GitLab

An SMB guide to getting started in DevOps

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Introduction

New to DevOps and in a small or medium-sized (SMB) business? You're far from alone: The 2021 Accelerate State of DevOps Report found that 27% of survey respondents work at SMBs. And Stack Overflow's 2021 Developer Survey showed that nearly 42% of respondents work for companies with fewer than 100 employees, as did 47% of GitLab's 2021 Global DevSecOps Survey respondents.

It's also clear SMBs face unique challenges.

For starters, SMBs are generally working with fewer financial and staffing resources, yet may have to maneuver through a growing web of disparate development tools. SMBs must be competitive in the market and ready to take on what are often much larger competitors. To keep up, you need to be able to quickly scale development and deployment. It's a tricky challenge, but it also can be an opportunity in disguise.

Unlike large enterprises with many and sizable tech teams, SMBs can more easily accelerate their capabilities by adopting a single, end-to-end DevOps platform that streamlines automation and replaces time-consuming, hands-on work. A DevOps platform also can help find code problems and security flaws early in the development lifecycle, enabling teams to avoid costly software delays.

This guide will help you get up to speed. We'll explain what DevOps is (and isn't), and key technologies and terms you'll need to understand, as well as why collaboration is so critical. We'll showcase an example of DevOps working in the real world for an SMB organization, and then explain why DevOps can help your career and your paycheck. Finally, we've got an extensive list of resources and a quiz so you can learn more and test your knowledge.

Let's dive in.

What DevOps is and how it helps an SMB

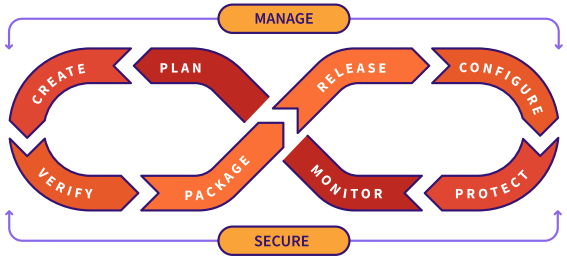
The first thing you should know about DevOps is that it's all about empowering teams – enabling organizations to work collaboratively to develop and deliver secure software faster and more efficiently. For many years, software development was anything but streamlined and efficient. Processes were siloed, leading to bottlenecks and costly delays, while security was, at best, an afterthought. DevOps sprung from deep-seated frustrations with the old way of doing things, and brought with it the promise of simplicity and speed.

We think DevOps is done best on a single end-to-end platform. As smaller companies' DevOps practices mature, developers often add new tools per each stage of DevOps. As that collection of tools grows, it gets harder and more time consuming to manage. Get in front of that problem when the business, and its collection of tools, is still small by choosing a DevOps platform.

A DevOps platform allows teams to move from, or avoid, that often complex and confusing multitude of tools by using a single, complete software development ecosystem, eliminating the need for team members to jump from one tool to another, saving both time and money. That ecosystem can be used to conceive, build, and ultimately, deliver better, more compliant and secure software more efficiently, continuously, and at top speed. And that helps DevOps teams be more agile, but it also provides more agility to the overall business – enabling companies to more quickly meet customer needs, remain compliant, stay ahead of competitors, and turn on a dime to take advantage of changing business climates. So DevOps is the engine that drives agility in both software development and deployment, as well as in business.

If you're at an SMB, maybe you don't have multiple teams working on software… yet. But by using DevOps now, you actually can prevent the creation of inefficient silos and build collaboration into your growing system. It also will enable you to scale and manage a single system, increase developer productivity, and receive immediate feedback on code performance and security.

And to talk about how DevOps works, you really need to talk about the culture, or mindset, behind it. It's not development as usual. The bedrock of DevOps culture is collaboration and joint responsibility, along with a focus on a constant cycle of rapid iteration, measurement, assessment, and reevaluation. Again, it's all about agility, and being able to learn and deploy fast. All of that leads to continuous, iterative improvements and feature deployment.



Fundamental technologies and processes

To work in DevOps, there are several key technologies and processes you need to understand. Familiarize yourself with the following:

Stages of the DevOps process

Depending on how you like to say it, there are phases or stages of the DevOps lifecycle. A DevOps education isn't complete unless you understand the lifecycle stages, which take the process from planning all the way through to launching new features, analysis, and gathering feedback.

