

# **“Our Marketing Is Up Fog Creek” And What We Did About It**



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*Editor's Note: Patrick McKenzie has done some work with Fog Creek last October and this May, focusing on improving our marketing. We invited him to write a guest post about what he has done and where we see ourselves going, so that other software companies can learn from our experiences.*

Fog Creek is an enormously successful software company which, for the last ten years, has made a name for itself by producing wonderful software and being a great place to work. It's so famous for that that it never had a marketing strategy other than being Fog Creek. This served it very well for a long time, but it didn't look like it could continue forever, so they brought me here last year to improve their website, SEO, conversion funnels, and the like. They've generously allowed me to share some of what we have done.

This is the first post in a continuing series, in which the Creekers and I will be examining where we were, what we did, and what sort of results we have achieved on the marketing side of things. We hope other software companies will be able to learn from our experiences. To that end, we're happy to announce [Building Great Software Companies](#), a collection of essays, reports, videos, and tutorials from Fog Creek staff where we share what we've learned over the last decade. Just like sharing open source software enriches the entire community, sharing knowledge of the non-technical aspects of running a software business helps us all. We're happy to be in a position where we can give back.

## **Step 1: Taking A Fresh Look At An Old Site**

Fog Creek has a very democratic workplace environment, where changes are largely made by consensus and engineers have responsibility for areas of individual ownership. Someone owns FogBugz's internal search. Someone owns Kiln's Mercurial integration. Someone owns getting catered lunches organized every day for 30 ravenous Creekers and the folks working at StackExchange.

*No one owned the website.* As long as it kept running, it was no one's job to monitor, measure, or improve it. This resulted in the team tending to update the website about once every release cycle — typically, at the yearly launch of the new version of FogBugz, Fog Creek's flagship software product.

So I spent a few days comprehensively reviewing the website. We got the whole company together and stepped through the site, one page at a time. For many, it was the first time seeing some of the pages which were critical to making the rent

every month. And the pages were... substantially less compelling than the software the team at Fog Creek spends so much effort polishing, in a way that was inhibiting users from actually getting to use that software.

Let's start with the front FogBugz page. Think quick: you're here to see if FogBugz meets your software team's [bug tracking](#) needs. What do you do?



And with some annotations:



*Users had to fight the website* to get into the 45 day free trial of FogBugz. Many did not even know FogBugz had a free trial, because you could read pages (and pages, and pages) of text on the site before first encountering an invitation to try it out.

The most clicked on element of the page, by far, was the video. It didn't do a great job of convincing people to try the free trial — they ended up abandoned on a page festooned with YouTube branding. The second most clicked on element, the yellow “FogBugz 7 Now Available” button, probably struck many users as leading to a free trial. Nope. It lead to a page of descriptions of new features in FogBugz 7.

How did this happen?

## **Our Main Product Took Over Our Marketing Even When It Wasn't Our Main Product Anymore**

Fog Creek is a company by engineers, of engineers, for engineers. Their engineers ship great software.

FogBugz is historically a product which one downloads and hosts on one's own server. This method of distribution dominates much of how life at Fog Creek works:

- ***Why do we have a yearly release cycle?*** Because after we ship a new version we need it to be installed on customers production systems, and frequent updates make them very unhappy with us, so we make sure it gets done absolutely right the first time.
- ***Why does our software even have a version number?*** Because it ships yearly, and you need to know to buy the next version, or we can't afford lunches for everyone and an office next to the New York Stock Exchange.
- ***Why do we do one big marketing splash a year?*** Because marketing happens around the yearly release. We spend 90% of our energies creating software for that release date — clearly, when that gets exposed to the public, that is the value we are creating and that is when we should do marketing.
- ***Why does the website only change once a year?*** Because why would we

change it if we didn't have a big marketing splash?

Some years ago, Fog Creek released a new version of FogBugz: FogBugz On-Demand (hereafter FBOD), which is a hosted software-as-a-service. This was a huge, huge win for Fog Creek:

- Sales are up, significantly: FBOD opens up new markets for bug tracking among companies which couldn't or didn't want to administer their own FogBugz servers.
- Support costs for FBOD are an order of magnitude lower than installable FogBugz, largely because the environment is predictable and under Fog Creek's control.
- FBOD supports a much faster cycle of iteration than installable FogBugz does. Changing the downloadable product takes a year, but changing FBOD takes only about a week.

