The 15 essential CIAM capabilities

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CIAM that delights

Just like 10x vs 2x goals, rethinking CIAM is all about mindset.

It starts by setting aside limiting ideas about what's possible — which tend to be over-informed by what your current solution can do or how workforce IAM solutions handle login journeys.

It goes beyond asking what your customers expect, what your CISO will approve, what your IT team can support, and what your marketing team will accept. Those are important questions, for sure, but they don't go far enough.

Instead, the driving question is: what would delight my customers, my CISO, and my marketing and IT teams?

To help you imagine what that looks like, we've compiled this list of 15 capabilities that make customer identity and access management (CIAM) truly delightful — that is, frictionless for customers, uncompromisingly secure, data-rich and capable of syncing with your customer intelligence systems, and easy to configure and customize.

15

Key CIAM capabilities you should evaluate

Of course, everyone is at a different spot in their CIAM journey. We've arranged capabilities into three groups. If you're just getting started you'll want to begin with the "table stakes" capabilities. Or, if you've got a running start and are looking to improve, take a look at the advanced and innovative features.

INNOVATIVE

ADVANCED
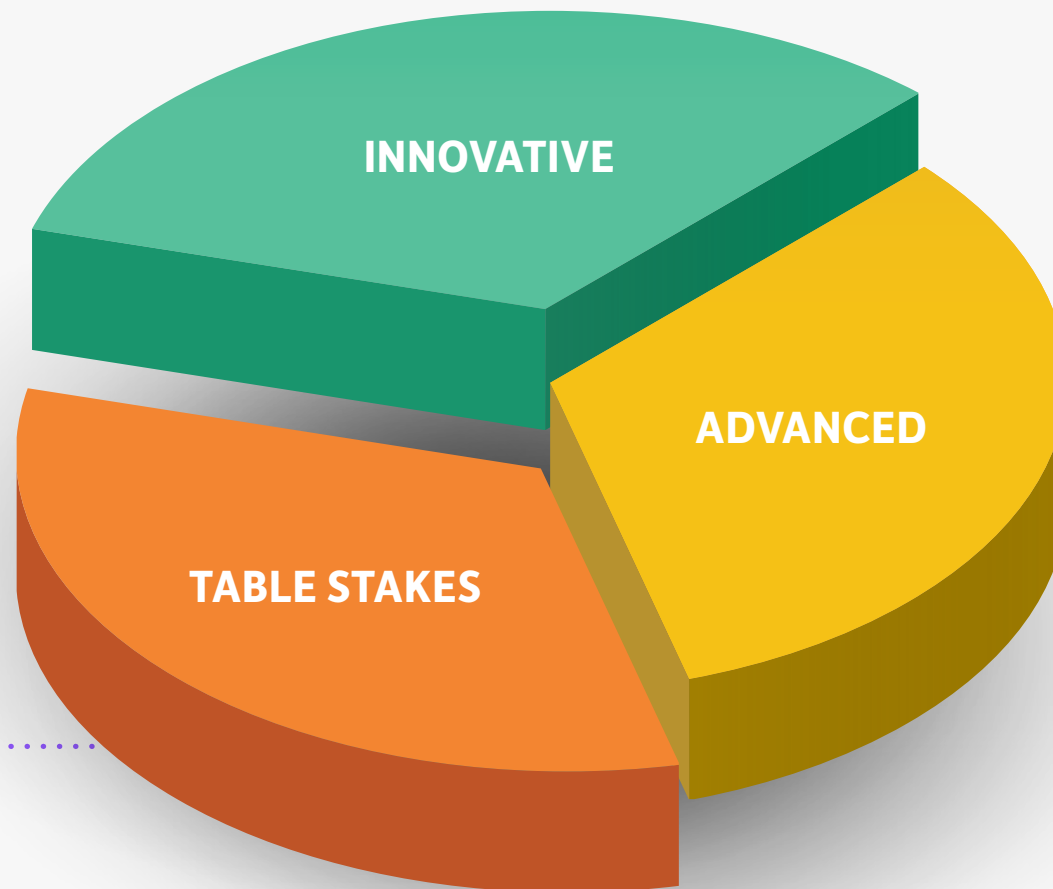
TABLE STAKES

CIAM Table Stakes

Capabilities that most CIAM solutions have but are often way harder to deploy than they should be.

Market availability: **Common**
(but often patched together)

Registration & progressive profiling

Converting customers and getting to know them over time should be easy for both you and your customer. A great CIAM solution streamlines this process by offering a selection of pre-built registration and profiling templates, eliminating the need for extensive coding. This not only simplifies the onboarding process, but also enables you to eliminate form fatigue, ensuring that you collect only the necessary data to provide personalized experiences.

Social login options

70% of users prefer social login when available. An optimal solution should include seamless integrations with popular social providers such as Google and Facebook. This not only simplifies the sign-in process but also captures data to better serve your customers. Importantly, this entire process should be effortlessly achieved with just a few clicks for everyone involved.

SSO & MFA options

Rolling out authentication shouldn't be a complex or isolated task. CIAM solutions should enable you to customize and configure authentication options across multiple sites and brands with a simple click-based approach — no coding required. Bonus points if the provider has an easy way to build and apply MFA policies in conjunction with adaptive MFA. This flexibility enables you to tailor authentication choices to meet the specific needs of your customers while also securing your business.

