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Suleman: How smart tech startups are getting to markets faster

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Austin continues to be the birthplace of innovative technology startups where the presence of established tech brands — including my own alma maters Intel and AMD and notable industry leaders such as Rackspace and Dell Inc. — create a carry-over effect as entrepreneurs leave to form their own businesses. A number of these startups have gained headlines by earning significant investment amounts from high-profile sources.

Unfortunately, not all startups are lucky enough to have founders or investors with deep pockets. And even those that do must be increasingly conscious of extending those dollars as far as possible to find their market and be successful.

Eric Reis, pioneer of the lean startup movement, noted that early stage software businesses succeed or fail on their ability to quickly and inexpensively develop and test new features and products. But if you, the founder, are also your own operations team and development resources are the biggest determinant of time to market, then software developers are your most expensive and highest ROI resources. IT salaries aren’t going down any time soon.

That’s why all software startups, no matter how small, should adopt a “development and operations” — or DevOps — approach. DevOps is the idea that software developers partner with IT operations to ensure that the software created runs with a minimum of problems. It also takes the view of sharing IT infrastructure and resources between development and operations teams, and, to some extent, embraces automation of parts of both “dev” and “ops” where quality and security can be improved by policy implementation.

When I speak with startup founders at meetups and conferences, I ask them if they are using DevOps, and many say they don’t have the time or knowledge. Yet the simple fact is that DevOps and startups is a match made in heaven.
While implementing a DevOps framework proactively takes some effort, implementing it retroactively has even more challenges. That said, it’s still worth the effort.

At Flux7, we recently learned this lesson firsthand. Although we had proposed a DevOps model early on for a complex project, we were unable to convince the client of the value in taking the time and resources up front to establish a DevOps framework that would support and streamline development workflow. As such, nearly a year into the project, with more than 100,000 lines of code produced, we were beginning to fall behind schedule. More resources would be needed to meet objectives.

It was during the 10th month of the project that we convinced our client that investing in a developer productivity solution would achieve cost and resource savings. The result just may have saved thousands of dollars in development and delayed delivery.

**Reduce costs, time to market**

When a software product is launched with a framework using a DevOps plan, startups benefit by being better able to manage and streamline their IT and developer resources, and getting their product to market faster.

If you could save each member of a four-person development team 10 percent of his or her time, you reduce costs and time to market, are able to try more experiments that increase your chances of success, delay additional hiring if necessary, and keep your burn rate under control.

This kind of approach also works effectively for a startup because developers can use their native machines with all their tools and environments, helping to curtail capital expenses while retaining quality assurance.

As for the ops team, requests from the dev team to create new environments are eliminated, and fewer queries are generated in regard to the production environment.

That’s why improving your workflow between development and operations to eliminate inefficiencies should be a top priority for every tech-driven startup.

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