Five years ago, Fog Creek was a successful software company. Today, Fog Creek is a successful SaaS company with a sideline in selling downloadable software. ***This changed the company, but the company didn't change with it.***

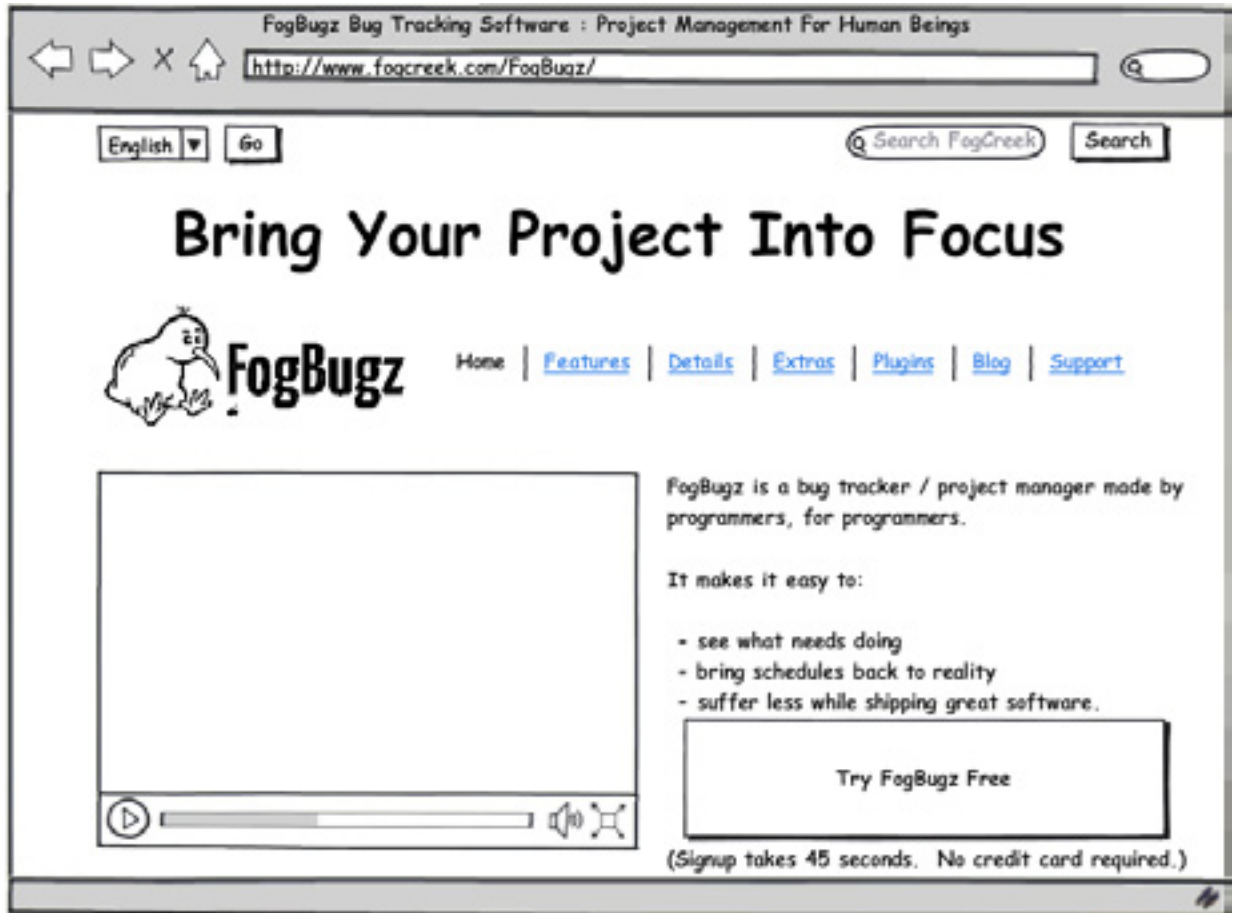
For example, like many companies, Fog Creek's internal deployment practices grew organically, and the scripts for building and deploying the website have gradually grown to do quite a bit more than that. As of last October, it took 45 minutes to make even the simplest possible website deploy. Change a word? Check it into version control, click a button, and that will be live on the Internet in 45 minutes.

This level of friction made changing the website a huge ordeal, so it was only done when it couldn't possibly be avoided, at the yearly launch. Had there been anyone who wanted to e.g. A/B test headlines against each other, doing so would have eaten up an entire morning just to see that the change had made it to the live site properly. As a result, this never got done.

