presentation slot.

Let's Test in Sweden, Agile Testing Days in Germany and LAWST style peer conferences, like for instance DEWT, are my favorite. I suspect CAST in the US would also be, but I haven't been there yet.

Large conferences like EuroStar have a different appeal. Not so much the community feel (although that is growing) but the overwhelming amount of talks and subjects are the biggest bonus there.

Richard Bradshaw

Could you tell me something about yourself and your adventures at test conferences?

I am an Independent Software Tester with nearly eight years of experience. I am still new to the software testing community, but loving being a part of it. My first year being part of the community was very much all-online, connecting with fellow testers on Twitter and getting into blogging (<http://thefriendlytester.co.uk>). This has since lead to be attending several conferences: two Selenium Conferences, a TestBash and more recently EuroSTAR 2014.

TestBash gave me my first introduction to public speaking consisting of a 99 second lightning talk (<http://www.ministryoftesting.com/2013/04/testbash-video-99-second-talks/>). While I don't believe it went so well, I caught the bug, I enjoyed being on the stage. This lead to me signing up for another lightning talks at the Selenium Conference in 2014 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=phS8aqe1A0g>, 17 minutes in) this time a whole 5 minutes!

During this time I have also been hosting a testing meet up in my city, #NottsTest (<https://twitter.com/search?q=%23NottsTest&src=typd>) this has been so rewarding, allowing me to meet local testers and build some great relationships. Also giving me a platform to discuss ideas and hot topics at the time.

Now, though, my time has come to give my first full talk, which is going to be at Belgium Testing Days in March titled "Page Object Pattern, Why, How and More". It's going to be a techy talk, but hopefully show people that coding, in the context of check automation, isn't that complicated and is fun!



You mention your first talk not going to well. What do you mean by that?

I was very nervous which lead me to forgetting 50% of what I had prepared. I still felt that I got my overall message across but felt disappointed that it didn't go as planned. Main lesson learnt though was that it isn't as scary on that stage as you think.

What have you 'been' before you became a tester? And what was the reason you started testing?

I haven't done anything other than testing in my career, aside from jobs around college and university but they don't really count.

I started testing after doing my sandwich year at Lloyds TSB as an Automated Tester during my degree. Lloyds were very generous with their training and certifications even for placement students. I did a QARun qualification while there and also my "ISEB" foundation. After graduating I wasn't really sure what to do, but one day I thought, I really enjoyed my placement year, I was getting to code and test. Coding was never my strong point during my degree but I enjoyed it but also enjoyed some of the evaluating modules, exploring standards/protocols, theory case studies and in particular a module called "Human Computer Interaction".

So at the time I saw a technical Testing career as a nice middle ground. And was sure I can use these certifications to my advantage, I did. I was able to avoid the competitive graduate schemes and after a week of applying to Testing roles I got offered three jobs, the rest is history.

Do you use what you've learned in "Human Computer Interaction" in your daily job in testing?

They're certainly elements of that course I have revisited. The course itself was very much focused on handheld devices, however we did look into things like how colour affects people, where a user's eyes are drawn to and how aesthetics can alter a persons' reaction or belief in a product.

With regards to my testing work now, I do believe this gives me an edge in User Experience, while the two are different skill sets, there is certainly a lot of crossover, so knowing a little can be really valuable to the companies I work at.

Why do you want to speak at conferences?

I enjoy learning and feel that conferences are a fantastic place to facilitate this. You are encouraged to send in your ideas; if successful you then spend time studying the topic in further detail and produce your talk. The next bit is also the reason I blog. You then share your ideas and open yourself up for feedback, which will be both positive and negative. While your blog has the potential to reach more people, at a conference your audience is in the room, they have paid to be there, they have chosen to attend your talk; they are likely to be more engaged. This results in fast feedback, if it's a facilitated conference you could be questioned throughout your talk, but you will almost certainly be questioned at the end of your talk. This is where conferences take the advantage, have you studied enough? If you have you will likely breeze the questioning, but the questions themselves will likely lead to you asking yourself further questions. If you haven't you will learn a lot very quickly. "Why didn't I think of that?" "What a fantastic point", "I have never thought about it from that angle".

But most important of all, those questions can be followed up post talk, in the lobby, at lunch, at the socials or my personal favourite in a local pub that evening.

Do you use this kind of follow up yourself actively? And why is the local pub your favourite?

If a talk has been really engaging I will always try to ask a question for a few reasons. One of those being that it helps cement these ideas but also gives me a reference point in my memory to relate the question with the talk, which I find helps me find this information in the future. Similar approach when I take sketch notes, the images act as the reference point, it's a hook you could say.

A pub / bar is a great place to talk Testing. People tend to be more relaxed in a social setting, a few beers obviously also helps with this. Also there is little pressure, people can be afraid of asking a 'stupid' question when there is a whole room listening, so when it's just you and a few others it can feel easier. But you get the opportunity to have a decent conversation with people, bounce questions and ideas back and to. Such conversations can also be the foundation for a future relationship, be it as friends or the basis for working together. This could be a job or a future collaboration on an article, talk or even a workshop.

There are different forms of conferences, you mention for example a meet up in your own city that you organized. What do you prefer?

They're certainly comparisons between conferences and meet ups, however I feel there objectives are different. I see conferences as a stage, a stage to share your ideas and experiences with a large wide community. With such scale though, comes the additional pressure to perform, while very rewarding the task for most is a daunting and frightening one. The meet ups are smaller, more personal and more accessible. I see my meet up as a safe place for people to meet fellow professionals in an environment where you are encouraged to share. Everyone has experiences to share, some people simply don't want to, some don't know how and others just need somewhere to do it. This place though has to be somewhere with little pressure, safe feeling but still with a level of respect to question those ideas and provide friendly feedback. This tends to be the case as people are voluntarily attending these meet ups, in their own personal time, not because there is a budget for conferences and some time away from the office.

With this in mind I would say that I prefer meetups because they can be viewed as a stepping-stone to conferences, an introduction into conferring, an environment to build confidence in sharing information and ideas. The first step to talking at larger events such as conferences.

