

# SHIFT HAPPENS

**Grove Ventures' Six Archetypes  
of SDLC-focused startups**



**In this part** of the Shift Happens research, we present a new way of thinking on SDLC-focused startups.

**Portraying the Israeli SDLC-focused startup landscape helped us identify six SDLC company archetypes that can be distinguished by their go-to-market strategy.**

## If you think of becoming a founder in the field, we highly recommend reading this carefully

After many hours of interviews, we gained valuable insights that enabled us to develop a new framework which categorizes SDLC-focused startups into six distinct company archetypes.



Identifying a **company's archetype** can assist in shaping its **go-to-market strategy** effectively, accelerate its growth, and help it proactively address unique challenges.

# To figure out your Archetype:

First, differentiate between the personas:



## Engineering

Software Engineers



## Operations

DevOps Engineers / SRE /  
Platform engineers



## External

Security / Product /  
Sales

Then, ask yourself these three questions:

### 1 Where do you **land**?

Who is the first user of your product?  
Is it the Engineers, the Operations, or External?

### 2 Who owns the **budget**?

Is it the VP of Engineering, Head of DevOps, or External (e.g. CISO)?

### 3 Who is the **end user**?

Is it the Engineers, the Operations, or External?

Archetype 1:

# The Founding Fathers



These are the titans of the software development world, the table stakes in every engineering organization.

Most of the companies that match this archetype were founded 10-15 years ago, when the software engineering landscape transitioned from traditional waterfall approaches to agile methodologies, and adopted practices as CI/CD, micro-services and Git version control.

Because of the ironclad grip that the 'Founding Fathers' have over the market, it became very difficult to compete with. It is already a 'closed list' which makes it hard to build huge companies in their already established categories.

# The Founding Fathers

ARCHETYPE 01	Land	Budget	User
<b>ENGINEERING</b>	✓	✓	✓
<b>OPERATIONS</b>		✓	✓
<b>EXTERNAL</b>			✓



**The Founding Fathers** managed to infiltrate almost all of the stakeholders - Engineering, Operations and External.

## GROVE'S TAKE

- Generated an amazing PLG engine
- Category appears to be closed for new entrants
- GenAI might disrupt the category



**ATLASSIAN**

Archetype 2:

# The Top Dogs



🔄 This is the new generation of companies who sit on top of the modern software infrastructure supply chain.

🔄 They developed a proven method for building giant DevOps companies, and challengers will always try to imitate them. Their buyer, user and champion are all the same. Their 'land and expand' is simple - their customer usage growth is driven by a strong brand recognition from their very first days.

🔄 The secret to their success - enterprise sales motion with an aggressive up-sale mechanism.

# The Top Dogs

ARCHETYPE 02	Land	Budget	User
<b>ENGINEERING</b>			
<b>OPERATIONS</b>	✓	✓	✓
<b>EXTERNAL</b>			



**The Top Dogs** are entrenched in the Infrastructure, it's where they bring all of their value with an unmistakable ROI for engineering executives.

## GROVE'S TAKE

- Build a strong brand and SLG from the early days
- Land & expand within the DevOps is natural, following the customer's infrastructure growth



Archetype 4:

# The Magicians



- The Magicians believe they can supply DevOps engineers with a 'magic wand' and influence developers' adoption.
- Their products are very intuitive, and unlike the Sneaky Bastards, the Magicians provide an intrinsic value for both DevOps and software engineers.
- These companies have the challenging craft of trying to convince developers to use products, while their liaisons are the DevOps, SREs or platform teams.

# The Magicians

ARCHETYPE 04	Land	Budget	User
ENGINEERING			✓
OPERATIONS	✓	✓	✓
EXTERNAL			



Because their main offering is within their client's Operations, **The Magicians** should always keep in mind who is picking up the bill at the end of the month - that's the DevOps, and not the Engineering team.

## GROVE'S TAKE

- Brand recognition and self-served products are key
- Value for the engineers should have a distinct and measurable ROI



elasticsearch



Archetype 5:

## The Dreamers



- Innovative startups seeking to revolutionize engineering practices and invade “The Founding Fathers” territory.

