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BenchmarkQA and 3M Host Agile Event Focused on Quality Assurance

Minneapolis, MN, August 6, 2007 — BenchmarkQA welcomed Twin Cities Quality Assurance professionals to a three hour event focused on Agile software development. Representatives of BenchmarkQA, 3M SEMS division and HighJump (a 3M Company) presented, followed by a panel discussion that enabled attendees to ask questions of and learn from their peers about how to take advantage of the best that Agile has to offer. The underlying theme of both the presentations and panel discussion included these key points:

- True Agile is not necessary; a blended approach can be equally successful. The intent of Agile is more important than the specifics.
- The tools selected to manage backlog, releases and iterations are essential to success and should be easy to use, available to the entire team and provide data for reporting.
- Quality Assurance becomes a shared focus in Agile and is incorporated in every step of the development process. Agile methodology supports QA's consistent involvement.
- Without a structured and disciplined process, any methodology will fail – even Agile.
- Create just enough documentation to add value. Documentation can be simplified and reduced with Agile but is still critical.
- When launching a new Agile effort, great return on investment can be obtained by engaging with external experts who have learned through experience how to make Agile work and can provide a third party objective view of your needs.

Betty Schaar, Certified Software Quality Analyst and Senior Consultant with BenchmarkQA presented an overview of the history and key principles of the Agile methodology. She included tips on how Agile and Waterfall methodologies can be blended together when traditional activities or deliverables are mandated. According to Betty, "You can benefit from Agile even if you can't follow purist Agile. As long as the development team understands the principles of Agile (which stresses team collaboration, verbal communications, flexibility, and fixed length iterations), a hybrid Agile approach can be applied with existing Waterfall processes." Although Agile is very flexible and requires less structured documentation, Betty assured attendees that Agile does not provide team members with a "Get out of Documentation Free" card. There are many reasons to create good documentation (subsequent system maintenance, training, future buyouts or mergers, and audits) but you don't need to document everything in writing up front, as in Waterfall. Betty also provided tips and resources to help companies get started with an Agile methodology.

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Adam Henry, Development Manager and Agile Coach at HighJump Software, gave event attendees an inside view of HighJump's use of Agile processes with local and distributed teams in the U.S., China and Chile. According to Adam, HighJump has proven Agile to be a more effective process than a traditional, document-driven approach to software development – demonstrated by a reduced regression cycle, increased frequency of software delivery, reduced project waste (i.e. documentation and rework due to misunderstood requirements), and increased software quality. Adam shared Keys for Agile Success for both organizations and individuals, highlighting the importance of leadership and corporate commitment, personal responsibility, adherence to core principles of Agile, and daily communication.

Brian Hackerson, Technical Manager for 3M's Software, Electronic and Mechanical Systems (SEMS) division, focused his presentation on the importance of having a defined process, then configuring the selected tool to support the process. Brian spoke about their use of Team Foundation Server (TFS), a Microsoft offering for source control, data collection, reporting, and project tracking for software development projects. Brian discussed the benefits of using a total integrated solution such as TFS to manage Agile projects end-to-end, allowing for requirements traceability and ease of reporting.

Following the three presentations was a panel discussion including panelists Michael Johnson, QA Manager for MakeMusic, Inc., and Jessica Vasquez, Quality Services Supervisor for MoneyGram. The panel of five fielded questions from attendees related to every aspect of Agile, from planning and implementation to success measurements and QA support.

BenchmarkQA Vice President of Operations Molly Doyle Decklever is very pleased with the amount of interest in the Agile methodology. "Agile emphasizes the importance of collaboration between development and testing resources, and requires an expanded role for quality assurance professionals from the beginning of product inception. The proven success of Agile is drawing more and more of our clients to consider implementing it. We are pleased to see this trend because within the Agile model, our consultants are well positioned to provide real value to our clients by reducing time to market and over-all development costs."

BenchmarkQA, headquartered in Minneapolis, MN, has provided exceptional quality assurance consulting and testing services to its clients for more than 20 years. BenchmarkQA helps software project teams deliver high caliber software with greater efficiency and cost control, through process improvement strategies, training, guidance and the productivity of highly-skilled QA industry professionals. As a service to the Twin Cities QA community, BenchmarkQA offers educational events on a quarterly basis. For more information, please visit www.benchmarkQA.com.

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For additional information about this event, or services available through BenchmarkQA, contact Molly Decklever, VP of Operations, 952.392.2384, molly.decklever@benchmarkQA.com.