Business Customer Identity for SaaS Apps — Simplified

Accelerate business growth with a scalable enterprise Identity solution purpose-built for SaaS apps.

okta

What's in store

Overview

Software-as-a-service (SaaS) is everywhere and makes up a constantly changing and increasingly competitive landscape. That's the world enterprises operate in — spoiled for choice but potentially paralyzed by too many options and rising complexity. As of 2023, the <u>average enterprise has 342 SaaS apps</u>, according to Productiv data.

This is an opportunity for B2B SaaS companies to stand out. Why should an enterprise select your solution from all the other apps out there? A competitive edge comes not only from a SaaS company's deep understanding of enterprise needs but also from their ability to showcase their ready-made differentiators.

Customer Identity management, access control, and the underlying security considerations of Identity are critical areas for clear differentiation.

Rethinking Identity: From simple login to strategic competitive differentiator

Google "first 90 days SaaS" and you will find a raft of articles because the first 90 days are critical to the long-term health of an account. Get it right in the first 90 and you're much more likely to see renewals and upsell. This is why there's a massive focus on customer time-to-value and go-live timelines.

This is also why your onboarding flow matters. People don't always think about customer experience when it comes to B2B SaaS, but this is where you can easily generate a core differentiator by making it easy to use your service.

Customer Identity is learning about your customers and building consent-based trust by understanding who they are and how they want to engage with you as a business. Customer Identity is fundamental to the success of your business, and legacy approaches to Identity aren't fit for purpose. The sheer volume of SaaS saturation poses unique scalability challenges, and SaaS businesses need a simple, convenient and intuitive way to onboard users and manage authentication and access control. At the same time, the enterprise demands a frictionless implementation of your application. Identity management is something that just has to work, no matter how complex the setup.

Customer Identity is an opportunity to secure access at scale, drive user acquisition and use developers' time more productively. An Identity solution should do the heavy lifting of authentication, helping you to deliver outcomes like simplified customer onboarding, improved customer experiences, and the ability to move faster on your key innovation and development areas.

Aiming upmarket: Boost developer productivity with off-the-shelf Identity

SaaS businesses with an eye on growth, not just in volume but in revenue size, naturally target enterprises to move upmarket. Aiming upmarket at enterprises, though, raises the service bar. Enterprises come with complex Identity needs that include functionality around user provisioning, administration, and security at scale. Common requirements include support for single sign-on (SSO), multi-factor authentication (MFA), and role-based access control (RBAC). Managing these requirements also adds significant engineering overhead.

In many cases, SaaS companies have successfully built Identity components themselves, but Identity is not usually what you hired your developers to build. Siphoning scarce, expensive internal developer resources away from core business stifles innovation, stalls roadmaps and releases, opens your organization up to security vulnerabilities, and distracts from your growth goals.

ROLLER, a ticketing-based guest experience platform, was originally using an open source Identity platform; as their operations became more complex, growing security needs called for a more robust solution. By outsourcing their Identity needs, ROLLER can stay focused on their mission of providing customized POS solutions for their clients. This not only saves them time, but also a great deal of money — "creating an authentication solution in-house was going to be at least 10 times the cost of just using Customer Identity Cloud," said ROLLER CTO, Andrew Brodie.

"When you can offload to a well-constructed solution or service that you can trust, it just makes sense to do that, so we can then focus on providing the best solutions to our users, which is the custom work."

Andrew Brodie
CTO, ROLLER

Choosing roadmap innovation over maintenance

SaaS companies face hard resourcing decisions, especially as they shift to serving larger enterprises. The heavy load of building and maintaining an Identity solution can cost months of roadmap innovation, whereas acquiring a robust Identity solution can strengthen security posture while reducing (or eliminating) roadmap blocks.

LaunchNotes, a product communication startup, used off-the-shelf Identity to become enterprise-ready and won enterprise business on the strength of their SSO implementation (a key security requirement for almost all of their enterprise customers and prospects). At the same time, they saved two engineering resources by handling Identity externally, allowing the creation of a new 6-month roadmap. "Our core competency is building tools for organizational transparency, it's not authentication," LaunchNotes CEO and Co-Founder, Tyler Davis, explained. "We use a microservices approach, so this is an area where we find value in partnering with an expert."

Trading up: Cut Identity management complexity down to size

Reaching next-level enterprise targets demands more from existing development resources. Enterprises impose a lot more requirements, making homegrown Identity solutions next to impossible to secure, scale and maintain at the level demanded by enterprise customers, particularly when adding in compliance considerations and strict security policy requirements.

In serving the many demands of enterprise customers, SaaS companies experience increased complexity as well. Third-party Identity solutions can help cut some of the sprawling complexity down to size. By unifying business customer Identity systems within a single source of truth as a single platform across the business's entire IT footprint, you've already simplified the outlook. APIs and SDKs let you easily manage common tasks; common authentication standards, development frameworks and programming languages ensure that compatibility is straightforward.

