

Industry Brief

Why Biotech and Pharma Companies Need SaaS Identity Risk Management



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Introduction

SaaS technology and artificial intelligence (AI) are revolutionizing drug discovery and development, which is traditionally a lengthy and complex process. Today, AI processes massive datasets of biological and chemical information to identify potential drug candidates, and machine learning algorithms analyze diverse data sources to predict the efficacy and safety of new compounds.

From administrative to marketing to medical teams and support staff, SaaS technology and AI tools boost productivity and drive outcomes. But while technology is fueling innovation, it's also introducing new risks and expanding the organization's attack surface. Previously, IT departments had control over software procurement and deployment, ensuring security measures were firmly in place. Now, SaaS and Generative AI technology have changed the game.

The Growth of SaaS, Identities, and Risks

In the past, IT environments were closely managed, with IT departments controlling software procurement and deployment. The rise of SaaS (Software as a Service) has significantly changed this dynamic. While core SaaS applications usually go through a formal purchase and security review process, many SaaS tools are now being adopted by individual employees on their own. SaaS applications are easy to acquire and deploy—employees can sign up and start using them with just an email and a few clicks, often bypassing traditional IT oversight.

When employees independently adopt SaaS tools, IT departments lose visibility into which applications are used, how they are used, and by whom. This occurrence, known as shadow IT, increases the risk of data breaches, as unvetted applications may not meet the organization's security standards or regulatory requirements.

Each new SaaS application expands the organization's attack surface. Identity risks grow because each account can become a target for cybercriminals, who can use it to gain access to other corporate resources, leading to unauthorized access, data exfiltration, and other malicious activities. Recent high-profile breaches like Change Healthcare, Broward Health, and L'Assurance Maladie highlight the importance of protecting and securing identities and the costly consequences when compromised.



SaaS Identity Risk Management: A More Modern Approach

The shift from a closely governed IT environment to one where every employee can independently adopt technology requires rethinking SaaS security. To safeguard biotech organizations effectively, the focus must be on enhancing visibility, control, and security compliance across all applications used within the organization. Enter SaaS identity risk management (SIRM), a strategic approach tailored to address the unique challenges posed by the widespread adoption of SaaS.

Traditional IT security frameworks fall short in a decentralized IT environment; however, SIRM provides a comprehensive framework designed to secure access, maintain compliance, and protect data within a decentralized and rapidly evolving IT ecosystem, ensuring that an organization can safely leverage the benefits of SaaS while mitigating the associated risks.

SaaS Identity Risk Management



The foundational elements of a SIRM program include:

- **Identity Lifecycle Risk Governance:** Establish and enforce policies for managing the digital identity lifecycle, including discovering and revoking user access to SaaS applications as necessary.
- **Access Management:** Involves implementing and managing secure access controls such as single sign-on (SSO), multi-factor authentication (MFA), and robotic process automation (RPA) to ensure that only authorized users can access SaaS applications.
- **Compliance Management:** Ensure adherence to relevant regulatory and industry standards, such as HITECH, HIPAA, NIST, SOC2, ISO27001, ISO/IEC 2382:2015, and others, particularly concerning securing access to applications and data.
- **Security Incident Management and Response:** Establishes comprehensive procedures for detecting, analyzing, and responding to security incidents affecting SaaS applications.
- **Enterprise Risk Management:** Evaluate and control risks posed by a SaaS application to the enterprise, distinct from assessing the risk profile of the SaaS vendor.

SaaS Identity Risk Management Outcomes

The objectives of a SIRM program are designed to address the unique challenges and risks associated with using SaaS and AI applications in an organization. These goals are critical for ensuring the security, compliance, and efficient management of identity-related aspects in a SaaS environment. The primary outcomes typically include:

- **Implementing Robust Access and Identity Risk Management:** Enforce strong access control mechanisms such as Multi-Factor Authentication (MFA) and Single Sign-On (SSO) to manage user access to SaaS applications securely. Efficiently manage the lifecycle of user identities from onboarding to offboarding.
- **Mitigating Risks Associated with SaaS Usage:** Identify and address security risks unique to SaaS environments, including those stemming from shadow IT, where employees use unapproved but tolerated SaaS applications.
- **Ensuring Regulatory Compliance:** Align SaaS usage with regulatory and compliance requirements, ensuring organizational adherence to relevant standards and legal mandates.

- **Improving Visibility and Control:** Gain comprehensive visibility into SaaS application usage across the organization. Establish control over who accesses what applications, when, and how.
- **Adapting to Evolving Threat Landscape:** Develop the agility to quickly adapt to new threats and changes in the SaaS ecosystem to ensure ongoing protection and risk management.
- **Enhancing Operational Efficiency:** Streamline identity risk and access management processes for SaaS applications to improve operational efficiency and reduce administrative overhead.