As you work in DevOps, you'll need to learn these phases since each one is an integral part of the process. So, from a 40,000-foot view, there are three overarching stages executed in a logical order – build, test, and deploy. It's the natural workflow. Build the code, then test it, and, if all is in working order, deploy it. However, we need to dig deeper to uncover more complex layers of these stages. Each one is a key driver to producing software and business value. Understanding and using this flow will create efficiency, reliability, speed, and agility. Here is a closer look at nine key stages:

- **Plan** is the stage of DevOps that encompasses everything that happens before the first line of code is written. It's about creating a product roadmap that guides upcoming development, helping the team organize resources and priorities, align, and track projects.
- **Create** is the first stage of the CI/CD pipeline. This is where code is designed and developed using version control to coordinate changes made by multiple developers to the same code base. This is one of the keys to improving velocity.
- **Verify** is a process focused on confirming the quality of code. To get feedback quickly to developers and testers, and instant insights into every commit, this process relies on security testing, code quality analysis, parallel execution, and automation. Enabling developers to find and fix flaws while they are developing has proven to be more cost-effective and efficient.
- The **Package** stage comes after code has been created and tested. Applications and updated code are packaged in containers with their dependencies and the rest of their environments. This ensures that applications built in one environment run consistently and seamlessly in others.
- **Release** or deployment is about pushing the new code or code update out into the production environment. With DevOps, releases can be deployed as iterations are created, tested, and ready – and not as on a preplanned, static, bulk release date.
- **Configure** is about setting up, managing, and maintaining application environments. Automated configuration management is designed to handle these complex environments across servers, networks, and storage systems.

- **Monitor** is a proactive, automated part of the process, focused on tracking software, infrastructure, and networks to trace status and raise alerts to problems. This increases security, reliability, and agility.
- **Protect** is about securing your applications and their runtime environment, from intrusions, and new vulnerabilities.
- **Manage** is about visibility and control across your end-to-end software development lifecycle by managing permissions, standardizing DevOps build and deployment processes, and automating guardrails to ensure security and compliance policies are met.

What about security? Good question. That's the beauty of DevOps – security isn't an afterthought. It's part of EVERY stage of the process, from documenting requirements to automated testing to validating those requirements. It ensures that new code and features actually work exactly the way they are designed, and that bugs, security threats, and compliance issues haven't been created.

These stages are all part of an ongoing cycle – the development and deployment lifecycle. All of the information created in these stages is instantly available through the platform to all participants, across stages, and provides a single source of truth for improved visibility and collaboration. Another key benefit of a united platform is the ability to manage and control the entire software development lifecycle from one place.

What powers these DevOps stages

SOURCE CODE MANAGEMENT (SCM)

This is how a repository of code is shared among many developers without one person's changes negating another's. The code is divided and managed into projects and groups of projects. An individual developer checks out existing code or adds code to what's there and the SCM tool identifies conflicting edits to the same code and flags it for resolution. This process allows multiple developers to work on one project at once, a key to increasing the velocity of software updates. DevOps relies on Git repositories, an important distinction from old-school version control systems, because of the powerful capabilities their modern architecture enables.

CONTINUOUS INTEGRATION (CI)

This is the step that enables the DevOps practice of iteration by committing changes to a shared source code repository early and often — often several times a day — and automatically testing each change and kicking off a build.

Continuous integration is all about efficiency. By automating manual work and testing code more frequently, teams can iterate faster and deploy new features with fewer bugs more often. Other benefits of CI include identifying and fixing problems more easily, less context-switching for your team, and happier users and customers.

To get the most out of continuous integration, make sure your setup includes these core elements:

- A source code repository with all the necessary files and scripts to create builds.
- Automated builds with scripts that include everything you need to build from a single command.
- Self-testing builds that automate your policies (for instance, fail if any test fails).
- Frequent commits and iterations so there are fewer places for conflicts to hide.
- Stable testing environments that accurately reflect the production environment.
- Visibility so every developer can access the latest executables and see any changes made to the repository.

CONTINUOUS DELIVERY (CD)

Continuous delivery is a software development process that works in conjunction with continuous integration to automate the application release process. Once code has been tested and built as part of the CI process, continuous delivery takes over during the final stages to ensure it's packaged with everything it needs to deploy to any environment at any time. Continuous delivery can cover everything from provisioning the infrastructure environment to deploying the tested application to test/staging or production.

With continuous delivery, software is built so it can be deployed to production at any time. Then you can trigger the deployments manually or automate the process.

