

Trust centers are a critical resource that help organizations demonstrate security and compliance to customers. Intentional and thoughtful design should not be overlooked.

Building Customer Confidence: How Trust Centers Save Time and Accelerate Sales

June 2024

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Introduction

While the concept of a trust center is not new, end-user expectations and the impact of trust centers on purchasing decisions have evolved significantly.

Many people — especially those with security, legal, and compliance roles — are familiar with the traditional external-facing document repository, typically referred to as a trust center that contains an organization's security and compliance policies, reports, and certifications. But an over 60% year-over-year increase in breach incidents; the proliferation of regulatory requirements like GDPR, CCPA, and the EU AI Act; and increasing concerns over how data is collected and used are driving greater scrutiny of companies' security programs and postures.

The brunt of this increased scrutiny has been shouldered by security teams who are tasked with responding to inbound security questionnaires from prospective customers. Further, these requests have increased in number and in detail as customers seek in-depth assurances that the appropriate controls, policies, and protections are in place at the company.

For security teams already stretched thin securing their organization, the additional burden of these security questionnaires has led to a reexamination of the form and function of trust centers. As a result, we see the emergence of new trust center features designed to alleviate this burden on security teams and drive positive results for the business by proactively building trust with customers. There is a statistically significant relationship between the quality of a trust center with cost savings, employee productivity, and revenue growth, according to IDC's August 2023 *Worldwide Future of Trust Survey*.

AT A GLANCE

KEY FINDINGS

- » 84% of IT decision-makers and business leaders worldwide report their trust center has room for improvement with a third of those leaders saying it needs "major improvements" or "a complete overhaul" (source: IDC's *Worldwide Future of Trust Survey*, August 2023).
- » The availability of a trust center is a determining factor in purchasing decisions.
- » A statistically significant relationship exists between the quality of an organization's trust center and both cost savings and employee productivity.
- » These cost and productivity improvements contribute to another statistically significant relationship between trust center quality and revenue growth for an organization (source: IDC's *Worldwide Future of Trust Survey*, August 2023).

IDC research also consistently shows that trust centers are the greatest contributor to brand trustworthiness in the area of compliance (see *IDC Future of Trust Scorecard*, IDC #US51860324, February 2024), with visitors to trust centers taking note of an organization's "commitment and willingness to be compliant and maintain that compliance" through the availability of a strong trust center.

Additional IDC research reveals that the availability of a well-maintained trust center is a determining factor in purchasing decisions. In a global survey of IT decision-makers and buyers, vendors that were considered for purchase but not selected by respondents were rated as most weak in their trust center offering (see *Trust Centers Are a Determining Factor in Purchasing Decisions*, IDC #US50852223, June 2023). Those vendors that were selected for purchase had high-quality trust centers that were among the best in the industry (see *The IDC Trust Perception Index: Measuring the Four Foundations of Trust (Security, Privacy, Compliance, and ESG) for the Top IaaS Providers*, IDC #US49817122, November 2022).

According to IDC's January 2023 *Trust Perception Index*, respondents who indicated that their service provider's trust center was a weakness said this was due to a lack of clarity on certifications, supported regulations, alignment, and frameworks. This lack of clarity on certifications and supported regulations will lead to lost opportunities, partnerships, and decreased customer loyalty.

Yet, while the data indicates the importance of a trust center to an organization and its perceived trustworthiness, few have matured their trust center beyond traditional static web pages to match customer needs and expectations. In fact, 31% of IT decision-makers and business leaders worldwide reported having a trust center that needed either "major improvements" or "a complete overhaul," and an additional 53% indicated that their trust center is still in need of "minor improvements" (source: IDC's *Worldwide Future of Trust Survey*, August 2023).

This Analyst Brief outlines the many benefits trust centers can deliver for an organization and its customers as well as the key considerations for companies as they evaluate their trust center strategy.

Benefits

Trust centers are more than mere document repositories or marketing pages; they are a public-facing extension of an organization's security program.

Organizations that choose to adopt or enhance their trust center can expect the benefits detailed in the sections that follow.

Save Time on Security Reviews

- » **Streamline security bottlenecks:** The strength of an organization's trust center is associated with improved cost savings and employee productivity, according to IDC's August 2023 *Worldwide Future of Trust Survey*. Trust centers help organizations save time by automating inbound requests for security documentation. Access approvals, nondisclosure agreement collection, and sharing permissions on a document-by-document level can all be streamlined by integrating with customer relationship management (CRM) and esignature vendors of record. This functionality not only reduces the burden on security teams who no longer need to take nearly as much time out of their day to respond to these requests but also drastically reduces the time from request to approval, ensuring customers get access to the most up-to-date information as swiftly as possible.

