

Automation Techniques for Efficient Container Image Management in CI/CD Pipelines

Venkat Marella

Independent Researcher, USA

ABSTRACT

With the advent of cloud computing, things became easier and the infrastructure was moved from on premises to the cloud, making on-demand access to resources just a few clicks away. However, deployment remained a problem due to a major reason: "Code working on developer's machine but not working properly in staging or production environments." Traditional methods used to release the final build as part of distribution process, along with deployment of the MySQL database and code on the on premise infrastructure, which was a lengthy and cumbersome process. CI/CD's primary goal is to provide developers a reliable and timely method for deploying features. Although it primarily helps developers, the software's end users also benefit from it. CI/CD often entails quick feature feedback cycles and little downtime. Fast feedback cycles thus make it possible for developers to provide new features quickly, which benefits other stakeholders as well. These articles provides a high-level overview of how CI/CD might effectively manage the rolling updates process and automate the whole build and deployment process, hence resolving the deployment and rolling upgrade issues. Additionally, it offers a fault tolerance mechanism in case of a failure in staging or production environments, as well as a means of applying the disaster recovery plan independent of the underlying cloud platform.

Keywords: -Information Technology (IT), CI/CD, Tolerance Mechanism, Code Working, Software, Timely Fashion, Developer's Machine, Cloud, Production Environments, Container, DevOps.

INTRODUCTION

Security has emerged as a critical issue in software development at all levels in the context of linked data, interlinked open data, and semantic a digital government applications. Applying safety procedures early in the designing process to identify and eradicate vulnerabilities as they emerge is known as "Shift-Left Security" [1], and it is becoming more popular. The security of the container environment is a key element of this design, and Docker and Kubernetes excel in this area by making efficient use of containers. Although containers provide increased portability, scalability, and efficiency, they also pose special security risks, especially with regard to runtime threats and image vulnerabilities [1, 2].

To lessen these problems, businesses are using automated vulnerability detection tools for container images more and more. As the software industry changes and evolves at an ever-increasing rate, security has emerged as a significant concern at every stage of software development. One example that is now receiving a lot of attention is "Shift-Left Security," which entails applying safety protocols always early during the development process to identify and eradicate vulnerabilities as they occur [2, 3]. In the age of connected data, linked open data, and semantic e-government applications, it is essential for contemporary software development to include shift-left security techniques and automated vulnerability detection in container images. This approach places a strong emphasis on security in container-based systems like Docker and Kubernetes as well as in the early phases of the integration process. Image vulnerabilities, unsecured settings, runtime hazards, inadequate orchestration security, and supply chain flaws are among the issues with containerization security that are examined in this study [2, 3]. Through static and dynamic assessments, vulnerability databases, and policy-enforcement mechanisms, it emphasizes adherence to regulatory regulations and the use of automated vulnerability detection techniques integrated into Continuous Integration/Continuous Deployment (CI/CD) pipelines. Finding vulnerabilities in CI/CD pipelines, preventing policy violations, [2], susceptible images, and repetitive processes are all covered in the article.

Because of the shift in content publication brought about by digitalization, the instruments used for content production also had to alter [5]. To prepare and assist online content publication, various tools are required, rather from the ones that were created for offline media publishing. The Finnish media has also been undergoing a continuous process of digitalization. A Finnish media firm is Sanoma Media Finland Oy [4, 5].

They provide material for a wide range of platforms, including periodicals, newspapers, radio, and television. In addition to printed media, digital media is becoming more and more significant in their repertoire. Finland's most popular newspapers, the Helsingin Sanomat and IltaSanomat, are produced by Sanoma. It also generates dozens of

neighborhood newspapers in addition to the two major ones. To meet the demands of the several editorial teams, such a large portfolio necessitates customized solutions. Many of Sanoma's solutions are developed internally to facilitate the digitalization of news content generation [5, 6].