When continuous delivery is done well, your software release processes become boring — that is, they are low-risk, consistent, and repeatable. Then you can confidently plan release processes and schedules, automate infrastructure and deployments, and manage your cloud resources more effectively.

AUTOMATED TESTING

This is key to fully adopting DevOps and continuous integration — and releasing higher quality code more frequently. With testing built into your CI pipeline, every committed code change triggers a build, and then the build runs tests to ensure the changes pass all tests, policies, and code compliance standards you established for your application. With this in place, bugs are identified earlier and with greater context to simplify their resolution, your teams can deploy more frequently and confidently, and you minimize manual testing and reworking late in the process.

Shifting security left

A fundamental process for successful DevOps is incorporating security into the end-to-end automation. This is often referred to as DevSecOps. By integrating testing and the security review process earlier in the software development lifecycle, there is more opportunity to adequately address any security issues. If security testing is treated as an afterthought or doesn't happen until code is ready for production, it can be difficult to go back and correct problems, and it's often too late to fix them quickly and efficiently. This can lead to delayed deployments, security issues making it into production, greater technical debt, and inefficient silos between security and the rest of the DevOps teams.

To shift security left, you'll want to integrate security testing into your CI pipelines so code is continually tested, not only against other commits in the shared repository, but for overall security, as well. Some types of security testing you may want to include early on in your development lifecycle include:

- Static Application Security Testing (SAST)
- Dynamic Application Security Testing (DAST)
- Container and cluster image scanning
- Dependency scanning
- Secret detection
- Infrastructure-as-code (IAC) scanning
- API testing

Documentation

Although sometimes overlooked, documentation is invaluable to successfully implementing DevOps practices. Creating and maintaining internal documentation for the services and applications that your team works on and what your DevOps process looks like can go a long way to improving your team's performance and the software you put out. The 2021 Accelerate State of DevOps Report noted that teams with higher quality documentation are 2.4 times more likely to see better software delivery and operational performance.

Feedback

This is an essential piece of the puzzle as organizations should always be looking for ways to improve the user experience and the overall DevOps process. In traditional software development, the feedback loop can be a complex path to navigate. With DevOps, the effect on usability from each update goes to the DevOps team so improvements can be efficiently and quickly made in future code releases. Automating the process is a key step since it will ensure the information is collected and distributed to the right parts of the team, creating rapid adjustment to new code updates.

Other key DevOps technologies you should understand

When you're getting up to speed with DevOps, there are several areas where you should be sure to educate yourself. Here are several areas you should understand and stay current on:

The cloud

If you're working in DevOps, understanding the cloud is a good idea. The majority of modern software depends on the cloud and cloud-native infrastructure, including containers and orchestrators, which help automate the process of software development and delivery. Applications developed this way allow DevOps professionals to deploy anywhere and to get the most out of multiple cloud platforms, or even private clouds within their own data center.

A cloud-native approach is more scalable because it distances the code from the hardware it uses. To be able to help their companies and their own careers, DevOps professionals need to understand cloud providers, services, and platforms. And it's a focus for a lot of DevOps professionals. According to the 2021 Global DevSecOps Survey, respondents said when it comes to upskilling, they want to learn more about cloud skills and serverless architecture. And 56 percent say their first priority on the job is managing cloud services.

A culture of collaboration

You need to embrace collaboration. It's a tenet of DevOps practice and philosophy. By inviting discussion, input, and assistance from both experienced and new team members, a culture can be built around learning from and relying on others' expertise. Being part of a true DevOps culture also means being able to listen, stay calm under pressure, create trust among team members, and be able to take ownership of a situation or problem.

Collaboration, though, is about more than DevOps teammates working together. It's also about collaboration between DevOps and other parts of the business – members of the security team, marketing, finance, customer service, and the C-suite. Collaboration between DevOps and security, for example, is a way

to integrate security into the entire development process. With SMBs, collaboration can include most everyone in the company. With a smaller number of employees, there is more opportunity for everyone to pitch in on innovation, making collaboration even more inclusive.

Don't make the mistake of dismissing this as a soft skill that's less important than technical skills. Develop key skills like communication, knowing how to talk about business needs, and working together to solve problems. In the 2021 Global DevSecOps Survey, communication and collaboration skills were frequently rated as important skills to have. Actually, an equal number of survey respondents rated subject matter expertise and communication/collaboration skills as the most helpful for the future of their careers.

