



# QA — MIND THE GAP

*Creating a “Shift Left” and “Reach Right” Mentality to Bridge the Gap in Understanding Quality Assurance.*

*Ultimately, QA is about causing something not to happen. And it’s not just department-, person-, or a process-specific — it’s a mindset that has to permeate throughout organizations. It’s officially time to “mind the gap.”*

**O**ver the past few weeks, I have taken an informal poll among my friends and coworkers throughout healthcare as to what the term “QA” means to them in the context of digital marketing and e-solutions. While almost to a person, they have had consistent answers to what the letters actually mean (quality assurance), there has been wide ranging answers as to how that assurance can actually be achieved.

On the technical side of the house, the conversation centered on detailed descriptions of coding, functionality, and platforms. On the account side, the answers included strategic discussions, proofreading, and MRL reviews, as well as nebulous descriptions of digital issues. On the client side, they didn’t care how it got done, just that it did, and that the execution was flawless.

Once my research was done, I couldn’t help but hear the voice of the lovely British woman who warns passengers upon entering the London tube: “Mind the gap.” And oh, is there a gap.

## Identifying the Gaps

Now the good news, although there was no consistency in describing the functions and features of good QA, one thing was abundantly clear, every single person, regardless of their department knew when it was missing, and everyone interviewed believes that we, as an industry, must do better. The reaction to the question about what happens when QA is skipped or compressed was visceral. It was laced with words that aren’t fit to print in this upstanding magazine. It manifests itself in the form of website bugs, platform malfunctions, misspelled words, nonexistent strategies, missed deadlines, and project overruns. It’s the silent killer of projects, reputations, and perhaps, even careers. (Look no further than the re-

cent launch of the Healthcare Insurance Exchange [healthcare.gov].)

To attack this issue head on, our agency recently joined forces with Abelson-Taylor to host an industry summit in Chicago. We wanted to hear from many perspectives, so the audience and speakers included representatives from the client side, agency side, testing companies and other technology providers. While acknowledging the complexities of today’s marketing landscape, the ultimate goal was to bring together those who form the ecosystem of healthcare marketing in the hopes of emerging with a working document that could begin to provide QA best practices for our industry.

## Getting Proactive

Throughout the day, there was much discussion about a “shift left” and “reach right” paradigm and how it’s time to switch our mindset about QA; from a reactive “fix it” mentality, to a proactive prevention attitude. We do that by communicating better as internal teams and with our clients. We do it by “reaching right” to ensure that our teams, at the end of the mousetrap building, understand strategically what we are trying to do. And they help by “shifting left” and explaining what exactly it is they need to do their jobs right, helping those of us “non-techies” understand, at a high level, the subtle or not so subtle nuances of multiple operating systems when launching websites, apps, etc.

We do it by borrowing a Six Sigma concept and adding “Critical” to Quality “pause points” throughout a project to check, recheck, and start again. In order to that, we must prioritize QA to our clients by explaining that, although it may have the appearance of adding time and money to a project, it will more likely save time and money in the long run. And for digital projects, more time should be spent collectively reviewing the documents in their early stages,

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even when the content seems to be directed for review by someone in that specific discipline. This includes documents that highlight technical requirements, functional requirements, feature requirements, etc. These are important for everyone in the continuum to prioritize, understand, and edit when project scopes change.

## A QA Evolution

Just as marketing technologies have evolved, it’s now time to acknowledge that the traditional linear, tail-end process of QA must also evolve. Ultimately, QA is about causing something not to happen. And it’s not just department-, person- or a process-specific, it’s a mindset that has to permeate throughout organizations. It’s officially time to “mind the gap.”

Stay tuned and check the website [stateofqa.com](http://stateofqa.com) for more information about the QA Summit, subsequent white papers, and how we can all advance the right mindset. We are interested in your thoughts. **PV**

**GA Communication Group** is an independent communication and marketing agency focused on healthcare, digital, and consumer markets.

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