This paper illustrates the deployment process of one of their content management service's components utilized in content development. Tools must be able to be updated and modified regularly due to the large number of platforms and the rapid speed of content creation. A crucial component of the developer experience nowadays is continuous integration and continuous delivery, also known as continuous deployment (CI/CD) [6, 8]. A CI/CD pipeline's primary goal is to provide developers a reliable and efficient method of deploying features. Although it primarily aids developers, an efficient procedure may also assist software end users. A well-designed pipeline often results in short feature development times, quick feedback cycles, and little downtime [7, 8]. Faster creation of the proposed features is another benefit of a shorter feedback loop [8].

The practice of developers regularly merging code changes and using automated tests to make sure the changes work properly with existing code is known as continuous integration (CI) [8, 9]. By facilitating the early identification and remediation of issues in the early phases of development, this procedure significantly contributes to the reduction of the entire development cycle [9, 10].

The process of executing code integrated via continuous integration (CI) using an automated build system and testing it to prepare it for production deployment is known as continuous delivery, or CD. This greatly shortens the time it takes for your software to reach the market by guaranteeing that it is reliable and prepared for deployment at any moment.

Monitoring the functionality and performance of deployed software and making ongoing adjustments based on user input and system logs is known as continuous feedback [9, 10]. This improves overall system dependability by enabling you to promptly detect and address problems in production.

DevOps, which stands for continuous development, continuous integration, and continuous delivery, includes CI/CD as a key element. In order to identify issues early, developers regularly integrate code changes and verify those using automated construction and evaluation systems, a technique known as continuous integration (CI) [11]. To guarantee automation and consistency in the deployment process, CD is a collection of procedures that automatically pushes this integrated code into the distribution environment. In order to improve the dependability and effectiveness of the deployment process, this procedure incentivizes developers to contribute code modifications on a regular basis [8].

These changes are then automatically merged and tested. Because of this, DevOps and CI/CD are effective tools for fostering team communication and enhancing the calibre and velocity of software release. Figure 1 [11, 12].

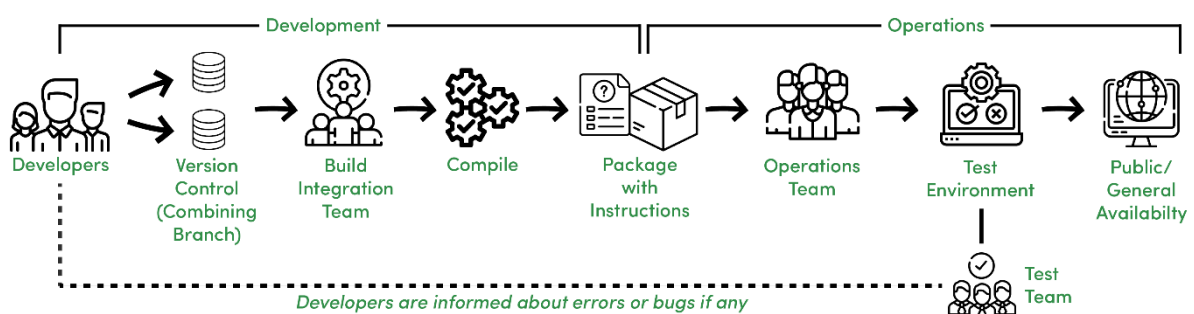


Fig. 1 CI/CD deployment process [12]

Containers

The concept of server virtualization, network virtualization, and storage virtualization is still used in cloud environments today and is at the core of the cloud computing paradigm. Traditionally, virtual machines were used to host numerous programs on the same server in an environment with virtualization [11]. As a result, multiple applications used the same underlying hardware for compute operations. Despite virtualization, inefficient use of resources and performance problems with the infrastructures persist [11, 12]. In essence, the hardware resources are divided up and assigned to the virtual machines in order to create an isolated environment. This allows the application to access the resources that have been allocated to it, but in many cases, the resources assigned to that application are idle and useless when the application is not performing any computations [13]. Consequently, it results in resource waste. In contrast, containers distribute the necessary resources during runtime rather than dividing them up beforehand.

Containers versus Virtual Machines

The following is how Docker defines containers:

“A standard software unit called a container bundles code and all of its dependencies to enable the program to execute consistently and swiftly across different computer environments”.