Self-service profile management

Make it easy for customers to recover lost passwords and manage their own experience. In doing so, you can free up helpdesk support and obtain accurate customer data for upsell/cross-sell campaigns. Look for a CIAM provider that excels in automating self-registration, account recovery, and account management. Opt for a solution that offers a user-friendly, no/low code interface, and easy customization to align with your brand.

Consent management

You should be able to build, deploy, revoke, and redeploy consents for any user journey with simple policy settings and configuration. Your customers deserve the ability to self-manage their consents, with clear tracking mechanisms in place. Be cautious of providers urging you to build or integrate with a third-party management platform. Consider a CIAM solution that integrates consent management within its core platform.

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Advanced CIAM

Capabilities that support more complex business needs, but which vendors often bolt on – either by acquisition or via partners – because their CIAM solution doesn't offer them.

Market availability: **Medium** (but often added on)

Risk and fraud

Avoid the hassle of yet another add-on solution to detect risk and fraud. And while we consider this an "advanced" feature, it doesn't have to be complicated. With a modern CIAM solution, you should be able to configure all risk and fraud detection rules out of the box and with a few clicks. A bonus is consuming intel from multiple sources to make informed decisions.

Identity verification and identity proofing

Similar to fraud solutions, most CIAM providers don't offer identity verification (IDV) and identity proofing natively. Whether it's verifying phone records and addresses or higher friction experiences like physical document verification (think drivers' licenses and passports), these capabilities should be available out of the box and be easy to deploy. This will mean less time integrating separate products and faster, more secure conversion rates.

Passwordless authentication

Going past basic MFA options like one-time passwords (OTP) and magic links separates good CIAM providers from great ones. Look for a vendor that offers multiple built-in passwordless options – including WebAuthn, FIDO2, passkeys, and physical keys. Customers should also have the option to choose what method works best for them. And your admins should be able to configure them with policy settings.

B2B delegated administration

CIAM providers should offer delegated administration as a standard in their offering. The ability to easily offload identity management to a B2B partner should be easy to do. If this is something your business needs, proceed with caution when looking at CIAM providers who don't offer this out of the box. Otherwise you'll have to build and support it yourself.

Multi-brand support

A must for larger organizations is the ability to have multiple branding policies across various applications on a single platform. In complex B2B deployment models, this functionality becomes even more critical. Different business partners often require their own branded experiences to ensure a high level of trust in the registration and authentication process. If a provider lacks this capability, you might be stuck deploying multiple instances of their software for each unique experience. The right cloud architecture liberates you from limitations, enabling the configuration of numerous brands from a single product instance.

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Innovative CIAM

Capabilities that very few vendors offer even though they can really accelerate your business. You might be surprised to see what else CIAM can do.

Market availability: **Rare**

Clicks over code policy configuration ✓

CIAM solutions have historically required significant professional services and custom coding. In fact, services costs are often several times higher than the cost of the CIAM product. Innovative CIAM solutions reduce the need for services by enabling you to configure the majority of capabilities using drop-down menus and radio buttons to change policy settings for everything from MFA options to B2B organization configuration to self-service policies and consent management. Since coding equals cost, unnecessary code should be avoided whenever possible.

Identity journey insights and analytics ✓

Visibility into your customer sign-in and journey data is critical to improving and optimizing the experience. Benefits include higher conversion rates and increased upsell. That makes this an innovative requirement. Strong CIAM providers will offer you a centralized dashboard with high-quality reporting so you can track trends and usage in real time. With access to more data, you can A/B test and adjust on the fly – so you're always delivering what your customers and your business need.

Low-code branding and UX customization ✓

User experience is critical for any online sign-in experience. A poor UX can reduce conversion rates and slow adoption. Unfortunately, many CIAM providers separate UX development from their platform, which means engineers have to use APIs to connect to the CIAM solution. CIAM providers that provide a native branding editor make it easier and faster to create and maintain your ideal customer experience. They also enable faster iteration and significantly reduce maintenance costs since there is less custom code to manage.

Lifecycle event orchestration ✓

Streamlining customer journeys requires real-time integration with diverse applications and databases to keep customer data synchronized. Crucial to this process is orchestrating interactions through APIs while upholding a delightful customer experience. It's essential that journey-time orchestration capabilities are native to the CIAM platform. Avoiding the need to custom code simplifies deployment, reduces complexity, and minimizes the cost of iterations. When selecting a CIAM provider, prioritize solutions that offer this capability out of the box rather than patched together through acquisitions.

B2B organizational management ✓

B2B customer experiences pose unique challenges, as each business wants to have autonomy in how they manage user access. This requires distinct login flows. In B2B models, this is the most critical feature a modern CIAM provider can offer. The best providers will allow you to create separate organizations for each B2B partner, linking each organization to applications serving both B2B and B2C customers. Configuration should be as straightforward as changing a policy, enabling each organization to enjoy its own custom-branded experience with tailored policies such as MFA and self-service. Unlike providers that require custom coding for B2B use cases, the best solutions reduce implementation and services costs with clicks instead of code.

If you're contemplating a CIAM revamp this year, we encourage you to use this list to guide your selection criteria.

While it may seem that the top providers offer similar capabilities, the approach they take to implementation can differ enough to affect your speed to market.

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The definitive list of essential CIAM capabilities

Stay ahead in 2024

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