One of the things I did in October was convince an engineer here to take the website deployment process under their wings. It now takes six minutes, which is about 355 seconds longer than I'd like, but the friction is low enough that ***more has been done to the website in the last six months than in the last ten years.***

## Redesigning Focused On Conversion

In December, the team totally overhauled Fog Creek's web presence, both making the site's aesthetic design a little more modern and aggressively reworking each page. The redesign started with mockups where I demonstrated techniques for encouraging conversion, such as giving people large, obvious buttons to click on to start their trials:



As you can see:

- The page now includes a prominent call to action for people to sign up for a FogBugz trial.
- We reworked it to include a little more Internet formatting, like bulleted lists, because nobody reads on the Internet.

The team, for the first time including dedicated designers, iterated a bit and came up with this:

**FogBugz Bug Tracking**

FogBugz is the world's easiest bug tracking system, built for teams who are serious about shipping great software.

- o cooperate with teammates
- o meet deadlines
- o maintain control of your projects
- o integrate with source control

FogBugz incorporates the lessons Joel Spolsky and the team at Fog Creek have learned over a decade of learning how to write software better.

[Try FogBugz Now](#) or [See Pricing](#)

**FogBugz and Kilo World Tour Talk by Joel Spolsky**

Watch Joel demo source control and project workflows in Fogbugz and Kilo.

**All Code Has Bugs**

No software development methodology – waterfall, Agile, XP, or what have you – can succeed in altering one fundamental truth about software development: it is *fucking hard*. The best developers in the world write buggy code. The natural state of software is not flawless: the edge cases are covered poorly, the specification is incomplete, and the software does not yet fully meet its users understanding of the problem.

If you are not using your [bug tracker](#) rigorously, you are wasting your time and effort, and you will never produce great software. FogBugz tracks bugs, issues, and customer support tickets through every stage of the development process. We built it to be quick and easy to use, so that [your developers will actually use it](#). [Over 20,000 teams agree](#) – it works.

Start squashing your bugs today! [Try FogBugz free](#) for 45 days. You can sign up in under a minute.

**Standardize Your Process**

What gets tracked gets improved. If you are not tracking your bugs, your bugs will only be fixed by accident. Many development shops use email, spreadsheets, or sticky notes as ad hoc bug tracking tools. These have poor visibility, poor communicability, and poor accountability. You should be using dedicated bug tracking software.

Good software is not an accident. It is a result of a process designed to produce good software. That means carefully tracking what needs fixing, fixing it, verifying that fixes work, and ensuring they do not get un-fixed later. Great teams use FogBugz to handle the [project management](#) so that they can focus on shipping great software.

Get a handle on your projects today! [Try FogBugz free](#) for 45 days. You can sign up in under a minute.

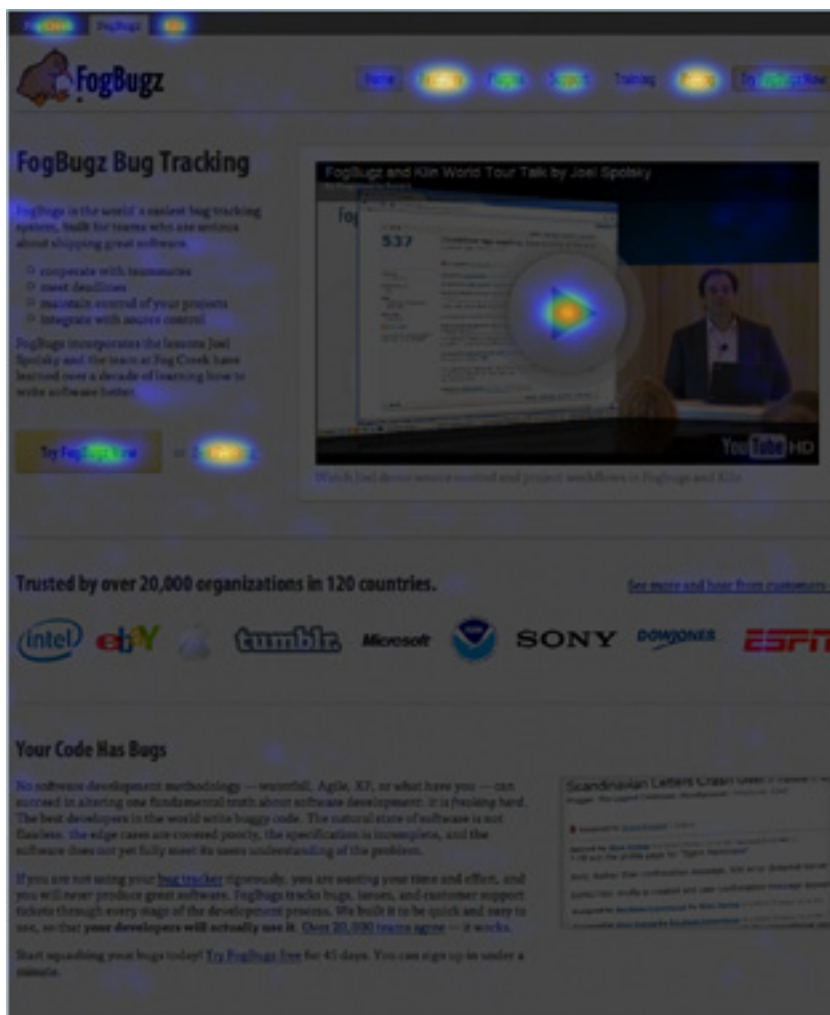
In addition to a few tweaks we made for SEO purposes, which we'll discuss in