Key programming languages

DevOps engineers need to be able to code, but even more importantly, they must consider the processes, tools, and methodologies used across the end-to-end DevOps lifecycle stages identified above. Some languages are more conducive to this end-to-end process than others. There are a lot of programming languages out there so it can be a big job to figure out which ones anyone on the team should master. First, you need to understand what your DevOps teams need. What projects are being worked on, and what languages are needed now, as well as what languages will be needed for future projects?

Some of the most popular programming languages are Python, Golang, Ruby, JavaScript, Perl, Java, Bash, and PHP. According to the Stack Overflow 2021 Developer Survey, JavaScript is the most commonly used programming language for the ninth year in a row. And for the fifth year, Python is the language most pros want to learn. As for other languages, 56 percent of survey respondents said they use HTML/CSS; 48 percent said they use Python; 47 percent use SQL and more than 35 percent reported using Java. It's also important to expand your skill set. According to the 2021 Upskilling Enterprise DevOps Skills Report from DevOps Institute, it's a good idea to not specialize in any one language, but to have a list of programming languages that you've mastered.

Need some practice? Why not volunteer your coding time or contribute to open source projects to fill out your resume?

Automation

DevOps teams are increasingly looking to automate processes throughout the development and deployment lifecycle, so it only makes sense that you understand how automation works and how to use it. Automation, which cuts time and money spent on repetitive tasks and eliminates human errors, streamlines the whole DevOps process. And for someone working in an SMB, automation can reduce hands-on work, helping a smaller team work faster and more efficiently.

With automation, each task is performed identically and with consistency, reliability, and accuracy. This promotes speed and increases deliveries, and ultimately deployments. While it doesn't remove humans from the picture, automation minimizes dependency on humans for managing recurring tasks, such as monitoring for availability, performance, or security problems; consistently configuring software environments; testing new

application versions against predefined quality standards; integrating code; speeding deployments; aiding CI/CD testing software throughout the development process; and managing logs and documentation. Yes, there's a lot to this.

According to the 2021 Global DevSecOps Survey, respondents said more than 55 percent of teams reported that their software development lifecycle was either 'completely' or 'mostly' automated. Another 27 percent said it was 'partially automated.' That means if you're in DevOps, you should be a student of automation.

Monitoring

As your organization's application stack and the number of DevOps teams working on it grow, the number of moving pieces will only multiply. Keeping track of all of those pieces can be overwhelming. That makes continuous monitoring a requirement for being able to maintain an end-to-end, real-time situational awareness of your ecosystem. With DevOps, complex applications could be updated and deployed every day – even multiple times a day. Sophisticated and automated monitoring is a proactive way to cut down on bugs, improve deployment speed and efficiency, detect security threats and compliance issues, eliminate breaking changes, and maintain documentation. It's used from planning through development, integration, testing, deployment, and even operations.

That means monitoring is not just a process needed by developers, but also by project leaders and security teams. Monitoring doesn't just track processes. It's set up to raise alarms about performance and threats throughout the pipeline. According to the 2021 Accelerate State of DevOps report, elite DevOps performers who successfully meet their reliability targets are 4.1 times more likely to have solutions that incorporate monitoring into the overall system. DevOps teams that want to be on top of their game will increasingly be using monitoring, so you should understand it.

Containers

The DevOps world has gone all-in with containers, which basically are packages of software code, its configuration, system libraries, runtime, and the rest of its environment. Containers hold everything needed for the application to run, and they ensure that applications built in one environment run consistently and seamlessly in others, solving the problem of how to get software to run reliably when moved between environments. These modular units, or building blocks, are set up to enable DevOps teams to build, test, deploy, and maintain applications efficiently, with fewer resources, at top speed, and securely.