Not directly related to the question but very important, both offer a place to extend your network, met fellow professionals, build some great lasting relationships and provide a fantastic social environment for all this to happen.



What's the best conference to go to in the world, or can you give a top 3?

From the conferences I have been to, EuroSTAR was on a completely different scale, size wise. But then as mentioned I haven't been too many. But saying that, TestBash had a certain charm to it, single track, great speakers and a variety of socials around the main event. I hear fantastic things about LetsTest, which I have decided to invest in attending this year, so hopefully that will leave up to the feedback of others.

I won't rate something I haven't attended, so based on the experience and friendships developed; I would say TestBash 2013 was the best conference I have attended thus far. Gave me my introduction to public speaking and was my first real insight into the test community.

Do you think there are certain subjects missing at test conferences, which are they and why do you think so?

Coding is a hot topic, there is still lots of debate about it today, but if you are a tester that does code there aren't many talks or workshops about coding. It's a different subject to cover in a talk; most tend to fall back to the theory with lots of examples. Workshops can work, but can be a lot of problems ensuring everyone's machines have all the required files, and if they don't the connection can soon die as they all try to get them, but it's not impossible, just difficult.

With that in mind I think it would be great for conferences to offer drop in sessions or clinics for want of a better name, where a respected / experienced tester offers their time one on one or for small groups. For example a WebDriver Workshop where a conference attendee could ask about a specific problem they are facing and they work together to create a solution. I have done this myself at conferences and witnessed others offering help via twitter, but not everyone uses twitter so would be great to see a conference offer this and advertise it. Perhaps remuneration of a free ticket would be too generous for such an offering, but some discount could be offered.

The TestLabs that are occurring more and more now are fantastic, I had the privilege of attending the TestLab at EuroSTAR, well I say attend, I pretty much spent all my free time there, was great, the clinics could be offered as an extension to the TestLab.

I feel this would improve a conference's offering, because while most attendees are generous with their time, it's never clear to all attending that people are willing to offer direct help. It also doesn't just benefit coding; it could also work for reviewing someone's approach to something, such as note taking or a report layout.

Huib Schoots

Hello, my name is Huib Schoots: tester, consultant and people lover. I love testing and I share my passion for the testing craft by coaching, training and giving presentations on a variety of test subjects. I have over fifteen years of experience in IT and software testing and I am experienced in different testing roles: from tester to test manager and from coach to line manager. I currently work for Improve Quality Services, a provider of consultancy and training in the field of testing.



Curiosity and passion are two main and important characteristics of me. And I consider myself as an agile and context-driven tester. I've read a lot and I attempt to read everything ever published on software testing or related to it. I am a member of TestNet and AST and I am a founding member of ISST and DEWT. I am also a black-belt in the Miagi-Do School of software testing. Together with 7 enthusiastic colleagues I wrote a book

about the future of software testing in 2012. I have a blog (www.magnifiant.com) and I am active on twitter ([@huibschoots](https://twitter.com/huibschoots)).

I live in the city centre of burgundian Den Bosch in the Netherlands together with Roos. With many shops, restaurants and pubs as well as nature reserve "Bossche Broek" within walking distance. It is a wonderful place to live. My hobbies are playing trombone in a brass band, photography, golf, games (especially strategic board games), travelling, diving, beer brewing and reading.

There are a lot of conferences concerning testing. Do you visit other kinds of conferences? How are your thoughts about that?

I mostly visit testing conferences, I simply do not have time to visit others. But I think people in IT should organize conferences together more often. Since we work together, we should talk about our work together. I did some testing courses with whole agile teams and they were awesome. It was great to see the team grow and developers get interested in testing. So I think there should be more room for mixed talks or other disciplines at conferences.

I did a workshop exploratory testing for developers last year and I utterly enjoyed it. It is great to see other disciplines interested in testing and we can learn a lot from each other. I also did several presentations for (project) managers about topics like agile testing. I wish I could do that more because I believe that progress in our craft can be boosted by making managers aware what testing is. I see a lot of misunderstanding and misconception around testing. Testing is often underestimated and undervalued. I hope I get the chance to train or do a presentation for hiring managers in recruiting excellent testers, since I see a lack of competence in spotting talented testers.

Are you a visitor of conferences, or do you only go when you are invited to speak?

I speak at 5 to 10 conferences a year. I do not have much time left to visit conferences. I do visit peer conferences and evening events by Agile Holland and FAT-NL. Of course I always

visit the events by TestNet and many of the evening events they organize. If I weren't a speaker at Let's Test I would definitely go there. It is awesome!

Why should people go to conferences?

Conferences typically are the place where you can learn the latest developments and opinions, submerge yourself into the testing mindset, confer with your peers, refresh your ideas and expand your network. So that is why I think every tester who is serious about learning and becoming a better tester, should attend conferences.

I wrote a blog post about that: <http://www.huibschoots.nl/wordpress/?p=263>



What's the best conference to go to in the world, or can you give a top 3?

There are many great conferences. Every conference has its own atmosphere I like EuroStar and Agile Testing Days. They are very good since they are big and attract interesting speakers. They also give me the chance to meet new people. TestBash is an awesome one day conference with an interesting community. CAST has a great community. But the very best is Let's Test in Sweden. I love that conference because it is context-driven, many of my closest testing friends attend and everybody stays at the conference center that is situated in the beautiful environment in the middle of nowhere. The evening events are awesome and since everybody is there, the community becomes really close. It is the perfect mix of learning, fun and networking.

What's your greatest success until now concerning talking in conferences?

You should ask this question to the people who attended my talks. I think my last EuroStar talk was good. I used a lot of music videos in it. It was rated very good, so I guess the attendees liked it too. I did the talk again at CopenhagenContext in January 2014 and the reactions were great there too. Content wise I think the best talk I did was "What testers can learn from Social Sciences". The research to do the talk was intensive and fun. John Stevenson helped me quite a lot and we Skyped a couple of times to discuss the content. Great process, I learned loads.

What are you using for presentation tool, and why are you using that tool?

