HITRUST is High Priority For Your Business

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Why You Can't Afford to go Uncertified

Every SaaS (software as a service) provider working in the healthcare space knows that few differentiators are more beneficial – or more challenging – than achieving HITRUST certification.

While the certification process can be both exhaustive and invasive, being certified can no longer be viewed as an option, or even as an opportunity. In fact, it's your business's obligation to ensure an immediate competitive advantage.

The HITRUST Certification Process: An Overview

When an organization stores, manages, or transmits ePHI (protected health information) in the cloud, a lot can go wrong. That's why the HITRUST CSF (Common Security Framework) provides comprehensive, standardized, and certifiable guidelines for meeting the regulations put in place by HIPAA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act) and HITECH (Health Information Technology for Economic and Clinical Health Act.

HIPAA is a law with no accreditation process or officially recognized bodies, but HITRUST is an accreditation organization. Its framework involves a rigorous set of over 1,800 possible controls across numerous regulatory bodies, and a HITRUST assessor will assign your organization a subset of them based on a comprehensive, standardized risk assessment. Controls include items such as:

- Password complexity policies
- Processes for offloading employee data
- Rotating encryption keys
- Maintaining breach and incident response policies
- Managing physical security

These controls are designed to pave a path to compliance based on your services and the types of data your products handle, ensuring that sensitive information is protected in the event of attempted security breaches.

But managing PHI in the cloud brings a number of risks that go beyond just security and compliance.





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Hurdles To HITRUST: What You're Up Against

With all the rigor of the certification process, it's no wonder that meeting HITRUST guidelines is as daunting as it is differentiating. For organizations starting out on the path to certification, the sheer scope and scale of the timeline can be a risk in and of itself.

No matter the size, specialties, or experience of your team, achieving HITRUST certification without an expert partner to guide you can be daunting. Especially if your business attempts to take on HITRUST alone, the process can cost you immensely in terms of:

- Time: Without the guidance of experienced HITRUST experts, the certification process can take months to years.
- Resources: Certification requires substantial internal resources, distracting your team and diverting energy from innovation and growth.
- Price/budget: HITRUST is an investment with an immense ROI. However, that investment can balloon (and the benefits shrink accordingly) when inexperienced teams are charged with attaining certification, because invariably errors occur, timelines are extended, and valuable resources are wasted.

Keep in mind that HITRUST certification is only good for two years, with an interim assessment required on the off year. Organizations must be prepared to devote considerable attention to the certification process.

To make matters even more complicated, organizations can't just prove they have satisfied controls at a certain point in time: They need to demonstrate that they have put processes in place to maintain ongoing continued compliance.

Combined with the general rigor of addressing hundreds of controls, all these factors require both initial and ongoing investments in new technology, to say nothing of the added expense of training, testing, and deployment.

With so many challenges and risks to consider, it's no wonder that not just any organization can complete the HITRUST process. But HITRUST certification is also becoming an opportunity – even a requirement – for organizations that compete in the digital healthcare space.

Your Competitive Edge: Why HITRUST Is High Priority

From addressing controls to managing timelines, achieving HITRUST is clearly a high bar. However, when considered against the risks that organizations run by not getting certified, the benefits far outweigh the barriers. In fact, certification offers unparalleled advantages in terms of compliance, security, differentiation, and growth.

Maintaining Compliance

HITRUST is, first and foremost, a framework for ensuring compliance with HIPAA and other industry, local, state, federal, and international regulations. While there are ways to meet these standards without HITRUST certification, HITRUST offers the most comprehensive way to keep your organization in line with both the law and your competitors.

However, compliance isn't just important in terms of following the rules. While failing to ensure compliance can cause liability issues for software providers, it can also result in steep fines that may very well end your business relationships – or your business itself.

For instance, the European Union recently implemented the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) to enforce standards for data collection and storage, with fines of up to US$22 million for noncompliance. A number of U.S. states have also begun following suit, such as California with its Consumer Privacy Act.

Because software providers are considered data processors (and are therefore liable under GDPR regulations), being proactive about compliance is crucial in order to retain customers and avoid being penalized. As HITRUST continues to update its framework to take into account an ever-increasing number of laws and regulatory boards, keeping up with compliance may make or break your business.

Securing Data

Accreditation bodies such as HITRUST exist because healthcare organizations can't be too careful when handling PHI. The average medical record sells for ten times more than credit card information, making it crucial for organizations to maintain compliant systems. In fact, 88% of ransomware attacks target the healthcare industry.

Looking further into the data around security breaches confirms that healthcare is a security-minded industry because it has to be: 66% of healthcare organizations had ransomware attacks in 2018, and the number of ransomware attacks is predicted to quadruple by 2020



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Small businesses are especially vulnerable to the devastating effects of security breaches: 60% of small businesses that suffer successful cyber-attacks are out of business within six months. Whether your customers are seeking HITRUST certification themselves or just want to work with a certified provider, you'll need to take every possible step to ensure their data is as secure as possible.

Keeping up with the Market

In today's digital healthcare landscape, not being HITRUST certified has gone from being a minor lack to a damaging limitation. From payers to providers to technology companies, covered entities and business associates of all sorts have begun to demand HITRUST certification of the organizations they do business with.

Ever since healthcare payers banded together and declared they wouldn't work with uncertified companies, the pressure to meet the HITRUST framework has caused an industry-wide ripple effect. Following the payers' lead, major providers now require HITRUST certification from all their vendors and partners as well. In this context, it's difficult to imagine a successful third-party vendor that hasn't met HITRUST benchmarks.

Moreover, HITRUST certification doesn't just help you hang on to current customers, it opens up access to new ones. By helping you both maintain and expand your customer base, HITRUST offers an unparalleled edge.

Prioritizing Growth

Organizations that are HITRUST certified position themselves as thought leaders. Certification also fosters growth, because being proactive about compliance widens your potential market and differentiates you from your competitors.

If you reduce your timeline to HITRUST compliance from years to months, you can reallocate a tremendous number of hours to business growth. Whether it's by pursuing new technologies or pursuing new customers, innovation can't happen if your resources are already devoted elsewhere

The Competitive Advantage Checklist

You can't afford to avoid HITRUST certification. SaaS providers that want to retain a competitive edge should prioritize HITRUST in order to:

- **Maintain compliance** – Stay on top of ever-changing regulations to avoid steep penalties for you and your customers.
- **Secure data** – Retain customers by minimizing their risk for disruptive security breaches.
- **Keep up with the market** – Stay at the leading edge of healthcare with the highest possible credentials.
- **Prioritize growth** – Widen your customer base and stand out from competitors.

Claim your Competative Advantage

Speak With A HITRUST CSF Expert

Schedule My Consultation