SIRM takes a programmatic approach to discovering and managing risks from Gen AI services and SaaS applications. By focusing on identifying and mitigating threats related to identity sprawl, shadow IT, and shadow AI, SIRM supports regulatory compliance and ensures effective management of identity-related risks, providing the most comprehensive approach for securing SaaS applications.

HITECH and HIPAA Compliance

Complying with Health Information Technology for Economic and Clinical Health (HITECH) and the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) requires biotech and pharmaceutical companies to implement comprehensive identity risk management across their SaaS applications. The HITECH Act update in 2024 significantly strengthens HIPAA compliance by imposing stricter penalties, extending HIPAA rules to business associates, enhancing enforcement and auditing capabilities, expanding patient rights, and promoting the adoption of secure EHR systems. SaaS is crucial in this framework by providing scalable, secure, and efficient solutions that support compliance while maintaining operational efficiency.

Shadow SaaS and Shadow AI Jeopardize Compliance

Cybersecurity compliance standards often focus on known SaaS; however, comprehensive discovery is essential for identifying potential gaps and security vulnerabilities that can lead to an incident. A SIRM approach helps organizations discover both managed and unmanaged SaaS applications within their network, providing visibility into all applications being used, whether officially sanctioned or not. Once these applications are identified, the risk associated with each can be assessed and evaluated, factoring in variables such as data sensitivity, user access patterns, and the security practices of the SaaS providers. SIRM enables security teams to prioritize their security efforts and focus on the most critical risks.

SIRM also supports risk mitigation by helping teams implement targeted security measures, such as enforcing multi-factor authentication (MFA) or securing dormant accounts that are no longer used. Through continuous monitoring and automated compliance reporting, the SIRM framework has helped companies in the healthcare sector adhere to HIPAA and HITECH requirements, ensuring that patient and proprietary data remain secure and regulatory obligations are met.



Mitigating Workforce SaaS Identity Risks

Biotech and pharma companies face significant challenges in managing a complex and dynamic workforce, which includes medical directors and doctors, lab technicians, administrative staff, and contractors needing to access systems. Staff often work on personal devices and use online reference tools that may not be officially sanctioned by the organization. This diversity and fluidity create a challenging IT environment for several reasons:

- **Multiple Roles and Access Levels:** Each group within the workforce requires different levels of access to various systems and data. Medical staff need access to patient records, nurses need to update patient information, administrative staff manage appointments, and contractors may need temporary access.
- **Changes in Staff:** Staff turnover and role changes require updates to access permissions. The workforce often comprises employees, contractors, or business associates working across various locations.
- **Distributed Access Needs:** Users often need to access internal systems and use external online resources to perform their duties onsite or from alternative locations. The use of personal devices is prevalent. This distributed access increases the complexity of ensuring secure and appropriate access controls.

One of the best practices for cybersecurity in the Bio-IT sector is implementing multi-factor authentication (MFA) to secure access to sensitive data. Shadow SaaS applications, which often store and process critical data, must also have MFA enabled to meet Bio-IT standards. However, this becomes more challenging with a diverse workforce due to varying roles, frequent changes, and widespread access needs. Without MFA, companies risk falling short of essential cybersecurity protocols and exposing sensitive data to potential breaches.

The SIRM framework addresses these challenges by offering advanced identity risk management processes that ensure comprehensive visibility, detailed reporting, and access revocation when needed. With SIRM, organizations can maintain a secure and compliant IT environment, effectively protecting sensitive patient and drug data while supporting the operational needs of their dynamic workforce.