I use PowerPoint and I love it. I tried mind maps and I didn't like it because it doesn't give you enough possibilities to create a nice lay-out. I also tried Prezi and I don't like it either. Prezi is nice if you want to have a simple and clean presentation. I use loads of pictures and photos and Prezi just doesn't work for me.

Have you got a technique or procedure in creating a presentation?

Not really, sometimes I just start creating slides right away, sometimes I write a story in Word and the story gets transferred into a talk and sometimes I use mind maps. In all cases I create something to dump my thoughts. Then I start reading blogs and articles that cover the same topics. I spend a lot of time polishing my talk and especially the slides. Creating beautiful slides takes a lot of time and gives me enough rest and focus to think my talk through.

How to you prepare a proposal?

I do not have a fixed method. I always carry a Moleskine and I take notes when I think of things I want to look into. Sometimes it results in a blog post, sometimes it results in a proposal for a conference. Last year I wrote a proposal especially for EuroStar. Most of my proposals come from a message I want to make, a story I need to tell or a topic that has my special attention.

When did you start as a speaker at conferences?

My first presentation was where demonstrations of automated tooling my company was selling. When I noticed I spoke quite easy and it was fun to do, I started teaching testing classes and do internal presentations at special interest groups. When I joined Polteq I met Martin Pol and Ruud Teunissen and they were doing many presentations at conferences and they infected me to submit to conferences. Before I thought only real gurus could speak at conferences. Since 2011 I am a regular speaker at many international conferences and I love speaking. I found out that in every project there is an interesting story to tell.

Have you got a golden tip for someone who wants to start speaking at conferences?

One golden tip? No, I have several tips for newbie speakers. Be passionate about your topic. If you smile and talk with enthusiasm, your talk will be great! Speakers are just human. Everybody makes mistakes and if you just keep talking and smiling, most of the people won't even notice. Prepare your talk but don't overdo. Don't write out your talk and don't memorize all the words. If you do, your talk will be dull and unnatural. Practice your talk and ask for feedback.

Fear of speaking is something a lot of people have. Have you got tips to overcome these?

Speaking is easy. Really! You just have to deliver a couple of talks to become more confident. So find a topic you're comfortable with. Practice to become more confident and just realize that you are allowed to make mistakes.

Why do you want to speak on conferences?

Several reasons. The most important is that I am an adrenaline junkie and I love being in the spotlight. The other important reason is that I want to change how the world thinks about testing. I think many testers don't realize that they actually know very little about testing at all. And that is why they don't do anything to get better. They are also not encouraged much by their colleagues. Testing is often underestimated. I guess everyone has examples of managers who do not value testing as much as we would want them to. Testing is often



devalued as “pushing buttons” and many believe “everybody can test”. I try to change testing by making people better testers, helping organizations grow and making managers and other stakeholders aware of what testing is (or can be) and how excellent testing can be faster, cheaper and better when done right.

Have you got a ‘favorite’ subject, something you talk about regularly?

I have several, but my most favorite topic is “how to become a great tester”. The testing community is dominated by standardization and I think many testers don’t realize that they actually know very little about testing at all. They don’t do anything to get better and I like talking about how to get better and talk about learning. A second topic I like to talk about is context-driven testing. I am a context-driven tester and by talking about it, I hope more testers getting interested in it.

Do you think there are certain subjects missing at test conferences, which are they and why do you think so?

I would like to talk more about how the whole team can do better testing with the whole team. I also get quite annoyed when people talk about testing in an agile context, they spent 10 minutes explaining what agile is... I would like to see more in-depth and advanced topics. That is why I love peer conferences and test retreats. In those type of conferences there is much more room for discussions and because there is no fixed program, the topics get the attention they deserve. In many context-driven conferences like Let’s Test and CAST the talks are shorter and at least a fourth of the total available time per talk is reserved for a facilitated discussion. To confer means “to discuss something with other people, so that everyone can express their opinions and decide on something” and I see way too many conferences where the talks are one direction and everybody just listens. I consider that a missed opportunity!

Have you got a tip for someone who wants to react on a Call For papers?

There is a story to share in every project you do. Don’t try to find the innovative, unique story that nobody ever shared before. Just share your experiences and tell people what they can learn from your experiences. If you are passionate about the topic, our audience will enjoy it.



Are there any book or blog tips for new (want to be) speakers?

- There are many books on storytelling and presenting:
- Whoever Tells the Best Story Wins – Annette Simmons
- Make to stick - Chip Heath and Dan Heath
- Resonate: Present Visual Stories that Transform Audiences
- Confessions of a public speaker - Scott Berkun
- How To Deliver A TED Talk - Jeremy Donovan
- Presentation Zen - Garr Reynolds

But there are many, many more. Check this

list: <http://www.goodreads.com/shelf/show/public-speaking>

There are several blog posts about writing god proposals for EuroStar:

- <http://www.eurostarconferences.com/blog/2014/1/29/dont-submit-to-eurostar-2014-unless>
- <http://blog.eviltester.com/2012/12/you-can-submit-to-eurostar-2013.html>
- <http://www.eurostarconferences.com/blog/2013/5/1/a-view-from-the-chair-with-michael-bolton-%28volume-4%29-%281%29>

I also like these posts:

- <http://lizgloyn.wordpress.com/2011/06/06/how-to-write-a-conference-abstract/>
- <http://gojko.net/2013/01/24/how-to-deliver-a-killer-presentation/>
- <http://www.techwell.com/2013/04/power-story-telling-software-testers>
- <http://erronis.nl/2012/08/09/how-to-craft-a-good-story/>

Watch a couple of TED Talk and observe how these people deliver their talks. But always stick to who you are, be yourself and practice! Practicing a lot helps!

Stephen Blower

With more than eighteen years of testing experience within a multitude of testing fields from gaming, internet service provisioning, gambling, financial services and version control organizations, Stephen Blower has seen the testing industry evolve from strict dogmatic practices to more flexible context driven ways of working towards delivering quality. Stephen is a strong advocate for tester recognition and he does not accept testing being left to the end. He often provokes debate on what is often seen by non-testers and testers alike as an industry stuck in the middle ages, non-dynamic and stagnant. To promote this he organizes a regular peer group for those involved within development where the tester's role is hotly debated and controversial topics are encouraged.

