

White Paper

What Every SaaS Company Should Know About Integrating with Its Customers

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When the growth of your business is fueled by your ability to exchange data with your customers, you can't custom-code your way into a valuable offering

As a SaaS provider, your entire business revolves around delivering an innovative, reliable, cost-effective, out-of-the-box service to your customers. But how do you differentiate your organization in a market that's heavily competitive, where it's becoming less expensive for SaaS developers to roll out applications every day, and easier for your competitors to bring new SaaS services online?

The success of any SaaS product is directly proportional to its usability and the ability for customers to adopt the offering. That's why connecting customer systems and integrating business-critical information drives the solution's value. Thus, it's important to understand how seamless B2B connectivity with customers and partners enables SaaS organizations to deliver a better service.

While the offering your SaaS company sells may be universally considered a "cloud application," that application gets delivered via a series of B2B-like transactions. This inevitably requires integration, which enables systems to connect and businesses to communicate, supporting the continuous flow of information critical to your SaaS operation and providing value to your customers.

SaaS companies essentially take on the integration of all their customers. If the offering is business-focused services, for example, that SaaS organization leverages customers' business data to provide key insights, data aggregation, or data exchange capabilities to these customers.

In order to be easy to do business with, SaaS organizations must connect their applications with customers' existing applications, which could be on-premise or in the cloud (or both), and they also must connect the internal applications and tools that power the SaaS product itself.

These are no small feats, given the various technologies scattered throughout businesses today.



Today's customer wants a higher quality of service, more cost savings, tangible improvement to their business processes, and more self-service visibility into their technology. SaaS organizations adopting modern B2B integration technology can deliver superior service because they recognize that the actual solution – the product SaaS organizations provide to customers – is only part of the overall customer experience.

It's now up to you, as a SaaS solutions provider, to take charge of integration. Only the savviest organizations leverage B2B technology that enables data movement and integration into the SaaS environment.

The SaaS Organization Paradigm

SaaS companies deliver software and services that allow data to be accessed via the internet, but these companies still manage the databases, code, and the underlying tools that comprise the application. Thus, all of your business processes are actually a continuous sequence of file transfers and data exchanges, an ecosystem of B2B and A2A transactions.

The importance of data and its exchange cannot be understated in this context. If you're a cloud-based marketplace or data service company, for example, you know the importance of data exchange. A SaaS firm analyzing information assets to provide clients with insights and customized data services requires a highly scalable and flexible solution for moving business-critical data among its data centers. So when your application promises to deliver customized data services, your ecosystem must communicate with various endpoints to aggregate the proper data and follow through on that promise.

At the end of the day, your customers want a seamless interaction with you, and that's achieved through seamless integration. But any SaaS company in business knows that integration doesn't just happen. SaaS organizations provide APIs so customers can integrate with existing ERPs or other business systems. But these tools can be so rigid that they often limit the cloud-to-cloud and intra-cloud data movement needs.

But what if you could offer the product AND the seamless integration experience? Well, you can. Embedding the data movement processor into your stack so you can integrate your cloud platform with customers, partners, and other cloud services is a critical component of any successful SaaS provider.

Successful integration means an increased capacity to take on new customers, reduce churn, and obtain more visibility into your SaaS operation, thus increasing revenue.

A CLOSER LOOK

Top Challenges for SaaS Vendors

Customer integrations:

Integrating legacy systems and custom scripting limit SaaS companies' ability to deliver expanded value and full solution potential for customers.

Cost of integration:

Many vendors have IT teams trying to custom-build integrations on their own, and these evolve into major headaches as the company grows.

Time constraints:

SaaS vendors often face tight integration timelines from customers, who are eager to deploy the solution and start gaining revenue or productivity.

Improper integration:

If your Salesforce or NetSuite apps aren't syncing correctly, for instance, it can lead to lost revenue, productivity, and confidence in the solution.