The foundation engine for executing and managing containers on it is provided by the free source Docker container engine. Additionally, Docker offers an improved method of software delivery: Docker images, which are essentially packages with many layers pre-packaged into a small bundle. The basic operating system, application dependency issues, application code, and network-related drivers and data are all included in one package. This image really allows containers to run the program extremely well, making it extremely portable and very scalable.

Architecture

In order to divide the hardware resources in advance and employ the necessary resources, virtual machines (VMs) often use a hypervisor as their foundation engine. However, since containers communicate directly with the operating system's kernel [13], there is no need to divide and allocate the system's hardware resources in advance; instead, they may be used at runtime in accordance with the specifications shown in Figures 2 and 3.

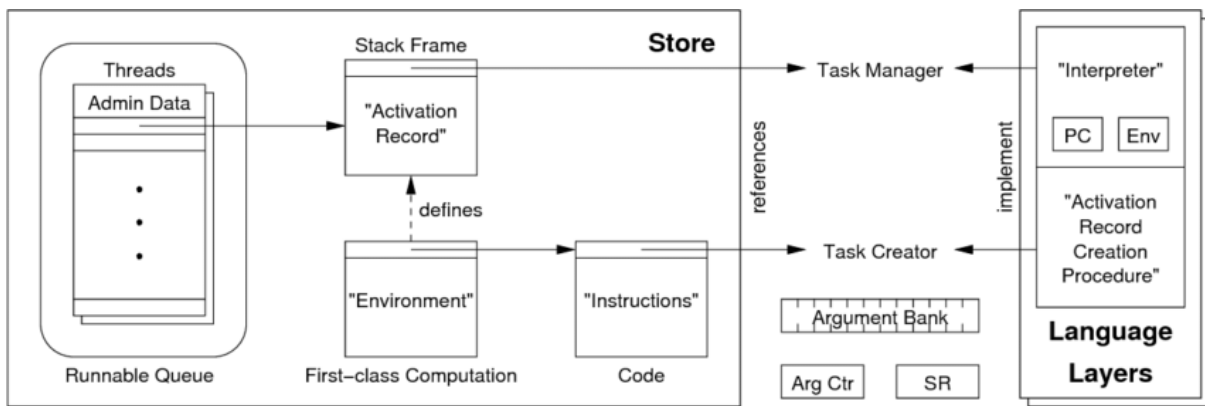


Fig. 2 Architecture of virtual machines [14]