You've been visiting a test event this weekend I believe?

Yes I went to Copenhagen Context on Friday, the first one. Three of the six talks were interactive which I enjoyed. Although I had two people I've never met in my group who weren't really listening and when it came to the exercise, I had to drop in to coaching mode.

What does that mean "Drop in to coaching mode"?

Rather than trying to do the exercise together, I had to explain the exercise and then ask them questions to guide them in to the exercise. Which is still great for me as I'm trying to coach more at work.

Is that something natural for you, coaching?

No it's not natural to me in the slightest. I like to be in control, but telling people what to do; managing isn't the same in the slightest to coaching. You have to build trust, guide and try to draw out their knowledge. Without giving too much away, I try to answer most questions with deeper questions so that they can get to figure the problem out for themselves with my guidance. You have to be very patient.

That sounds like what Anne-Marie Charret is doing.

Yes, I've read some of her stuff and been on her webinar, I missed her tutorial at EuroStar though. Coaching is something I'm very interested in. I have a new tester, who has no experience and I'm enjoying teaching her. It's a great position to be in as she has no preconceptions of what testing is.

How do you even start off with that?

The first week for her was very much just sitting with me, whilst I drove, and her asking me questions and me asking her questions. I gave her some simple reading materials. First Lesson of BBST course which has a lot of basics. We have a session at the end of the day to go over what she has learned so I can find out what to do next, what she has picked up and what I need to go over again. It's a gradual learning process, with emphasis on the uncertainty of testing.

That sounds great, coaching with this approach. It is very difficult to think of questions that don't totally block the coached person.

That's one thing I've been very aware of, that is not to give her too much information, as she'll not retain it or become overloaded and not enjoy it. I try to make it fun. I make mistakes and when she notices we make a joke about it. It can be an intimidating position to be in, so I make it as much as fun as possible to try and reduce the pressure which could block learning.

Or are too easy, is that something you learned somewhere? Books, classes or courses?

I've read a small amount of blogs, but mostly talking to people and doing testing challenges and learning from others and then learning from the way I approach them when I give them to others and modifying my approach. I'm constantly learning and evaluating how I approach coaching, I'm very aware of what does and doesn't work and continually evolve my techniques. Michael Bolton has been a great help, doing testing challenges with him and some conversations we've had regarding how to approach coaching was useful.

Can you give an example of such a challenge (or are these secret?)

The answers are secrets, but not the name or aim of the games. The first one I did was the Dice Game, which I completely flunked and got angry with the group I was with, so that wasn't a good start on the RST course with Michael Bolton.

Then around the same time I did the Coin Game with Michael as well with a large group of people, we only solved it with some big clues from Michael. Basically this game is setup as the person running the game is a coin sorting machine and you the player have to determine what the sorting rule is.

Another is a Card Game called Show Tell, I did this with Paul Holland. I got close to solving it and this time I was on my own so no one else helping. I didn't actually solve but without giving the answer it's very difficult to say how close I got without giving the game away.

I've also created my own Testing Challenge which I've run on Twitter a few times and I've learned a huge amount from just running it. It's fairly fine-tuned now. It's a number sequence game and you need to determine my rule.

As you said you like interactive presentations, what kind of interactivity should I think of?

Audience participation, give them a problem after explaining some ways of approaching it. I'm not overly keen on the types that give little up front information and let you make mistakes. I'm not sure I learn much from them.

Give them some tools to begin with then give them an example and ask them to apply these to a particular problem, then evaluate afterwards in the debrief.

Would these kinds of presentations be more like short workshops then?

Presentation, interspersed with a short 10 min exercise yes. Then afterwards an interactive Q&A trying to get as many people's opinions on their approach as possible. I've seen people trying to do that with big audiences. Didn't always work. Big audience are probably a problem, 50 is possibly the limit, maybe a little more.

People at the back probably won't do anything and will feel left out and not involved so may not get much out of it in the end. You need to know the audience for sure, and the size.

At what events have you spoken at yourself?

I've spoken at Romanian Testing Conference which was my first talk. I then started my own Test Gathering which I run 6 weekly in Sheffield. I've spoken at Leeds Test Gathering, Nottingham Test Gathering, and Agile Yorkshire. I'll be speaking at Test Bash in March and I've submitted to CAST, I'll be submitting to Nordic Testing Days and EuroStar, so hopefully more to come.

So lots of experiences with the smaller conferences and going for the big ones?

I think that will give me some good experience, yes. EuroStar although it's a big conference

the numbers in the track sessions are not that huge, I spoke in front of 100 in Romania, and I'm going back this year to do a day's workshop with Simon Knight.

And the presentations you did, are they interactive, as you like them yourself?

No, I do ask questions through out to get some interactivity. I think those are very hard to make work as you've said. I would love to do one and it's something I'm thinking about. I did plan performing a little game in my first talk, but couldn't really think of anything that would work with my topic rather than being a gimmick.

What is / are the most important lessons you've learned when speaking at test conferences?

Don't be afraid to speak your mind, don't think that just because you know something others know too. The most important thing I believe is to tell stories, not blurb on about facts and stats. Yes use them if required but wrap them around a story. Telling stories is an obvious one, but because it's obvious I believe it's often forgotten about.

My first draft of my first talk was a disaster, it had one story for a 40 minute talk and the rest was just dry. I had it reviewed it Michael Bolton and he pulled it apart. Then we got into conversations about what I was trying to say and out of those conversations came lots of stories that I had, but hadn't included. I tried to steal one of his stories with his permission of course.

Couldn't the complete presentation be just one story?

Sure it can, that's what people are interested in. If you confidently put yourself in front of people and tell an impelling tale with relevance to a topic I'm positive they'll remember more about your talk than the one running in another track about metrics. Unless the metrics one is a story of how they failed/worked of course

Earlier you mentioned you are an organizer of a test event, the Test gathering in Sheffield. How did you come to start that?