Maintaining security:

With SSL, TLS, and other security standards constantly evolving, keeping company data secure is one of the biggest concerns when it comes to SaaS integrations.



But SaaS vendors specialize in their own individual capabilities, not integration. Similarly, the customer only cares about the application they are buying and the function it can deliver. While critical to both customer and vendor, integration regrettably becomes an afterthought.

That's why embedding a B2B processor into your infrastructure delivers the plug-and-place layer so your application — the one that's core to your buyer's business universe — can easily onboard and exchange data with your customers.

So how do you enable that? By delivering modern integration.

While modern integration can mean a variety of things, it really means this:

The days of pieced-together file transfer and integration components are long gone, and any data or information services enterprise that relies on such complex, unstable "technology" will ultimately put its business at risk.

Modern integration technology delivers:

- Expansive connectivity for cloud and on-premise systems
- Self-service capabilities for end users
- A single, scalable platform for every data movement need
- Database independence for advanced scalability
- REST API support for flexible interface capabilities
- Enhanced data visibility across the enterprise

The Integration Challenge

SaaS organizations will often state that the thorn in their sides when it comes to customer implementation is integration. It can be complex and time-consuming, and it's becoming even more so with additional trading partners to connect and mountains of data to import.

Just why is integration so difficult? For starters, there are so many things to connect. You are connecting customer systems to your systems, which are connected to lots of other applications and systems. These solutions might require a variety of ground-to-cloud and cloud-to-cloud integration scenarios, and the customer side also might have existing ad-hoc integrations. Complicating matters is the fact these technologies don't inherently communicate, making it difficult for SaaS companies to take on new business.

But it's also because of the outdated approaches to integration. As SaaS organizations grow, they discover that managing their integration services and protocols they piecemealed together from open-sourced components, or custom-developed to fit their SaaS infrastructure and governance requirements, becomes a burden that dilutes their ability to focus on their core business value.



CUSTOMER USE CASE

Elevating the E-Commerce Experience

Jagged Peak provides a SaaS-based management system (OMS) for e-commerce and fulfillment. Such a solution requires tight integration to exchange messages with external cloud-based e-commerce platforms (think Magento or Demandware) and external warehouse management systems. Its OMS also must integrate with a host of other external applications, including financial and reporting systems like Workday and NetSuite.

But that's just the external B2B scenario. In reality, the OMS has numerous actions set up to move files among internal applications – web portal and logistics tools, for example – that supplement the OMS platform and serve various client needs. Jagged Peak uses a complete B2B integration platform from Cleo to facilitate each flavor of integration required to make this a viable omnichannel e-commerce offering.



Additionally, the traditional service-oriented architectural (SOA) approaches to integration often fall short of expectations because they're too often driven by the IT side of the house and consequently deliver minimal value to the business side. These collections of reusable services, which can be cost-effective, often can't handle heavy data exchange and only hinder overall business communications as the company scales.

But no one ever claimed that constructing an ecosystem of SaaS integrations was easy. The good news is, there are solutions out there that can provide the means to integrate and exchange data with your customers, using whatever standard protocol they (or you) want without requiring your IT teams to develop, manage, and maintain governance over these protocols. The better news is, you might already have one in your IT stack.

The very MFT and B2B integration technology you use for your customer and partner business communications can integrate the internal applications that power and differentiate your SaaS solution.

Successful customer integration via advanced B2B solutions will streamline business processes and improve productivity through faster onboarding, improved relationship and SLA management, robust governance, and air-tight compliance capabilities, which is what your customers really want. A reliable MFT component also ensures the continuous exchange of information to deliver the 100 percent uptime today's customers expect.

And when integration is a product of a standardized, business-wide approach, the foundational B2B platform serving the enterprise's IT and business needs greatly simplifies the critical connectivity required to differentiate your SaaS technology.



