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## Quality Time

For Daniel Bharadwaj, the ultimate payoff of quality is simple: happy customers.

As head of quality control at billing-services provider Billtrust, Mr. Bharadwaj knows the best way to keep customers happy is for his company's products to function seamlessly.

That can only happen if quality is woven into every part of the project. Yet the Billtrust team must balance that quest for quality with a need to make adjustments on the fly as technology, specs and requirements shift. That's where the company's solid project management comes into play.

***Your company recently launched a new cloud-based platform, Invoice Central. What were the potential stumbling blocks you identified as you worked on the project?***

One of them had to do with the notion of acceptance of change. Companies don't want to mess up their billing. When they move from in-house to outsourcing billing, it's a leap of faith. So our challenge was to educate our customers about the e-tools at their disposal.

From a project management perspective, the challenge involved how to prioritize features. We started with a huge list, but we knew we couldn't be in development mode forever. So we had to determine the handful of key features that customers would quickly embrace, and what we could roll out later. We prioritized according to criteria such as impact and features requested by customers.

***Did you use a particular project management approach to develop Invoice Central?***

We used agile approaches. For example, instead of having a prolonged documentation phase where we wrote down every requirement and then built each in a traditional waterfall methodology, we had a backlog of features we wanted to build, and we chunked them into smaller sprints. Being agile allowed us the flexibility to change, in case during development another feature gains more weight and needs to be delivered first.

We also had to ensure that the quality of the product was not compromised. We did that by making sure that what we changed didn't jeopardize what was already working and that it met our new requirements. This was done through regression testing, a combination of automated unit and functional tests. The quality team also had to be prepared to say, "We're not going to market with this yet. We're not ready."



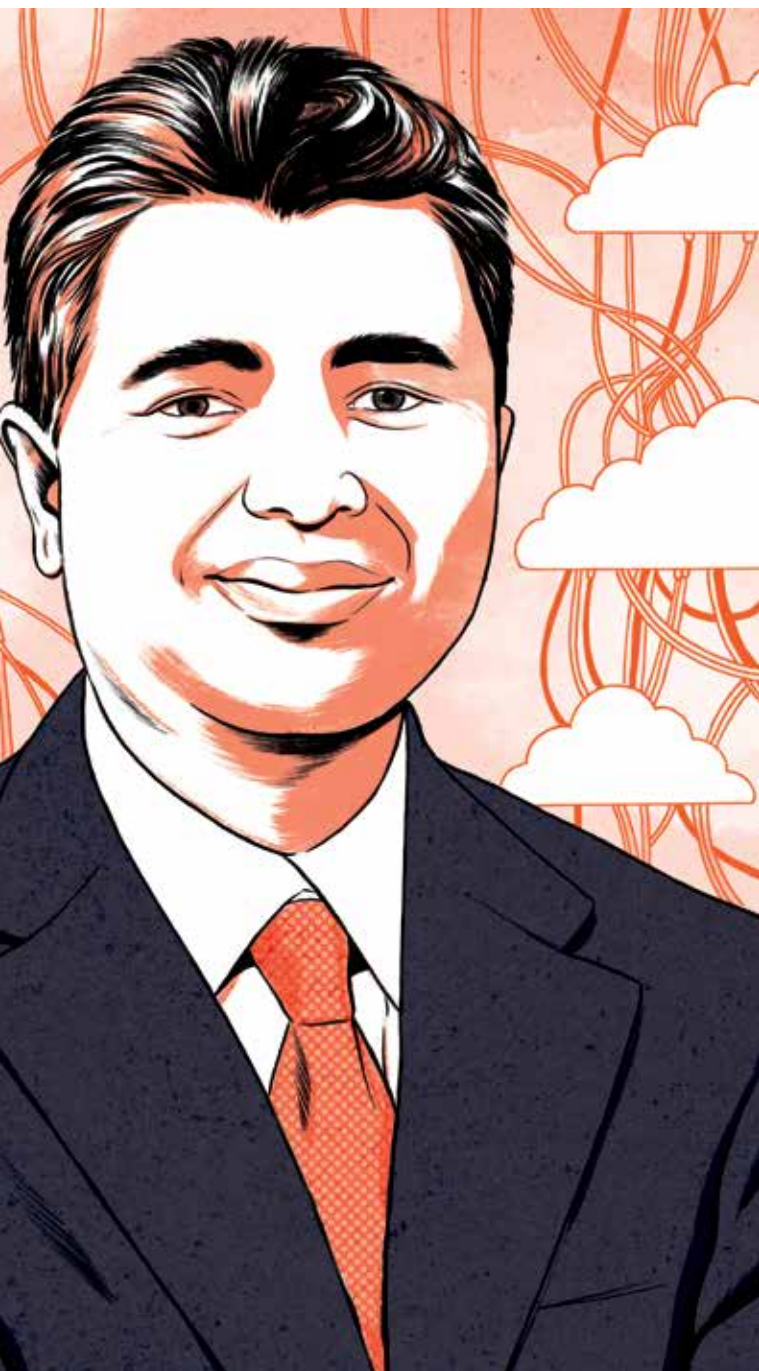


ILLUSTRATION BY JOEL KIMMEL

### ***How do you keep projects on track and meeting quality standards?***

Every team member has a defined set of goals each is accountable for on a daily basis. In addition, our team structure is such that everybody chips in to help every aspect of the project—developers help the testers, the product manager helps during the testing phase, and so on. Previously, if the developer met his or her deadline but there were bugs in the testing phase and the project was delayed, the blame

“Quality is one of the pillars of good project management. It’s my job to ensure that the overall quality of each project leads to the release of quality products.”

would fall on the testing group. But now, the whole core team is accountable for the release date. There are no silos—there’s just one team.

### ***How do you balance the need to get a project out the door with quality assurance?***

No one wants to compromise on quality, but if you’re 10th to market, that’s not as good as if you’re number 1 or 2.

To walk that line, we stick to the fundamentals of project management but also consider the environmental factors that we’re working in. For example, it’s not realistic to take a month for planning in this industry. So we build a very focused two-week plan instead and still spend a few hours up front to create that plan. **PM**

### ***Small Talk***

#### ***What three words describe your dream project?***

Challenging. Exciting. Useful.

#### ***What’s on your bookshelf?***

Lots of business and personal development books. I’d rather read something constructive.

#### ***Any guilty pleasures?***

Chess. I have a chessboard in my office and play against other people in the company.