I first got inspired by testing exactly a year ago after watching a James Back RST YouTube Video. I then attended the Leeds Test Gathering in February. After that I went to Test Bash 2013. At Test Bash I did a 90 second talk and in it I said I was going to start a Test Gathering in Sheffield. After being to the Leeds one and knowing there wasn't another one nearby me at that time I deemed that Sheffield could do with one, so I just started it up. I went to other Gatherings, Meetups on other subjects, met quite a few people to get the idea of what it was all about then I set a date and worked towards that and just did it.

I read some blog posts as well one by Erik Davis who was in a very similar position to me regarding setting one up so we kind of encouraged each other, even though he's in the US

How is it going with the gathering, are there enough people coming? When do you feel it is a success?

I get around 30+ people attending on an average. I've got sponsors, in fact getting speakers is harder than getting sponsors, which is OK for me, as I get to speak more. :)

I've got Sheffield University already sponsoring two events upfront this year and two other events also sponsored by other businesses. So I'm good for the next 4 on that side of things.

How to you get sponsors for TEST events? Promise them beer or something?

No the Sponsors pay for the beer and food for those that attended. Mostly because they like to support the event and get testers involved, small ulterior motive is they get to meet other

testers especially if they are recruiting. Shef Uni, sponsor me as they had a budget and the two people from there that come have really enjoyed coming so they just wanted to support it moving forward. They are academics so they are interested in what businesses do and also to spread the news of projects they are interested in doing with industry.

Well, it sounds great what you are doing out there. I really have to congratulate you with this initiative.

Cheers, I get a lot out of it myself and really enjoy doing them, we have a great collection of people plus I get to run some Testing Challenges.

You said "I first got inspired by testing exactly a year ago". As I remember, I think from a blog post, you've been in testing for longer, but rediscovered testing?

Yes, it will be 18 years in testing this year. I was more of a Factory Tester. I always liked testing but I didn't study it or do any extracurricular activities in the slightest. In fact once I got the ISEB Foundation Certificate that's when I thought I was an expert, unfortunately so did others I worked with. I got bored at work, I was looking for another job and I was just browsing around the internet and fell into CDT blogs, videos, articles and thought WOW, now this is what testing should really be about.

Does that also mean you discovered test conferences? Or were you a visitor already until then?

Nope, I'd never been to test conferences before last year, my very first was Test Bash last March. My first Meet up was Leeds, my second meet up was my own. My second conference was in Romania where I talked. I just went with the flow and soaked as much up as I could, and still do.

Didn't you know about test conferences before last year?

Yes I did, but I wasn't interested in them. I thought most were just about automation and tech things and mostly stuff I wasn't interested in.

I guess there are more testers that live this way. Any idea on how to reach out to them and convince them into going to test conferences?

You can't reach out to them and convince them into going to conferences as they just don't go. That's why running local gatherings can help. My next venture is to try and go in to local businesses and talk about testing and show that it's interesting and why it's interesting.

In fact that is something I'm very passionate about, in one way I want to actually get away from the idea that testing is the sole domain of a tester, that's all they do and no one else does very much of it at all. That's something I'm very actively doing in my current work place, changing the culture, changing the responsibilities of testers and what other's responsibilities are concerning testing.

Fortunately I'm getting positive feedback from management so far. At the last place I worked I actually got more positive feedback from management than from testers, but that's another long story.

Erik Boelen

Could you tell me something about yourself and your adventures at test conferences?

I am one of those persons who is passionate about testing. As a test coordinator and test consultant, I worked at a large number of companies to set up effective test processes. In addition to specializing in agile testing, I challenge traditional views of testing to better serve my clients in their specific needs. I am currently the Business Line Manager Software Testing at Testronic, a testing company with a strong focus on digital television solutions.

When it comes to events, I attended quite a few. It all started locally in Belgium around 2001 at the company I was working for at the time. I first started with some internal presentations and then moved on to client talks. Then, when I got the hang of it, I submitted a paper to the call for papers at EuroSTAR in 2003. They accepted, and that is actually the moment when my track as an event speaker started. Looking back now, I spoke 6 times at the EuroSTAR conferences, always with a focus on agile, flexible ways of testing. EuroSTAR was kind of the red line throughout all the talks I did.

Over the years, I did a keynote at 'TestNet Najaarsevent' on the practical side of agile testing. Besides this keynote, I also did a few presentations at TestNet over the years.



Another conference I like to present at is QA&Test in Bilbao. I talked there 3 times, with a highlight on last year, when I did a tutorial on TMMi together with Jan Jaap Cannegieter. He mainly talked about the theoretical part of TMMi, where I talked about the practical implementation by using an actual business case I worked for as a test coordinator.

In 2010, I was invited to speak at STAREast in Orlando. It was quite interesting to be on a stage in between great testing names like James & John Bach, Michael Bolton, Elisabeth Hendrickson and Scott Barber. That was mainly for me a learning experience, since talking to an American audience seems to be quite different from talking to a European audience. Especially when it comes to interaction. The level of interaction over there is at least ten times as high as anywhere else. It gave me the opportunity to learn how to handle this.

Besides all these presentations, I also did some others for example CzechTest, a small conference in Prague. That is where my talks on acceptance testing started. For this presentation I explained the way of working we used at an assignment on how to get most value out of your acceptance testers. This presentation was the basis for some other ones on this topic, for example the presentation that I will be giving at the Dutch Testing Conference this year in April.

Two years ago I took a small break from conferences and other events, but since the end of last year, during my tutorial at QA&Test, I noticed that I'm ready for a new conference year!

You mention that the level of interaction in the USA is higher than anywhere else, what do you mean by that?

If you tell a story on a conference in the USA, you will immediately see whether the audience

likes what you're saying or not. Because if they don't like it, they just get up and leave the room. So, you could say that the difference between the audience at the start and the end of your presentation gives you an indication of the quality of your presentation.

Another thing that you can clearly see is that they are focused on self-made men and slogans. I once saw a presentation there of someone saying he never got a high school diploma but still made 40.000 dollars in one week. That presentation was declared very successful by the audience.

I'm not saying that the presentations given over there are bad, but the format is different from what we are used to in Europe.