CUSTOMER USE CASE

Managing Complex Supply Chains

SaaS-based supply chain management giant JDA Software was transmitting more than 2,000,000 files a day and required more flexibility and agility to quickly bring new customers on board. With a half-dozen data centers around the world and its customer base expanding by the day, JDA chose Cleo integration solutions to consolidate its disparate technologies onto a centralized platform.

With Cleo, JDA deployed a reliable, scalable single-platform solution to support the aggressive growth, complete with easy load balancing implementation and multiple secure protocols inside and outside the enterprise. JDA can onboard new customers faster, exceed its customer SLAs, and meet its demanding scalability requirements as a global cloud services provider company.

How to Better Power Your Cloud

Leading vendors provide many integration options to enable SaaS companies to integrate with their customers. Outstanding vendors provide an embedded integration platform that enables organizations to:

- Provide every industry-standard B2B protocols to enable high-tech, low-tech, and no-tech customers to connect easily and seamlessly
- Improve new-customer onboarding for a faster time to market and to revenue, with a special emphasis on API-driven onboarding lifecycle
- Exchange data with the same level of security that organizations have within the enterprise
- Orchestrate massive volumes of data to move to the right system at the right time
- Operate in a headless manner accessible via REST APIs while pushing self-service management to customers and reducing service call volumes
- Integrate out of the box with other SaaS applications, such as Salesforce and Netsuite
- Provide a flexible deployment model using dockerized containers, Amazon Elastic Cloud (EC2), Google Cloud, Microsoft Azure, or third-party public or private clouds
- Deliver proactive and pre-emptive monitoring for easy troubleshooting
- Manage an architecture that can grow linearly as the business grows
- Deploy a redundant architecture to support high availability and comprehensive disaster recovery capabilities to ensure SLAs

Customers come to you and stay with you because you provide them with the cloud-based tools and service they need to succeed in their own business. An elastic, scalable, and API-enabled platform that supports all governed multi-enterprise, collaboration, and cloud integration usage patterns, powers the modern SaaS organization.



CUSTOMER USE CASE

Delivering Reliable Payment Services

To better connect some of the largest global corporations and governments with its tens of thousands of suppliers, Tungsten Network, a SaaS-based payment processing company, must have a dependable IT infrastructure. With multiple data centers in the U.S. and in the U.K. to support its growing electronic invoicing network, Tungsten was transmitting more than 6 million files a month. Any downtime could mean a loss of customers and revenue.

Tungsten leveraged Cleo's integration technology to support these data volumes and deliver maximum reliability for its SaaS offering. The integration technology elevated its reporting, management, and root-cause analysis of activities so Tungsten could understand short-term issues and long-term trends to make better business decisions for itself and for its customers.

Recommendation

Your SaaS organization, by its very nature, has accepted the integration of your customers, and it's up to you to manage the hundreds, thousands, or even millions of business-critical transactions that enable your business to succeed. While other SaaS companies are grappling with piecemealed data exchange capabilities, you can stand out by powering your cloud offering with robust integration technology.

If your specialty is delivering an amazing SaaS solution that provides true business value to your customers, then Cleo's specialty is providing the tools that embed in your platform to enable the simple and secure exchange of data with your customers – no matter what format, protocol, and data size you need to accommodate.

The ability to run headless with REST APIs, scale linearly, be database independent, provide common governance regardless of protocol, and support containerization position Cleo as the leading SaaS data platform to power clouds.

Learn more about [embedded integration](#) technology from Cleo and how it will help you easily exchange data with customers, partners, and other cloud services to power your SaaS solution.

About the Author



Dave Brunswick

Dave Brunswick leads Cleo's global pre-sales and solution support. With more than 25 years of experience in technical sales, pre-sales, technology strategy, engineering, product management, and product development, Dave has held senior consulting and architecture roles throughout the managed file transfer software market, serving as a senior technology leader at Axway and Tumbleweed Communications. He also has led systems research and development teams for a range of government, manufacturing, and transportation customers. He holds an M.A. in mathematics from Oxford University.



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