detail later in this series, we made it much more obvious how to get into the trial. That is a frequent subject for A/B testing, a practice the team has adopted in earnest after being shown how fun, easy, and ridiculously profitable it can be.

## In Which Stuff Gets Measured

One of the great results of our work together is that the team now actually measures the performance of the website, so that we know whether the improvements we are making actually do anything for Fog Creek. For example, the old website was not well-instrumented and it was not obvious to the team that e.g. placing something low on the page would decrease the number of people who clicked it.

Enter [CrazyEgg](#), which lets you make heat maps of where people interact with a given page. The hotter the color, the more clicks a particular area is getting. Here, for example, we have one of the several iterations the site has been through.



You'll notice that the video gets a lot of clicks. That video is an hour long explanation of FogBugz by Joel Spolsky, the CEO of Fog Creek. It ROFLstomps everything else we've tried there. We tried short videos, we tried screencasts, we tried images — in A/B test after A/B test, our users said Give Us More Joel.

One thing which might not be obvious about the video is that, in A/B tests, putting that big honking Play button on top of it **doubles** the number of people who actually start watching versus more understated Play buttons.

You can also see that the See Pricing link attracts more people than the free trial button, possibly because the free trial isn't identified as being free. (And literally right after writing that line I pushed an A/B test to see whether that matters or not. Anything is possible when your speed of iteration isn't rate-limited by artificial technical factors.) Previous tests on that button have played with the color, placement, and wording — it turns out that my favorite shade of orange didn't really help that much, but adding the word "Now" almost doubled the number of folks who clicked it in one test.

And, sure enough, this trickles straight down to the bottom line. Compared to the same period last year, FogBugz is getting:

- More trials.
- Better converting trials.
- More seats sold from converting trials.
- More revenue.

This is a wonderful and terrible thing to hear as an engineer. Historically, Fog Creek has believed to its bones that new features are what moves the company forward. That worked very well for many years, but recently it hasn't been the slam dunk it has been in the past. On the other hand, optimization has made a meaningful difference to their financials already, and the benefits keep compounding every month, as more trials age into paying accounts and as happy, satisfied customers continue paying lots of money for their services.

## Pricing Pages That Sell

FogBugz exists to help software developers write great software, but it also exists to pay the rent. This means that we have to actually consummate transactions on our website. This was previously delegated to the curiously named “Details” page. It had been designed primarily to explain to customers the difference between FBOD and the downloadable version of FogBugz. Sadly, this ended up being quite confusing.