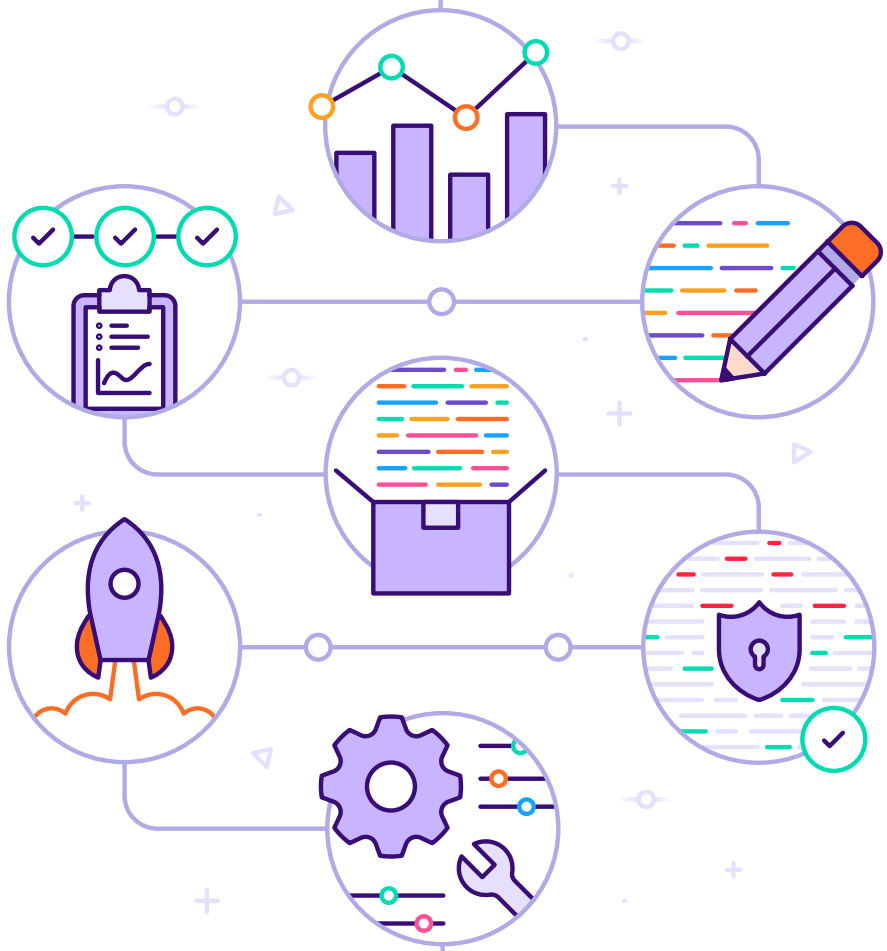
Since they easily can be shared between teams, they not only speed development and deployment, but they feed into a culture of collaboration, which is key in DevOps. And knowledge of containers means understanding Docker, a popular application container technology, as well as Kubernetes, an open-source container-orchestration system that controls how and where containers run. The 2021 Accelerate State of DevOps report showed that container knowledge is an essential aspect of working in the field since 64 percent of professionals said they use containers, a growing trend in companies of all sizes.

How DevOps solves real-world SMB problems

If you're trying to figure out exactly how important and transformational adopting DevOps can be for your SMB, check out how a DevOps platform helped Anchormen, a machine learning, data science, and engineering consultancy based in The Netherlands.

The company, which had previously been using Jenkins, needed a way to collaborate efficiently with clients. Because Anchormen caters to a variety of companies, it needed to create an environment to act as a playground where customers can work and innovate together. And while needing to ensure that product delivery could happen seamlessly and on time, the business also required a platform that could integrate with AWS, Azure, Docker, Jira, and SonarQube. Anchormen was able to meet its needs with a DevOps platform.

Using a single, end-to-end application, the tech team has increased deployment time by 85 percent. And they've transformed their workflow processes and now have more than 80 software projects within the platform – all while growing their team from 20 to 70 people. "GitLab really helped us to structure the growth in both employees and projects," said Jeroen Vlek, CTO of Anchormen.



Why learning DevOps is good for your career

OK, we know this all is a lot to digest, so let us tell you what's in this for you… and your career. If you recently joined a DevOps team, you're in for some terrific news: You just made a great career move. If you've been working in IT, you've already been on a good track. Studies have shown that the tech industry, in general, has held strong during a tumultuous economy, but DevOps, in particular, is on a growth trajectory. A lot of companies are looking to hire DevOps professionals, according to reports from the likes of Glassdoor, and Robert Half International, Inc., a human resources consulting firm.

And companies are paying well for DevOps pros they hire or promote into those positions from within. Actually, Amanda Stansell, a data scientist at Glassdoor, said, based on earning potential, overall job satisfaction and the number of job openings listed on Glassdoor, DevOps engineers made her list of Top 10 Best Jobs in America for 2021.

So what do these paychecks look like?

While salaries definitely vary depending on location and skill level, there's great news for people new in the DevOps field. If you only have one year of experience, you can still expect to earn $112,785.

And you can look forward to making $165,980 when you get 10 years or more of experience under your belt. These numbers are pretty consistent with data from sites like ZipRecruiter and Glassdoor. So where does that kind of salary put you compared to others working in IT? In the U.S., for instance, DevOps engineers in 2021 ranked in the top 10 when it comes to the best-paying IT careers, reported Glassdoor.