Trading up: Cut Identity management complexity down to size

Customization

Trading up requires investing in developer focus on product features and innovation to deliver a more compelling product to enterprises, not on developer distractions in the form of complex Identity-solution maintenance. Identity requirements differ in every enterprise, leading to increasingly diverse customization requests from every SaaS customer. Designing authentication experiences to meet each organization's needs adds a whole new level of complexity to the Identity equation.

The homegrown Identity solution at iCIMS, a leading talent acquisition technology provider, struggled to deliver a seamless experience for its clients' diverse user types — all of which coexist in the same applications. To serve both internal and external candidates, iCIMS had to solve for disparate authentication methods and identities within the same applications, which resulted in both high costs and difficulties keeping up with clients' security expectations.

Choosing an external Identity solution allowed iCIMS to trade up —delivering a seamless experience for all of its clients' diverse user types who coexist in the same applications, while alleviating the burden on in-house development teams. Features such as Organizations allow iCIMS to set up separate authentication and authorization workflows for each user type, with the ability to configure identity policies and customize candidate experience based on whether a candidate is internal or external. Organizations also offer customizable email templates and login pages, creating an end-to-end, branded job application journey.

> "Developer-friendly toolkits have greatly improved our engineering team's ability to unify Identity."
>
> **Bryan Tedesco**
> SVP of Engineering, iCIMS

Trading up: Cut Identity management complexity down to size

Scale personalization and authorization through consolidation
For SaaS businesses, delivering the seamless B2B customer login experience can mean many different things: branded login flows to match the look and feel of the organization or delegated administration capabilities which simplifies granting limited access to privileged user accounts. The same holds true for authorization management. Implementing access control correctly is critical in building a SaaS application, and SaaS companies need a way to consistently manage authorization, but this is frequently done at the application level. Not only does this open the door to inconsistency, it decreases developer efficiency.

Jamf, a leader in Apple-first management and security, experienced some of these roadblocks. Before moving to a pre-built Identity solution, each Jamf product had its own admin console and login experience. As their sales of products in their portfolio to enterprise customers increased, so did the importance of ensuring a streamlined end-user experience. Consolidating access to all products within a unified platform delivered positive experiences for both their in-house engineering teams and end-customers.

Originally an on-prem MDM solution, Jamf would typically connect to their customers' local Identity solutions using protocols like LDAP. As the company shifted to the cloud, they needed to figure out how to federate with the Identity systems of their largest clients.

"When a customer asks if we support their Identity provider, all we have to say is 'If you follow industry standards, we'll work with it.'," said Jamf Product Manager, Christie Vick. "Whether it's OAuth-based or Saml-based, we'll connect to it. Customer Identity Cloud makes those conversations easier."

Trading up: Cut Identity management complexity down to size

Security on demand

Enterprise businesses typically avoid unnecessary risk. For SaaS application businesses, enterprise security policies and requirements can create hurdles to attracting enterprise customers. Once more, Identity security shouldn't be a core competence or responsibility for most SaaS providers or developers, but meeting the demands of the enterprise means signing on to secure the data of business customers and offering protection against some of the common attacks on Identity systems.

For ORTEC, a global supplier of mathematical optimization software and advanced analytics, an external Identity solution proved to be the right choice for securely granting and monitoring access to data across their enterprise customers. ORTEC's attempts to manage security in-house were error-prone and were, according to their Cloud Operations Architect, Christian van de Schraaf, "...really challenging, especially in the last few years, to keep up with the standards that companies need in terms of security." At the same time, ORTEC Product Manager, Merlijn Gootjes, explained, their growing customer base consisted of organizations with extremely high standards for security, such as hospitals, that ORTEC could not fulfill without help from an outside Identity solution.

> "Setting up authentication has been reduced from around 10 to 20 days to a few days, max."
>
> **Merlijn Gootjes**
> Product Manager, ORTEC

Tackling Identity management at the speed of your SaaS business

As the demand for SaaS applications grows, product and engineering teams face the challenge of implementing a range of unique Identity requirements as well as driving the development of core products and features forward. Tackling Identity management can be part of retaining a competitive edge.

By adopting a business customer Identity platform, such as Customer Identity Cloud, SaaS businesses tap into Identity expertise that supports the challenges of scalability and rapid growth, while maintaining customizability.

Okta's Customer Identity Cloud powered by Auth0 is designed for scalability, security and developer agility. By using the Customer Identity Cloud, development teams can easily and quickly implement features such as Enterprise Federation, Delegated Administration, Access Control, Custom Branding, and Multi-Factor Authentication, helping organizations to meet the needs of their enterprise customers, while accelerating their time to market and shortening time to customer value.

Reach out to learn more about Okta's Customer Identity Cloud powered by Auth0, or try it out for yourself for free.

About Okta

Okta is The World's Identity Company™. We secure Identity, so everyone is free to safely use any technology. Our customer and workforce solutions empower businesses and developers to use the power of Identity to drive security, efficiencies, and success — all while protecting their users, employees, and partners. Learn why the world's leading brands trust Okta for authentication, authorization, and more at okta.com.