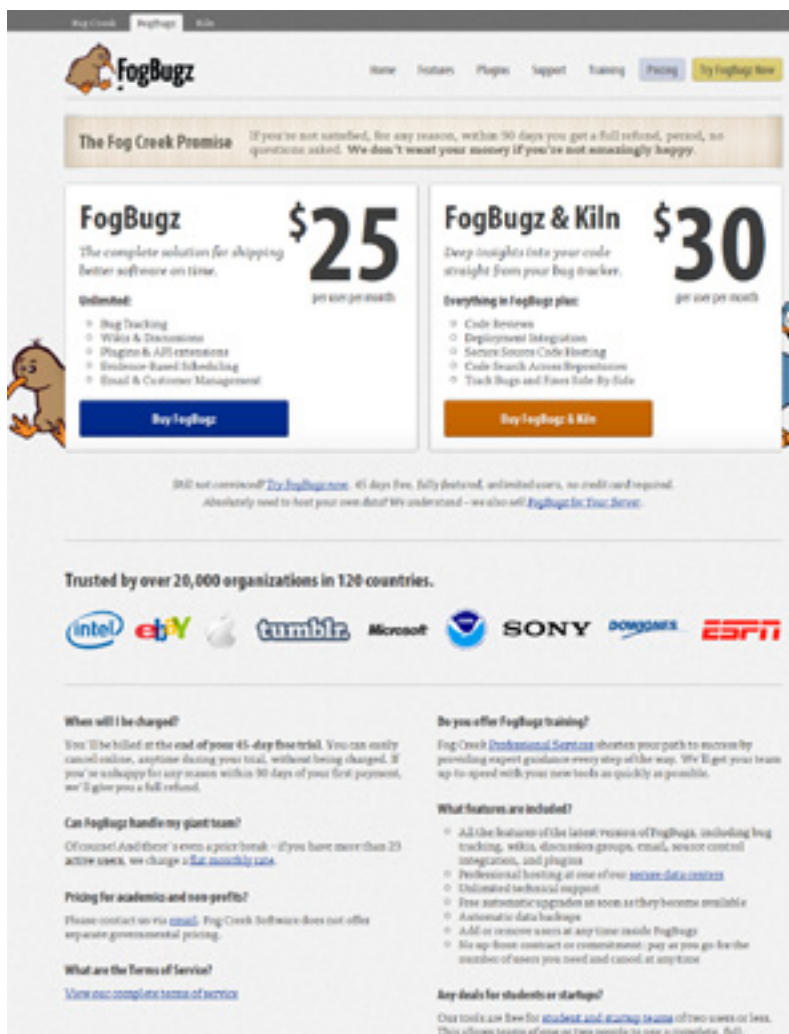
This is a page ostensibly about the user, but it was really about Fog Creek: we need to explain to you, at length, the difference between FBOD and hosted FogBugz because a) we need to know which totally different purchasing funnel to send you into and b) this division is core to how we think of everything. From the user's perspective, though, this puts a really hard decision in front of getting the pricing for FogBugz. Do I want FogBugz, which apparently runs on recent versions of Debian, whatever that means? (The person making the decision is often a manager and not necessarily the most technical person in the organization.) Or do I

want “professionally hosted FogBugz”?

The page also does a lackluster job of *selling* FogBugz. For example, buried in the links on the right rail are customer testimonials. FogBugz is well-loved by prominent customers and 99.8% of the people visiting this page never learned that because that information is in web-design Siberia.

Plus, the core user question “So how much does this cost me?!” is buried here. It takes you a few more clicks and quote forms to get to the right answer. At our meeting last October I asked everyone how many clicks they thought it took to find out how much FogBugz costs, starting from the homepage. Many thought “two”, there was a plurality for “four”, and nobody guessed the actual answer — *eight clicks* to fight one’s way to the quote form and *I couldn’t figure out how to do it* despite being *paid to try buying their software*.

We’ve iterated a bit on this, and the new version is *radically* better.



This:

- Defaults the user into selecting FBOD. If they don't know they want the server edition, assume they don't want it. (We have plenty of data and customer conversations to make this assumption.) This means we can surface the price immediately. As a bonus, \$25 / user / month sounds cheaper than \$4,453.80, which would be a fairly typical license purchase.
- Cross-sells Kiln to users interested in FogBugz. Kiln is Fog Creek's other main product to make software developer's lives better — it makes code reviews a breeze and makes distributed version control (specifically, mercurial) usable for developers who would otherwise be stuck with inferior source control tools. This page greatly increased the attach rate of Kiln to new FogBugz accounts: why not get a whole new service for just \$5 more per month?
- Includes social proof, via icons of some of our prominent, satisfied customers. The icons whisper “Companies you trust for engineering excellence use FogBugz, because we're the best option.”
- Includes our money-back guarantee, which further decreases perceived risk in the purchase.
- Answers many common customer questions at the point where they are likely to come up.
- Makes it very easy to buy the software.

## There's Always More To Do

The biggest change from our work together has been getting Fog Creek onboard with a simple proposition: *the website is a shipping software product of the company*. It deserves the same level of attention to detail, monitoring, focus, and internal resources that Fog Creek's other software products get. It has now moved from a detail of the yearly release focus to a known target for ongoing improvement, and the Creekers who are leading that charge are continuing to make major progress on it.

Revamping the website was only one facet of how we're pushing forward on marketing. We're going to talk later about SEO, email marketing, other enhancements

we've made to our site and products, and a variety of other topics. Let us know what would help you.

Interested in following along or suggesting topics for the conversation?

- Comment about this post on your blog — we'll find you. (We also have easily available inboxes and are active on your friendly local Twitter [@fogbugz](#) and our individual addresses.)
- Sign up for our [RSS feed](#) or [our developer newsletter](#), where we'll announce new articles you might be interested in.
- Keep an eye on [Building Great Software Companies](#), which we intend to continue improving over the coming months.