OK, so if you get a DevOps job, it will pay you well. But how likely is it that you can move up the ranks in your DevOps team or land a great DevOps job at another company – one that pays better and offers a better culture and perks? According to numbers from the Randstad 2021 Salary Guide, the chances are good since many companies report that they're dealing with long-standing vacancies – an average of more than 50 days – in their DevOps teams.

Check your DevOps Knowledge

Test your team's DevOps platform usage

Take this 5-minute quiz to see where your DevOps team ranks with its efforts into not just using DevOps but effectively leveraging the platform. You'll then be directed to resources that can help your team do its best DevOps ever.

Resources

Here's a look at just some of the resources available to you out there:

Podcasts to help you dive in to DevOps

- The Humans of DevOps Podcast Series offers insights on things like upskilling, the art of DevOps, and women working in Devops.
- Arrested DevOps talks with top techies about the state of DevOps.
- Real World DevOps talks with people who are organizing DevOps conferences, writing related books or building tech.
- The Cloudcast is exactly what you'd expect – focused on all things cloud-related.
- Greater Than Code focuses on both human and tech issues in DevOps, and the tech field in general.
- Code Newbie Podcast is aimed at people just getting started with software development.
- DevOps Paradox has industry luminaries walk you through what DevOps is all about.

Helpful books and eBooks

- Seven Tips to Get the Most out of Your DevOps Platform This is an eBook from GitLab that focuses on making sure your team is poised to get the most out of a DevOps platform.
- Continuous Delivery One reviewer called this "required reading" for anyone working to tie the whole development and delivery process together.
- Practical DevOps talks about how DevOps works, and then moves into code storage, code testing, and deployment.
- The DevOps Handbook is considered a go-to for anyone in the field. It not only talks about the advantages of DevOps, but what it can do to give companies a competitive edge.
- GitLab Quick Start Guide is an eBook and a great guide for how to migrate to the GitLab platform.
- Big Little Book on Git is an eBook that talks to both the experienced DevOps professional and the beginner.
- Ten Steps Every CISO Should Take to Secure Next Generation Software is a primer for security pros to understand how software development changes impact security programs.

Certifications

- DevOps Institute offers certifications in areas such as development, DevOps engineering, DevOps testing, and security engineering.
- GitLab has its own certifications in areas like CI/CD, project management, and DevOps security.
- Always go to the source. For training on using Google Cloud, for instance, look to the company's site for certifications.

Bootcamps and courses

- For a monthly fee, the online training platform A Cloud Guru offers cloud certifications. It's set up to give users video content, hands-on labs, learning tools, quizzes, and exams.
- LinkedIn Learning's DevOps Foundations offers a solid knowledge base for anyone new, or fairly new, to DevOps. Free to anyone with a LinkedIn subscription, videos give users a rundown of the industry, along with key principles and technologies, like automation, collaboration, monitoring, and culture.
- The DevOps Implementation Boot Camp, offered by consulting firm Cprime, is a three-day course that starts at $1,695. Training is offered in-person or live online. Private team training also is available.
- DevOps Culture and Mindset is run by the University of California, Davis via Coursera, an online course provider. Fully online, the approximately 15-hour course focuses on foundational principles of DevOps. It's free with a Coursera subscription.
- Continuous Delivery & DevOps is an online, beginner-level, 8-hour course offered by the University of Virginia, through Coursera. It focuses on continuous delivery, testing, and infrastructure as code. It's free with a Coursera subscription.

About GitLab

GitLab is The DevOps platform that empowers organizations to maximize the overall return on software development by delivering software faster and efficiently, while strengthening security and compliance. GitLab's single application is easier to use, leads to faster cycle time and allows visibility throughout and control over all stages of the DevOps lifecycle. With GitLab, every team in your organization can collaboratively plan, build, secure, and deploy software to drive business outcomes faster with complete transparency, consistency and traceability.

Built on Open Source, GitLab works alongside its growing community, which is composed of thousands of developers and millions of users, to continuously deliver new DevOps innovations. GitLab has an estimated 30 million+ registered users (both Paid and Free) from startups to global enterprises, including Ticketmaster, Jaguar Land Rover, Nasdaq, Dish Network, and Comcast trust GitLab to deliver great software faster. All-remote since inception, GitLab has more than 1,350 team members in over 65 countries.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