SIRM Platforms: Why Grip SSCP is the Best Solution for Biotech

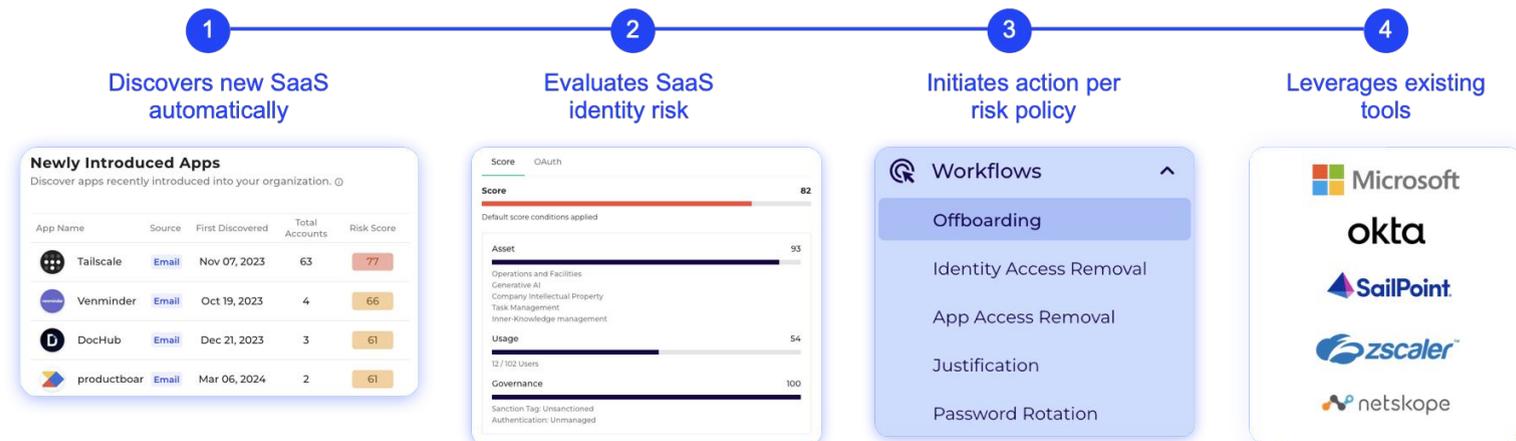
As SaaS and AI adoption and reliance grow, the risks created must be addressed. The healthcare sector faces unique challenges due to the critical nature of its data, stringent regulatory environments, and a dynamic workforce. Addressing these challenges necessitates a robust SIRM strategy.

The Grip SaaS Security Control Plane (SSCP) is the industry's leading SIRM platform and has become essential for biotech and pharma companies as they expand their SaaS usage. Grip SSCP provides actionable insights beyond what Cloud Access Security Brokers (CASB) and SaaS Security Posture Management (SSPM) can offer by supplying broader coverage, encompassing all SaaS applications, including those procured by individual users and used on unmanaged devices. Additionally, Grip SSCP is adaptable, including versatile integrations for diverse platforms and assessing risk based on the impact on the enterprise, which is critical for maintaining the security and integrity of sensitive healthcare data.

Grip SSCP is Foundational for SaaS Identity Risk Management



Employees sign up for a new SaaS app and an ideal solution...



Supporting Regulatory Compliance

Grip SSCP is designed to meet HITECH and HIPAA compliance standards, providing the tools necessary for comprehensive identity risk management across SaaS applications. The 2024 update to the HITECH Act has intensified compliance requirements with stricter penalties and enhanced enforcement mechanisms. Grip SSCP helps organizations navigate these complexities by:

- **Discovering Managed and Unmanaged Applications:** Grip SSCP identifies all SaaS applications within the network, whether officially sanctioned or not, ensuring no potential compliance gaps or security vulnerabilities are overlooked.
- **Assessing Risk:** It evaluates each application's risk based on data sensitivity, user access patterns, and the security practices of the SaaS providers. This risk assessment enables healthcare organizations to prioritize their security efforts effectively.
- **Mitigating Risks:** Both HIPAA and HITECH require covered entities to implement reasonable and appropriate administrative, technical, and physical safeguards to protect electronic protected health information (ePHI). Grip SSCP helps implement targeted security measures, such as enforcing multi-factor authentication (MFA) or securing dormant accounts, thus mitigating identified risks and enhancing overall security.
- **Continuous Monitoring and Reporting:** Automated compliance reporting and continuous monitoring ensure that hospitals and healthcare systems adhere to HIPAA and HITECH requirements, maintaining secure operations and protecting patient data.

The Future of SaaS Identity Risk Management in Biotech

Gartner projects that the adoption of SaaS and AI tools will continue to expand, with most tools being acquired outside of IT's purview. This means shadow IT and shadow AI risks will also proliferate, and breaches from compromised identities will persist unless these risks are proactively addressed. SaaS security is long overdue for modernization, and Grip is uniquely positioned to deliver the SIRM solution to address the evolving SaaS risks of today and tomorrow.

Grip SSCP's versatility allows seamless integration with a wide range of platforms, making it adaptable to the unique needs of any biotech or pharma organization. Its scalability ensures that as the organization grows and evolves, Grip SSCP can expand its capabilities by providing a future-proof solution that aligns with the ever-changing digital healthcare landscape.

Grip SSCP also reduces the burden of manual compliance tracking and enables security teams to focus on core operations while ensuring continuous adherence to regulatory requirements. Grip's automation enhances security, provides real-time insights, and ensures that sensitive data is always protected.

About Grip Security

Grip Security is the industry leader in SaaS identity risk management, providing cutting-edge solutions to help enterprises navigate the security challenges of widespread SaaS adoption. Our platform enables companies to discover, prioritize, secure, and orchestrate SaaS risk mitigation. By leveraging identity as the central control point, we provide a comprehensive approach to securing all SaaS applications—including shadow SaaS and shadow AI—empowering organizations to adopt SaaS confidently and securely. [Contact us to arrange a personal demo of the award-winning SaaS Security Control Plane.](#)