- These pioneers will quickly discover they have a financial barrier—most of their budget lines were run dry by their predecessors, and engineering executives might find it difficult to provide business reasoning for spending money on yet another developers’ tool.

- A lot of Dreamers struggle while trying to implement a PLG strategy that doesn’t always scale. If companies that fall under this category can prove a tangible ROI for their clients - they will pave their path to growth.

# The Dreamers

ARCHETYPE 05	Land	Budget	User
<b>ENGINEERING</b>	✓	✓	✓
<b>OPERATIONS</b>			
<b>EXTERNAL</b>			



**The Dreamers** can be spotted from a distance - their Go-to-Market strategy is for engineers, and engineers alone.

## GROVE'S TAKE

Two ways for succeeding:

- 🕒 Build a pure PLG engine, with a tangible ROI, or -
- 🕒 Solve an executive problem and have a perfect enterprise sales motion



Archetype 6:

## DevFlix & Chill



- Engineering teams often face the Build vs. Buy dilemma, and decide whether to spend time on building and maintaining a custom solution, or purchase an off-the-shelf product.
- The DevFlix & Chill archetype covers companies that solve this dilemma easily, with the instant value-add of a self-serve, bottom-up mechanism.
- These companies often answer a need that started outside of the engineering organization (in the Product or Revenue teams, for instance). Because both engineering and business teams are involved, once these companies' products are in - they can usually "chill".
- This is an intriguing archetype that includes many category leaders.

# DevFlix & Chill

ARCHETYPE 06	Land	Budget	User
ENGINEERING	✓	✓	✓
OPERATIONS		✓	
EXTERNAL		✓	



The trick is replacing a solution that most engineering teams have to build by themselves, but are reluctant to do so. This is why the **DevFlix & Chill** archetype is able to funnel budgets from all personas.

## GROVE'S TAKE

- Under this archetype, there is room for big companies to grow
- Keep the barrier for adoption to a minimum - make them an offer they can't refuse and solve their Build vs. Buy dilemma



Archetype 3:

## The Sneaky Bastards



The Sneaky Bastards use a clever distraction strategy to penetrate the market, which resembles the 'Look, a Bird!' method used by parents to convince a reluctant baby to eat.



The Sneaky Bastards strategically "Shifted Left", focusing their marketing on developers for lead generation. Their end-users are the developers, but other teams, for instance - security or ops teams, gain the most value out of their products. They readily embrace them, and then endorse them to discerning developers.



This is an emerging category, with Snyk paving the way for many young startups who followed suit (usually in security, authentication and configuration sectors). But these young startups must remember - even Snyk didn't rely solely on PLG.

# The Sneaky Bastards

ARCHETYPE 03	Land	Budget	User
<b>ENGINEERING</b>	✓		✓
<b>OPERATIONS</b>		✓	
<b>EXTERNAL</b>	✓	✓	✓



**The Sneaky Bastards'** value is external - directed at teams external to the engineering teams - but their go-to-market strategy sees the developers as their end-users. This strategy is a two-front war, which requires dual attention.

## GROVE'S TAKE

- Requires a hybrid Go-to-Market of PLG and SLG
- Rely on enterprise sales for outbound sales, and uses PLG as a marketing method to increase brand awareness and inbound demand generation



# Knowing your archetype is important



When building your company, it is essential to identify your archetype and learn from the Go-to-Market experience of your predecessor.

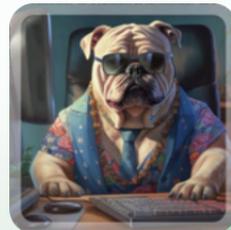
**Educating yourself about the meaning of your Archetype will help you:**

- ✓ Build the right **Go-To-Market** strategy
- ✓ Build the right **business model**
- ✓ **Stay away** from known pitfalls
- ✓ Learn to better plan your **land** and your **expand**
- ✓ Understand who is your **buyer** and who is your **user**

GROVE'S 6 ARCHETYPES

# Knowing your Archetype is important

- There are archetypal challenges, and archetypal **growth hacks**.
- Learn from **your predecessors**.



# DO YOU HAVE QUESTIONS? THOUGHTS OR INSIGHTS?



**Do you have questions? Thoughts or feedback?**

**We want to keep the discussion going.**

**Send your thoughts to:**

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