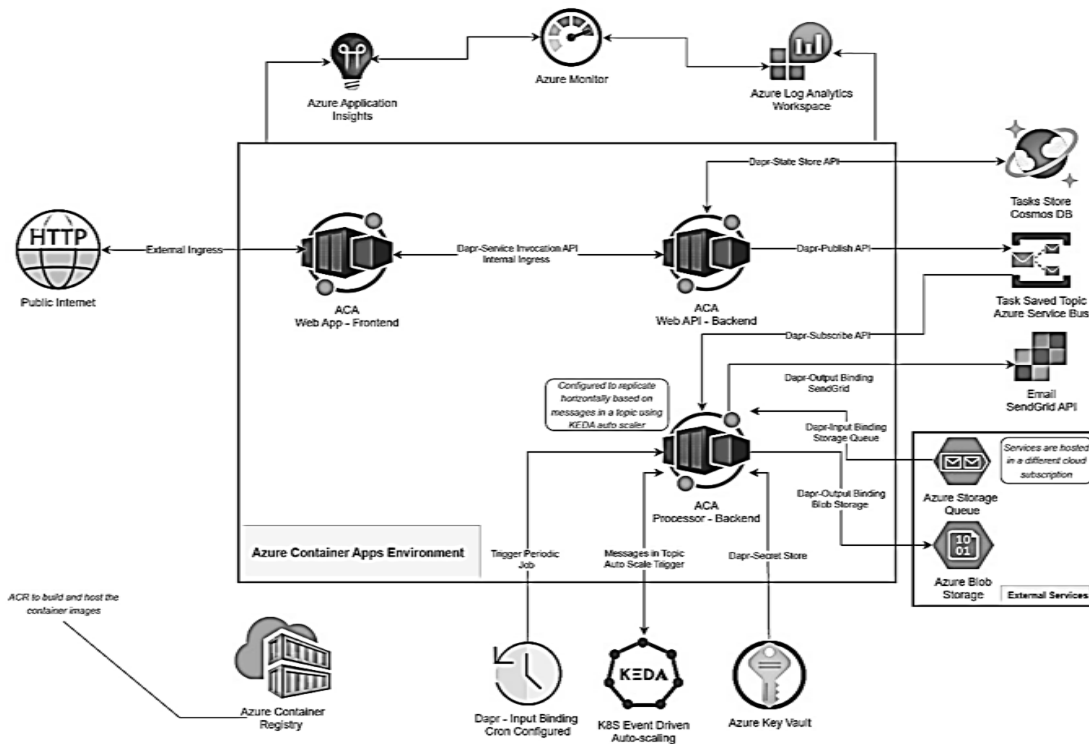


Fig. 3 Architecture for containerized applications [13, 14]

Deployment Process

Docker images, which are essentially packages containing the application code, necessary dependencies, and networking details for that application, must be developed in order to deploy containers, which can be powered by images [15]. Docker files are manifests that may be used to produce Docker images. Once the images are built, they can be released on the Docker engine, which allows for application management [15].

With the help of container orchestration tools like Kubernetes or Docker Swarm, it is also simple to maintain multiple replicas of the containers. By using these tools, the services can be repeated onto other nodes, creating multiple copies of any given service, which makes the entire infrastructure fault tolerant. The main drawback of adopting containers is that they must be manually handled at every stage. This problem may be fixed using CI/CD, which automates the whole process.

Continuous Integration and Continuous Deployment (CI/CD)

In order to automate the build process, continuous integration is a technique that assists many teams in integrating their code in one location [11, 16]. In order to prevent the final deployment from becoming a drawn-out and difficult process, continuous deployment pushes minor upgrades into the production environment on a regular basis. It does this by enabling real-time, automated application deployment with zero or minimal downtime.

Building the code is the first step in the process, and when it is completed successfully, it is moved to the testing framework. It is tested after being deployed to the testing environment [12, 13]. After testing is finished, it is moved to staging for additional testing, after which the alterations are moved to production. If any bugs are discovered, they are fixed, and the process is repeated.

There are many CI/CD solutions available; Jenkins is a well-known open source tool that can be used to build pipelines for Continuous Integration/Continuous Delivery to automate the introduction and testing process and integrate infrastructure smoothly [13].

Jenkins

The whole build, deployment, and testing process may be automated using Jenkins, an open source tool for continuous integration and delivery (CI/CD) [14]. Jenkins can also be connected with containerized apps to automate the procedure for deployment into containers. The issue of manually creating Docker images, submitting them to the registry, and then spinning containers from them may be resolved by using Jenkins as the CI tool. The following are some of the different parts of the complete CI/CD workflow:

- **Jobs:** A Jenkins job comprises the entire build and deployment process, including building the code, creating the Docker image, pushing the image to the Docker registry [15], entering the deployment environment, pulling the image from the registry, and spinning the container from the image into the production environment [18].
- **Triggers:** Jenkins uses triggers to initiate jobs; when an event happens, such a push in Github, Jenkins will launch a job from that trigger to finish the remaining steps.
- **Groovy:** Jenkins uses this syntax for constructing the job script [18].
- **Stages:** Additionally, Jenkins allows multistage builds, allowing us to separate the task into different components by dividing it into many stages [19, 20].

CI/CD Using Jenkins

When developers submit their code to a version control system—in this case, we assume that programmers are using Github as their version control system—the whole process will begin to run. Jenkins will initiate a Jenkins job as soon as the code is pushed to Github, which will then create a Docker image from the code.

This Docker image will then be uploaded to the Docker trusted registry, which is the main location for storing and delivering Docker images worldwide. Jenkins will then establish an SSH connection on the server and clone the Docker image [20]. If the container already exists, it will simply update it with the most recent version of the image [18, 19]. In addition to deploying the application to different environments and being useful for container orchestration and dispersed environments, this may be further improved to include automated testing once the container has been launched Figure 4 [20, 21].

