**Survey on Version Control Tools**

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**Introduction**

Version control systems are a category of software tools that help a software team manage changes to source code over time. Version control software keeps track of every modification to the code in a special kind of database. If a mistake is made, developers can turn back the clock and compare earlier versions of the code to help fix the mistake while minimizing disruption to all team members.

For almost all software projects, the source code is like the crown jewels - a precious asset whose value must be protected. For most software teams, the source code is a repository of the invaluable knowledge and understanding about the problem domain that the developers have collected and refined through careful effort. Version control protects source code from both catastrophe and the casual degradation of human error and unintended consequences.

Software developers working in teams are continually writing new source code and changing existing source code. The code for a project, app or software component is typically organized in a folder structure or "file tree". One developer on the team may be working on a new feature while another developer fixes an unrelated bug by changing code, each developer may make their changes in several parts of the file tree.

Version control helps teams solve these kinds of problems, tracking every individual change by each contributor and helping prevent concurrent work from conflicting. Changes made in one part of the software can be incompatible with those made by another developer working at the same time. This problem should be discovered and solved in an orderly manner without blocking the work of the rest of the team. Further, in all software development, any change can introduce new bugs on its own and new software can't be trusted until it's tested. So testing and development proceed together until a new version is ready.

Good version control software supports a developer's preferred workflow without imposing one particular way of working. Ideally it also works on any platform, rather than dictate what operating system or tool chain developers must use. Great version control systems facilitate a smooth and continuous flow of changes to the code rather than the frustrating and clumsy mechanism of file locking - giving the green light to one developer at the expense of blocking the progress of others.

Software teams that do not use any form of version control often run into problems like not knowing which changes that have been made are available to users or the creation of incompatible changes between two unrelated pieces of work that must then be painstakingly untangled and reworked. If you're a developer who has never used version control you may have added versions to your files, perhaps with suffixes like "final" or "latest" and then had to later deal with a new final version. Perhaps you've commented out code blocks because you want to disable certain functionality without deleting the code, fearing that there may be a use for it later. Version control is a way out of these problems.

Version control software is an essential part of the every-day of the modern software team's professional practices. Individual software developers who are accustomed to working with a capable version control system in their teams typically recognize the incredible value version control also gives them even on small solo projects. Once accustomed to the powerful benefits of version control systems, many developers wouldn't consider working without it even for non-software projects.

**Benefits of version control systems**

Developing software without using version control is risky, like not having backups. Version control can also enable developers to move faster and it allows software teams to preserve efficiency and agility as the team scales to include more developers.

Version Control Systems (VCS) have seen great improvements over the past few decades and some are better than others. VCS are sometimes known as SCM (Source Code Management) tools or RCS (Revision Control System). One of the most popular VCS tools in use today is called Git. Git is a *Distributed* VCS, a category known as DVCS, more on that later. Like many of the most popular VCS systems available today, Git is free and open source. Regardless of what they are called, or which system is used, the primary benefits you should expect from version control are as follows.

1. A complete long-term change history of every file. This means every change made by many individuals over the years. Changes include the creation and deletion of files as well as edits to their contents. Different VCS tools differ on how well they handle renaming and moving of files. This history should also include the author, date and written notes on the purpose of each change. Having the complete history enables going back to previous versions to help in root cause analysis for bugs and it is crucial when needing to fix problems in older versions of software. If the software is being actively worked on, almost everything can be considered an "older version" of the software.
2. Branching and merging. Having team members work concurrently is a no-brainer, but even individuals working on their own can benefit from the ability to work on independent streams of changes. Creating a "branch" in VCS tools keeps multiple streams of work independent from each other while also providing the facility to merge that work back together, enabling developers to verify that the changes on each branch do not conflict. Many software teams adopt a practice of branching for each feature or perhaps branching for each release, or both. There are many different workflows that teams can choose from when they decide how to make use of branching and merging facilities in VCS.
3. Traceability. Being able to trace each change made to the software and connect it to project management and bug tracking software such as Jira, and being able to annotate each change with a message describing the purpose and intent of the change can help not only with root cause analysis and other forensics. Having the annotated history of the code at your fingertips when you are reading the code, trying to understand what it is doing and why it is so designed can enable developers to make correct and harmonious changes that are in accord with the intended long-term design of the system. This can be especially important for working effectively with legacy code and is crucial in enabling developers to estimate future work with any accuracy.

While it is possible to develop software without using any version control, doing so subjects the project to a huge risk that no professional team would be advised to accept. So the question is not whether to use version control but which version control system to use.

Below are some of the most popular and most preferred open-source version control systems and tools available for making your setup easier.

1. CVS

CVS may very well be where version control systems started. Released initially in 1986, Google still hosts the original Usenet post that announced CVS. CVS is basically the standard here, and is used just about everywhere – however the base for codes is not as feature rich as other solutions such as SVN.  
One good thing about CVS is that it is not too difficult to learn. It comes with a simple system that ensures revisions and files are kept updated. Given the other options, CVS may be regarded as an older form of technology, as it has been around for some time, it is still incredibly useful for system admins who want to backup and share files.

2. SVN

SVN, or Subversion as it is sometimes called, is generally the version control system that has the widest adoption. Most forms of open-source projects will use Subversion because many other large products such as Ruby, Python Apache, and more use it too. Google Code even uses SVN as a way of exclusively distributing code.  
Because it is so popular, many different clients for Subversion are available. If you use Windows, then Tortoise SVN may be a great browser for editing, viewing and modifying Subversion code bases. If you’re using a MAC, however, then Versions could be your ideal client.

3. GIT

Git is considered to be a newer, and faster emerging star when it comes to version control systems. First developed by the creator of Linux kernel, Linus Torvalds, Git has begun to take the community for web development and system administration by storm, offering a largely different form of control. Here, there is no singular centralized code base that the code can be pulled from, and different branches are responsible for hosting different areas of the code. Other version control systems, such as CVS and SVN, use a centralized control, so that only one master copy of software is used.  
As a fast and efficient system, many system administrators and open-source projects use Git to power their repositories. However it is worth noting that Git is not as easy to learn as SVN or CVS is, which means that beginners may need to steer clear if they’re not willing to invest time to learn the tool.

4. Mercurial

This is yet another form of version control system, similar to Git. It was designed initially as a source for larger development programs, often outside of the scope of most system admins, independent web developers and designers. However, this doesn’t mean that smaller teams and individuals can’t use it. Mercurial is a very fast and efficient application. The creators designed the software with performance as the core feature.  
Aside from being very scalable, and incredibly fast, Mercurial is a far simpler system to use than things such as Git, which one of the reasons why certain system admins and developers use it. There aren’t quite many things to learn, and the functions are less complicated, and more comparable to other CVS systems. Mercurial also comes alongside a web-interface and various extensive documentation that can help you to understand it better.

5. Bazaar

Similar to Git and Mercurial, Bazaar is distributed version control system, which also provides a great, friendly user experience. Bazaar is unique that it can be deployed either with a central code base or as a distributed code base. It is the most versatile version control system that supports various different forms of workflow, from centralized to decentralized, and with a number of different variations acknowledged throughout. . One of the greatest features of Bazaar is that you can access a very detailed level of control in its setup. Bazaar can be used to fit in with almost any scenario and this is incredibly useful for most projects and admins because it is so easy to adapt and deal with. It can also be easily embedded into projects that already exist. At the same time, Bazaar boasts a large community that helps with the maintenance of third-party tools and plugins.