How do people react on presentations that are more 'European'? Should someone from Europe change his presentation to get more out of it in America?

I really think that a presentation for the US should focus more on one specific topic. We Europeans tend to focus on different subjects in one presentation. Some European presentations that I've seen could actually be split over different presentations if you go more in-depth on one of these topics. So, if I can give a tip on this subject, focus on one topic and work this out in-depth if you intend to do a presentation for an American audience. Actually, I'm sometimes in favor of such presentations because the information is sometimes too much in the short time that you get for conferences.

There are a lot of conferences concerning testing. Do you visit other kinds of conferences? What are your thoughts about that?

To be honest, I do not visit many other conferences besides testing conferences. This is because of two reasons. Firstly, there is the timing issue. There are so many conferences in testing that are so interesting that there is not much time left for others. I also have full time assignments to work on during the rest of the year. Lastly, I'm really into testing so my interest is always going to be in discovering new ideas in testing, based on presentations that I attend during these conferences.

What's the best testing conference to go to in the world, or can you give us a top 3?

For me the two best conferences on testing are EuroSTAR and the TestNet events they organize twice a year. So, I have a shared first place. And in the second place I would like to put the smaller conferences like QA&Test, CzechTest, Nordic Testing Days, ... These are a lot smaller, which also means that they are very personal and give you the opportunity to get 'closer' to the speakers and therefore also learn more from them.

For the conferences that I haven't visited yet; I'm very much looking forward to the Dutch Testing Conference in April this year. I'll be doing a presentation there and based on what I hear from the organizers, this looks very promising!

How do you prepare a proposal?

I always start with an idea, like most people. Then I start working on a mind map related to this idea. Every time something comes to my mind I add it to this mind map. If, after a couple of days, I notice no more ideas show up, I know that the subject is not worthwhile to continue.

Once I have a complete mind map, I start working on the proposal. When writing the actual proposal, you have to make sure that you mention the actual problem and give an indication of the actual solution you will present. This will trigger people to actually come and listen to your presentation.

Have you got a technique in creating a presentation?

Based on the mind map that I've set up for the proposal, I start working on my presentation. I don't have a real process as such. It is mostly a race against the deadline for submissions.

Are there subjects that you think that are missing at test conferences?

This is a difficult question. I think that most topics in testing are present at conferences. The problem is that we don't go enough in-depth on some topics. If we look at mobile testing for example, this deserves a full conference on its own. There are so many variances within this area that we can easily fill a full program. The same goes for testing in the digital television world. So, the topics are OK at general testing conferences, but sometimes I'm looking for a more detailed view on some topics. So, I think that in the future, we will evolve towards smaller, more specialized conferences.

Have you got a tip for someone who wants to react on a Call For papers?

Yes, but this is a tip for doing presentations in general. A lot of people tell me that they don't react on the call for papers because they have nothing interesting to tell. They think that everything they can speak about is already known by the audience. I strongly disagree with this. I think almost every tester has some experience he or she can share. And there will always be an audience for this. There are so many levels of experience present at a conference that all presentations ranging from basic to highly specialized will have an audience. I struggled with the same idea in the beginning, but after doing my first EuroSTAR conference in 2003, I learned that even a very simple approach to testing could inspire others. As long as you believe in your story and can link it to an actual case, there is a reason to participate in the call for papers.

Are there any book or blog tips for new (want to be) speakers?

Many years ago I followed a training on how to do presentations. Years after this I noticed that I never really followed the rules they prescribed in that training. Everybody has their own style of presenting. That is also one of the reasons why these conferences are so interesting. If everyone followed the same set of rules of doing a presentation, it would become quite boring actually.

I've actually only finished one book on how to do presentations and that is 'The presentation secrets of Steve Jobs: How to be insanely great in front of any audience' by Carmine Gallo. Not that I would ever pretend to be a speaker like Steve Jobs, but I did learn a few important lessons from it. When you read this book, you'll find out that even Steve Jobs did a huge amount of preparation for a presentation. And if you combine this preparation with the fact that you believe in what you are talking about, I'm sure that's a good start for your presentation.

Rik Marselis

Rik Marselis is a management consultant in Quality and Testing at Sogeti. Since Quality & Testing is not only his job but also his hobby Rik also spends time on this profession in other settings. He is vice-chairman of TestNet, the Netherlands independent association of testers, and (after having been board member for over 6 years) he is an active workgroup-member of the ISTQB board for the Netherlands.

Many people in the testing world appreciate Rik for his informative presentations with humorous comparisons. You may also have read texts written by him, as since 1998 he has contributed to 15 books on quality and testing both in the Dutch and English language. He often writes articles, white-papers, columns and blogs.



When did you start as a speaker at conferences?

The first time I presented at a testing conference was in 2004, the ICSTEST Netherlands in Noordwijk. Before that conference I had attended several conferences and I like this way of exchanging information and knowledge very much.

What was the subject at that first time?

It was titled "The test manager; from bogeyman to hero" and it was about the role a test manager can pick up in a Prince2 project. If he does it wrong nobody is his friend and they see him as the bogeyman, but if he (or she, of course) does it well then he is the hero of the project

That sounds somewhat familiar. Do you think this situation is still on going, about 10 years later?

Of course, the basic principles of testing haven't changed much over the last decade or even decades. We gain new knowledge but that doesn't mean old knowledge becomes out-dated.

So you could send in that presentation to a conference nowadays and re-use it?

Well, I don't think I would submit it now since Prince2 is not "hot" anymore. Everybody knows enough of Prince2 and the subject of how to fit test management in, is not a big issue anymore.

Back to test events, you mentioned, "I like this way of exchanging information and knowledge very much". In what way do you like that? What is this way at conferences?

My experience is that conferences are a great place to get inspired. I hear a lot of practical experiences and new points of view. And once in a while someone has a story about something completely new (the longer you are in the profession the less real new things you hear, but that's no problem since new interpretations of "old" knowledge can also be very valuable).

Besides that, I also have time, during the conference, to get some distance from my day-to-day work and I get new ideas about both projects and research & development items that I'm involved in. And let us not forget the social aspect. During a multi-day conference abroad the nights are filled with social activities where we have a lot of good discussions and friendly meetings at the restaurant table or at the bar.

