



Standards and Best Practices

The SRB November, 2004

BEST PRACTICES

PTC “best practices” are procedures, methods and guidelines the PTC recommends to the developers, publishers, and administrators of performance tests for the purpose of producing valid and reliable performance tests without the overhead of discovering these practices for themselves through trial and error. The PTC publishes a best practice when it is supported by sound evidence of its value and following a structured deliberative review process.

The PTC publishes best practices for performance tests in the following areas defined by the audience for whom the best practices are intended:

- test delivery
- test design
- item design
- item administration
- test evaluation and analysis

PTC best practices are fairly general, reasonably broad in their scope and application, and are supported by evidence of their efficacy. Some best practices are defined as such because of widespread industry acceptance and adoption. Others may not yet have broad industry acceptance, but have been found to be useful and effective when applied appropriately. Still others may be new practices whose benefits are demonstrated through quantitative or qualitative means.

A PTC best practice may not always be suitable for every application. When this is the case, the best practice will include indications, counter-indications, or other qualifications that provide guidance on its use.

STANDARDS

PTC Standards are procedures, methods and guidelines that provide a model or rule for some aspect of performance test design or delivery. All PTC standards include criterion measures that can be used by test

developers, third parties, or the PTC itself to establish compliance or non-compliance with the standard unambiguously.

PTC standards fall into one of three categories:

- *Interoperability standards:* a reference for determining compatibility among different elements of a performance test or testing environment.
- *Empirical standards:* set an acceptable threshold for establishing testing metrics such as validity or reliability, or they may define appropriate methods for calculating these metrics
- *Compliance standards:* guidelines for compliance with legislation; e.g., the Americans with Disabilities Act.

HOW ARE BEST PRACTICES AND STANDARDS RELATED?

Best practices and standards are both advisory in nature, but differ in some key ways. A standard must be applied in such a way that its evaluative component demonstrates full compliance. A best practice, on the other hand, may not necessarily have an evaluative component, and hence adherence to a best practice may sometimes be demonstrated more through documented processes and procedures than strictly evaluative measures. Consequently, an interpretive aspect may sometimes apply to a best practice; standards use criterion measures.

Best practices may invoke standards. For example, the PTC might publish a document targeting parties involved in test delivery that identifies several different tiers of testing facility hardware. Given the clear evaluative components (e.g., quantity of RAM, processor speed, etc.), this document would be a standard. The PTC might also publish a best practice document for test developers that recommends use of systems that conform to one of the tiers defined in this standard in order to improve cost-effectiveness and time-to-market. The standard itself is not a recommendation – it is just a set of definitions. The best practice is a recommendation, and the recommendation is structured around the clear definitions provided by the standard.

A best practice may become a standard through accrual of objective evidence and sufficient peer review.