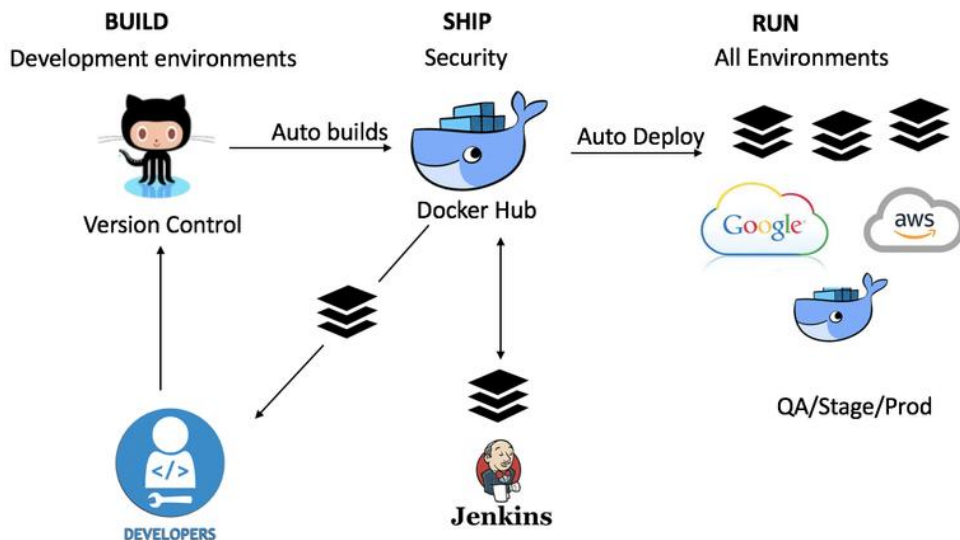


Fig. 4 Architecture for CI/CD [22, 23]

Future Work

Using open source tools like Terraform by Hashicorp, which can be used to create infrastructure as a code for practically all cloud platforms, this architecture is possible to integrate with multiple cloud environments and created as infrastructure are provided as a code in a way that is completely cloud agnostic [24, 25]. Additionally, it may be improved to accommodate container service offerings from other cloud platforms. For example, Amazon AWS provides "Elastic Container Service," which is hosted and managed by AWS but utilizes the same core Docker architecture.

CONCLUSION

By comparing automated and manual deployment utilizing a CI/CD pipeline with Jenkins, we assessed deployment efficiency in this research. According to our findings, automated deployment solutions are much better than manual deployment in a number of areas. The main conclusions of this research and our discussion are listed below.

Deployment times were much shorter during automated deployments than during manual ones, particularly for iterative deployments. While automated deployments enhanced time efficiency since CI/CD systems like Jenkins handled all processes automatically, manual deployments took a lot of time because each step needed human participation.

Therefore, build and deployment processes may be automated with optimal performance and increased efficiency by using CI/CD systems like Jenkins. For comparable use cases, other technologies like Ansible, Chef, and Puppet may be used, however Jenkins is recommended because of its effectiveness and large community.

Organizations may reduce risks and take advantage of Shift-Left Security practices by integrating the automated vulnerability detection approach into CI/CD pipelines. Potential application exploitation is avoided when vulnerabilities are discovered by including vulnerability screening and repair procedures into the software development lifecycle.

The effectiveness of safe software delivery is also guided by this method, which guarantees conformity to industry legislation, organizational policies, and security requirements. The methodology's outcomes demonstrate how well it works to enhance an organization's overall security posture and compliance.

The danger of putting susceptible applications into production settings is greatly decreased by early vulnerability discovery and remediation, which also lessens the possible effect of security breaches and the related expenses. Comprehensive vulnerability reports and audit trails provide assurance in the software delivery process by facilitating adherence to organizational security needs and industry norms. Furthermore, automated scanning, policy enforcement, and remediation techniques improve vulnerability management procedures, boosting productivity and lowering the possibility of human mistake. Proactive vulnerability management is ensured by ongoing monitoring and feedback loops, which minimize possible interruptions to applications and services and allow for quick reaction to newly identified vulnerabilities.

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