And what is your main drive for wanting to speak yourself at conferences?

While, over the last 33 years I have acquired a lot of knowledge on IT in general and Quality

& Testing in particular. I really like to help other people improve their work using my experiences and knowledge. People that have seen me on stage might find it hard to believe that I'm basically a shy person, but when I'm allowed to discuss my hobby (which of course is testing & quality) I overcome the shy-ness and see presenting as a great opportunity to inspire and help people. To make it enjoyable I always try to make the talks somewhat lighter by using humorous comparisons or taking examples from totally different professions. For example: A little over a year ago I was speaking in Brussels about comparing the Test Director with a Film Director and for that I used a short clip from a James Bond movie where I pointed out something that was important for the tester but also mentioned an error from a cinematographic point of view. (By the way reading/watching James Bond novels and films is also a hobby of mine)



The glitch, was that the car that went on two wheels down an alley?

No the car on 2 wheels was in another film, which obviously is the best known error in any of the Bond films, and at that time they simply didn't have the budget and time to fix the error. Where have we heard that again??

I see your name a lot on conference programs. You spoke at TestExpo in Denmark and Norway, of course in the Netherlands and also on EuroSTAR in the last 10 years. Have you also presented at conferences outside of Europe?

In these 10 years I have presented at conferences in the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, Czech Republic, Norway, Denmark, Sweden, Spain and the United Kingdom. Next to that I also act as a trainer and besides the countries mentioned I have trained people in Finland and Austria. But I never spoke outside of Europe yet. That will change because I will do a training course in Australia next month.

Funny thing with EuroSTAR by the way is that I have presented at 3 conferences but I have been mentioned in the programme only once. The first time I presented I was stand-in for a colleague who had become ill the night before. And the second time we presented with a team but only the leader of the team was mentioned. The third time I was finally a speaker on my own ;-)

At all these conferences I take a lot of photos and that way I have already gained me some free entrance tickets as the official photographer. That's a nice way to combine hobbies again.

Indeed, you have lot of event's photographs on your website. Good for people to check around. Is taking photographs helping with the social part of a conference for you?

Of course, being a photographer is a great way to walk up to people (I already mentioned that I'm a bit shy) and to start a conversation.

Another advantage of being a photographer is that you can walk in and out of rooms without having to be embarrassed. So in the rare event I am attending a presentation that is not interesting I have a good apology to leave the room. Also it is a great way to stay in touch with the people I meet during the conferences, send those emails with photos and have some continued discussion about our wonderful profession.

So, if someone needs a photographer for their event, they know who to ask now.

Indeed, they can always invite me. And as a package deal I can not only take photos but also do a keynote presentation and/or a tutorial ;-)

Do you also get the opportunity to visit other kinds of conferences? Any non-testing conferences?

Last February I was selected as a presenter at the Agile Dev Practices conference in Potsdam, but seeing the number of testers we can debate whether that was or was not a testing conference. And last November I was speaker at an Agile conference in Amsterdam, where all aspects of the Agile mind-set were discussed and I of course covered the subject of quality and testing.

The nice development is that in Agile testing and the other disciplines are not separate anymore. Finally all IT-people only have one goal: working software that fulfils the needs of the stakeholders.

Still a lot of unknowns about testing though with 'the others', how was your talk received?

Testing in Agile always gets a lot of mixed reactions. But one of the starting points of the Agile mind-set is that we should create an IT-system that supports the user. And good testers can do an awful lot to support the rest of the Agile team in reaching that goal. That is because testers are more aware of the need to work risk-based than the rest of the IT-people and also testers are more aware of the different aspects of quality, especially the non-functionals.

Do you tell your story in a different way when talking to such a group of people?

Well, I try to connect with the audience so I use some different examples and sometimes a different angle. What helps of course is that in the first half of my career I was a developer myself. Although I also was a tester, because in my basic training as a COBOL programmer, back in 1980, I already learned that no program is finished until the test set is delivered with it, and executed without any problems.



There are a lot of testers that maybe want to speak at conferences too, but have a bit of fear of speaking or are shy. Have you got tips to overcome fear and shy-ness for them?

The best tip is to stay close to yourself. I for example quickly learned that I shouldn't tell jokes; I simply can't make people laugh that way. But I discovered that

using humorous comparisons I can also get a smile on people's faces.

Also don't think your knowledge isn't much. On conferences there are many audiences. But quite a large part of the audience consists of people who are relatively new to the testing profession and they want to hear practical tips about day-to-day work. So if you are an experienced tester yourself your experience is more than they know and thus can help them. Also I noticed that you shouldn't be afraid to present the 100th (or so it feels) presentation on something like product risk analysis, many people still struggle with it. Let alone the test design techniques, I now very few testers that are really applying multiple test design techniques in an efficient and effective way. So we definitely can do with some more presentations on that.

To practice you should start teaching. Training courses for your peers are a good way to gain confidence in speaking for an audience. And the next step is a presentation for some colleagues at an event within your own company. Or at a special interest group, like TestNet in the Netherlands. After you have obtained some experience this way you can start sending proposals to conferences. But don't expect to be selected the first time. You will need to learn to write proposals that appeal to the selection committee. Which is not too difficult. You have just to make sure that the text is clear and doesn't have many different messages. The title must attract the attention. And the proposal must not be too long because the selection committee members have to read a great lot of proposals so they hate lengthy texts.

And finally proposals based on your own experience have much more chance than general presentations about vague theories.

What would you consider to be the best 3 conferences you visited? Is it possible to give a top 3?

A top 3 is very difficult. But you can imagine that TestNet is at the top of my list, since I am involved in organizing the TestNet conferences for about 10 years now and we have over 500 visitors each time. EuroSTAR is a great opportunity to see a lot of "big names" together, but also to see many friends from the testing community. And in 2012 and 2013 I have been at the TestExpo's in UK, Denmark and Norway and I must say these were very nice conferences. I hear a lot of enthusiastic stories about other conferences. Actually nowadays there are so many conferences that it would take all my time to visit them all. Unfortunately I also have to do some work once in a while. Speaking at conferences of course is also mostly during work-days, but it really feels like a hobby!!