- » **Low or no-touch security reviews:** Trust centers serve as the first line of defense for common security questions. Prospective customers can self-serve much of the security information they need to make a purchase decision from a trust center. For some customers, this results in a no-touch security review without needing to contact sales or security teams. For others, it means completing the time-consuming security questionnaire process early on so that subsequent interactions with the sales team are productive and efficient.
- » **AI-powered security answers:** IDC predicts that by 2026, 40% of organizations will utilize AI-enabled risk and compliance solutions to continuously monitor data in real time to predict noncompliance (see *IDC FutureScape: Worldwide Future of Trust 2024 Predictions*, IDC #US51293523, October 2023). Leading trust centers are embedding AI into their services to help summarize and highlight key information about the organization's security posture. It can often take buyers hours to comb through and find the information they need. GenAI presents an opportunity to pull out key findings from the corpus of knowledge available on a trust center to help buyers quickly find the information they need.

Improve the Trustworthiness of the Security Program

- » **Centralized and up-to-date source of truth:** Security professionals often face hundreds of inbound security requests per week. Survey respondents told IDC that ease of information access was the number 1 benefit of great trust centers as it helps them efficiently update documentation as their security program evolves. The old process of sending documentation over emails not only makes it difficult to manage version control but also fractures the ways in which information is shared and maintained. Trust centers provide an up-to-date, centralized repository that aids in ensuring correct information is provided to buyers and accessible to everyone within the organization.
- » **Enable continuous compliance:** Point-in-time compliance is no longer sufficient to ensure software buyers that a vendor is trustworthy. Prospective buyers tell IDC that they visit vendors' trust centers for every contract bidding, for RFPs, and whenever they need to purchase new products or services. Add to this the increase in regulations and policies, and it's clear that yearly or twice yearly maintenance of trust center documentation is no longer adequate. The strongest trust centers are integrated with an organization's governance, risk, and compliance tools and can provide up-to-date information in near real time, reduce reporting errors, and help ensure customer retention over the long term.
- » **Insights to improve security programs:** Trust centers equipped with usage data and analysis tools can unlock insights such as which documents are the most viewed or what are the most commonly asked questions and can help refine a company's security posture. Organizations that power their trust center with usage data are better able to respond to potential gaps in information availability as well as what parts of their security program they should prioritize next.

Accelerate Sales and Measure Business Impact

- » **Shortened deal cycles:** With trust centers, prospects and customers can move through security reviews and access requests more quickly, shortening the overall deal cycle. This not only helps accelerate deals but also leaves less revenue on the table. There is a statistically significant relationship between the quality of a trust center with cost savings, employee productivity, and revenue growth, according to IDC's August 2023 *Worldwide Future of Trust Survey*.

- » **Impact tracking:** Security teams can now quantify the monetary impact of their trust center on the business. Through integrating with CRM systems, security teams can report on how much revenue was influenced through their trust center. This data helps prove the efficacy of security programs as a revenue driver for the organization.

Considerations

Many organizations find themselves standing up a trust center for the first time or redesigning their trust centers from the ground up to accommodate these new requirements. For a trust center that best supports both employees and customers, IDC recommends that organizations conduct a thorough evaluation of their existing trust center and undertake proof-of-concept exercises with trust center vendors to assess the following considerations:

- » **Usability for administrators and customers:** Trust center visitors are looking for easy-to-access, up-to-date information to offer assurance before purchase. Therefore, it's important to ensure that a trust center is intuitive and easy to navigate for visitors and employees alike. Trust centers also need to support the scale of a company's security program, offer adequate roles and permissions, and have a user interface that supports both the organization and its security and compliance requirements as they grow. Evaluating the user experience from the point of view of a prospect or customer is also important.
- » **Platform integrations:** High-quality trust centers take advantage of automation wherever possible. Trust center vendors help accomplish this by offering a wide variety of APIs and integrations. When considering providers, make sure to validate that their tech stack is compatible with the organization's trust center. Look for vendors with the broadest platforms that will support the trust center's continued evolution.
- » **Security questionnaire workflows:** The strongest trust center platforms seamlessly integrate with security questionnaire automation workflows, allowing questionnaire responses to draw from the knowledge base of an organization's trust center and enabling customers to complete inbound questionnaires more quickly.
- » **Continuous monitoring of controls:** IDC predicts that 40% of organizations will utilize AI-enabled risk and compliance solutions to continuously monitor data in real time to predict noncompliance by 2026. The most effective trust centers will be those able to display near-real-time compliance by continuously monitoring controls. Vendors that provide continuously updated snapshots of compliance controls from within their trust center earn greater customer trust through reassurance that the information is current and accurate.

Conclusion

Trust centers are an invaluable part of any organization's security, privacy, and compliance strategy and cannot be overlooked. In designing a trust center, it's important to go beyond a simple document repository and provide features that assist both employees and customers to find the information they seek quickly and efficiently. Provision of a strong trust center saves security teams time, improves an organization's trustworthiness, and accelerates sales.

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About the Analyst



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Grace Trinidad is research director in IDC's Security and Trust research practice responsible for the Future of Trust research program. In this role, she provides strategic guidance and research support on approaches to trust that include risk, security, compliance, privacy, ethics, and social responsibility.

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