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Python Development Case Study: Enso Autocomplete

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Enso is a user-interface enhancement product created by Humanized (http://www.humanized.com) and is somewhat unusual in that it's an application written almost entirely in Python meant to be downloaded and installed locally by non-technical users. This spring, driven by user feedback, Humanized began upgrading Enso with a new auto-completion algorithm. This project presented several major challenges in UI design, algorithm design, performance, and testing. In this talk, I will present a case study of these challenges and how we overcame them. Specific topics of interest to Python developers will include:

UI design: how to create an auto-completion algorithm (i.e, one that correctly guesses the user's intended command from a minimum number of keystrokes) that is efficient, learnable, and respects the user's habits.

Development and deployment methodology: How Python enabled an agile cycle of quick prototyping and integration, limited beta release, and rapid user feedback, and how user input drove our process.

Performance: algorithmic efficiency, how to achieve acceptable response times in Python, the profiling tools we used to identify hot-spots, and the techniques we used to defeat them.

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