Martin Pol

Could you please introduce yourself with a short biography?

Back in 1983, after having worked for a couple of years in the operations area of the early mainframes both as an operator and systems programmer I was drawn into development and more or less coincidentally full time into testing. Since then I was able to play a significant role in helping to raise the awareness and improve testing worldwide. I have gained experience by managing testing processes and implementing structured testing in many organizations in different branches. I was responsible for the creation of the structured testing approach TMap and the Test Improvement Model, TPI. I have written many books on these topics which have been translated into many languages. I'm also co-author of the best-seller "Testing Cloud Services".



Over the years I have become a regarded presenter (keynotes, tutorials and track presentations) at conferences and training sessions throughout Europe, North and South America, India, China and Australia, e.g. American STAR conferences (>30), EuroSTAR (>15), LatinSTAR, AsiaSTAR, PNSQC, SPIndia, ChinaTEST, ALATS-Brazil.

I have presented about (of course) TMap, TPI and Cloud Testing, but also about Test Outsourcing (TOGA), TPA, TI on a Shoestring and the Evolution of Testing. I have also had the pleasure to chair quite some conferences, e.g. EuroSTAR for three times. I'm currently working for Polteq Test Services, based in The Netherlands and Belgium, and still active in the testing practice every day.

There are a lot of conferences dedicated to software testing. Do you visit other kinds of conferences? What are your thoughts about attending such conferences?

I was invited to speak at a couple of Software Process Improvement (SPI/CMM) events both in Europe and in India. This experience extended my thinking and I started asking myself questions such as: Is our working too structured? Are we too narrow minded? Are we process focused?

When the Cloud started to become of interest I attended a big German development conference which was outside the testing scene. This helped me to get an understanding of these changes and it's the impact on testing.

I believe that for effective well informed testing, it is very important to keep track of what's going on in the rest of the world.

What do you consider to be the difference between those and test conferences?

Test conferences are dramatically avoiding commercial influence in the speaker's program. In general commercial test companies put a lot of effort in Research & Development which results in the most interesting solutions. These are mostly presented in a special commercial sessions organized in a corner of the test conference in competition with often old news, presented by conference in-crowd. That's completely different elsewhere.

Do you speak at non-testing conferences, if you do, is your presentation different?

I spoke a couple of times at Software Process Improvement (SPI/CMM) conferences. The

only difference is that you have to take some time to “explain” testing. In general when speaking for a group of non- testers: beware that they look at testing differently, mostly as an unavoidable evil.

In what way did the SPI CMM events open your eyes? Can you give an example or a moment that helped you?

As a test pioneer I grew up with extreme discipline. Under pressure of auditors and for instance the FSA (the Financial Services Authority) we defined and detailed every step in the process. The (controllable) process and the documentation became more important than the testing itself. For me, looking into CMM/SPI scene was like looking in a mirror. Many organizations were just focusing on the next CMM level and forgot about the customer targets. This helped me to think less thoroughly, focus more on the best test and solutions for the customer.

Are you a regular visitor of conferences, or do you only go when you are invited to speak?

I sometimes attend a conference without contributing as a speaker, mostly because I want to know more about a certain subject or for commercial reasons, as a representative of my company.

Why should people go to conferences?

To speak, to listen, to meet peers, to ask, to discuss, to exchange info, to learn about innovations and to have fun.

What's the best testing conference to go to in the world, can you give a top 3?

1. The complete yearly offer of Dutch SIGIST (TestNet) events
2. UK SIGIST events
3. The STAR's (STARWest and STAREast in the USA and EuroSTAR)



Why do you think commercial sessions should be more in the spotlight at test conferences?

Other conferences are able to organize a perfect mixture of high level (commercial) innovations and practice. This also attracts business representatives and IT-management; people we normally don't see at our conferences.

What's your greatest success until now concerning talking at conferences?

I addressed over 25 Keynotes over the years. I consider the fact that I'm asked back over and over again to present at world's most prestigious test conferences as my greatest success.

What are you using as your presentation tool, and why are you using that tool?

PowerPoint. I grew up with the tool and it still meets my requirements.

Have you got a technique in creating a presentation and can you describe that?

I start finding out about the audience, background, knowledge of testing, culture, native language, objectives, the subject, the message (>1 <4), etc. In other words: What will the audience learn; what are my points? After that I use my “fish format”: the fish-head, the body and the tail. The head is the introduction part (5-10%), the body the story (80%) and the tail the summary. Bringing the right story in the particular scene is most important. It’s not about you as a speaker!

In what way do you look at the culture, what do you mean by that? Also, what do you mean by finding out about the native language?

A speaker should try to predict the way the audience will pick the talk. In fact the culture, etc. defines how to address the message. Culture relates to the country, the maturity of the



organization, the type of systems. A couple of examples: Chinese people are used to “follow the leader” and governmental organizations tend to strictness. It requires quite some maturity to successfully apply Agile, Exploratory and Rapid Software Testing. I found out that Finnish attendees only ask questions afterwards and of course it differs whether you’re talking for financial services testers or “Google-ish” guys. About the native language: It has quite some impact on the wording, the time and the questioning if you’re

talking to a group of people that hardly or even not understand English and you have to work with a translator. I have experienced this phenomenon in China, Brazil and Mexico.

Have you got a golden tip for someone who wants to start speaking at conferences?

- Learn (and practice) the basic techniques and tricks for presenting
- Start locally, within your own company or interest group (SIGIST)
- Stay within you own expert area and expand knowledge and experience over time
- Don’t act funny because you think you’re supposed to do so
- Act naturally, be yourself!

Fear of speaking is something a lot of people have. Have you got tips to overcome these?

Train, train, train. I personally attended rhetorical classes before I started presenting in public.

Why do you want to speak at conferences?

Because I enjoy it. Because I think I have something to share with the community. And for commercial reasons, as a kind of pre-sales activity for the companies I’ve worked for over the years.