

WHITEPAPER

# How to **Avoid** the **Visibility Trap** in SaaS Management

Why chasing perfect data stalls progress and how outcome-driven visibility accelerates ROI

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SaaS has become the backbone of modern business operations. It fuels agility, accelerates innovation, and empowers teams to move independently. But that same freedom has created a fragmented, fast-moving, and increasingly expensive ecosystem that most organizations struggle to control.

## The SaaS Management Paradox

SaaS was supposed to make work easier. Instead, it created operational complexity that grows faster than most organizations can keep up with.

While leaders understand there's a problem, they often underestimate the hidden costs:

- The average organization now uses roughly 200 SaaS applications.
- Up to 40% of those application licenses go unused.
- Roughly 67% of those applications are unknown to IT.
- 33% of security breaches originate from those technologies that are unknown to IT.
- Procurement, finance, and IT teams often spend hundreds of hours annually manually reconciling contracts, renewals, and invoices across fragmented data sources.



# 40%

of those application licenses go unused



# 67%

of those applications are unknown to IT



# 33%

of security breaches are unknown to IT

SaaS gives teams freedom, but behind the scenes, sprawl is quietly spinning out of control. Redundant systems compound spend, siloed ownership makes accountability challenging, unsanctioned tools create security risks, manual reconciliation drains team bandwidth, and surprise renewals blindsides finance teams. And to top it all, most organizations operate with a partial, dated, or contradictory view of their SaaS footprint which hampers critical decision making.

The instinctive response? “Let’s get full visibility.” Yet many programs never deliver the ROI leadership expects. Most stall early, caught in a Visibility Loop.

# The Visibility Loop: Why SaaS Management Efforts Stall

The typical SMP rollout begins with a heavy emphasis on discovery. Teams attempt to uncover everything, every user, every department, every shadow app. They deploy agents, browser extensions, and API integrations across the enterprise. Six months later, they're still cleaning and normalizing data, arguing over false positives, and working with stale reports.

By the time they approach a “complete” picture, the business has changed. New tools were purchased. Departments have reprioritized. And the program starts to stall.

The intention is valid. The execution is flawed.

## Stop Boiling the Ocean

When teams chase 100% visibility, they fall into patterns that slow progress:

- ⊗ Endless cleansing of datasets that will be obsolete in weeks
- ⊗ Over-collection of data that doesn't support any meaningful action
- ⊗ Misalignment between IT, security, finance, and procurement on what “accurate” even means
- ⊗ A backlog of discovery work that grows faster than teams can analyze



The organization gets stuck at step one.

Meanwhile, renewals still happen. Redundant tools continue to expand. Shadow IT multiplies. And the cost curve continues upward.

# A Smarter, More Agile Approach to SaaS Visibility

The key to escaping the Visibility Loop is to right-size your approach, by focusing on discovery that aligns with your goals.

## 1. Start with the data sources already inside your ecosystem

Your organization likely has systems that are already capturing most of your SaaS activity. Use them. Even better – layer them! By connecting to two or more of the discovery sources below, you will form a complete Visibility picture and open up a broader range of outcomes for your SaaS management program.

Together, these existing sources can deliver up to 90% visibility with far less overhead than more invasive discovery measures.

This approach accelerates time to insight and respects the reality of enterprise change control. You reduce friction, minimize data sprawl, and generate a view that is actionable and operationally meaningful within days or weeks instead of months or years.

	Users	Disabled Users	Desktop Usage	Web App Usage	Sign-Ins	URLs	Best For	
Endpoint	Crowdstrike	✓	✓				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>License Optimization</li> <li>Shadow IT</li> <li>App Rationalization</li> <li>Security Compliance</li> </ul>	
	Microsoft Defender for Endpoint Security P2	✓	✓			✓		
	Threatlocker	✓		✓				✓
	Trend Micro	✓		✓				
	Sentinel One	✓		✓				✓
SSO	Microsoft Entra	✓			✓		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Access Governance</li> <li>License Optimization</li> <li>On/Offboarding</li> </ul>	
	Okta	✓			✓			
	OneLogin	✓			✓			
	Salesforce SSO	✓			✓			
CASB	Microsoft Defender for Cloud Applications	✓			✓		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Shadow IT</li> <li>Security Compliance</li> </ul>	
	ZScaler	✓			✓			

**90%**  
visibility is achievable using existing sources with far less overhead

# A Smarter, More Agile Approach to SaaS Visibility

## 2. Align visibility depth to the outcomes that matter

Discovery isn't one-size-fits-all. Not every use case requires the same depth. Different business goals require different discovery strategies.

### If your goal is:

- ✓ **Renewal Management and License Optimization** → Layer SSO and Vendor Portal integration to combine usage activity with detailed entitlement data to identify savings and track utilization patterns over time.
- ✓ **Access Governance and Risk Detection** → Combine SSO discovery with Endpoint or CASB connections to get visibility into both sanctioned and unsanctioned apps.
- ✓ **Shadow IT reduction** → Connect Endpoint Security and/or CASB sources to capture unsanctioned app usage for across browser and installed apps to identify potential security risks
- ✓ **Governance** → Layer multiple discovery sources, as well as HRIS and financial integrations to track usage by user and cost center and automate workflows.

When you align your discovery strategy to desired outcomes, your program moves faster, and leadership will be able to see early wins that build momentum for future outcomes.



# A Smarter, More Agile Approach to SaaS Visibility

## 3. Treat discovery as a continuous operating function

Treating discovery as a one-off project is a common misstep. Audit completed. “Success” declared. Then nothing.

Within a few months new apps proliferate, ownership changes, renewals sneak up, and your data will be stale.

Instead: adopt continuous discovery. Automate feeds from SSO, finance systems, and vendor APIs. That ensures:

- ✓ New apps get detected as soon as they’re in use
- ✓ Renewals show up early
- ✓ Usage/adoption trends stay current

One organization implemented a lightweight continuous loop with Okta and a finance-data refresh every two weeks. In one quarter they reduced shadow IT by 40% and negotiated four renewals proactively, saving over \$300K before year-end.

With continuous discovery in place, you can then add automated policy alerts and workflow automation to maintain a complete cycle of SaaS optimization and governance.



# 40%

reduced Shadow IT cost in one quarter



# \$300k

saved through proactive negotiation of four renewals before year-end

# Shift from reactive cleanup to proactive SaaS strategy

Remember: Perfect visibility is an illusion. The goal isn't to see everything—it's to see enough of the right things to take action and deliver outcomes.

Organizations that focus on value-driven visibility reach ROI faster, reduce data noise, avoid tool fatigue, and create momentum that sustains their SaaS-management program long term. Visibility is the first critical step, not the destination.

With continuous visibility in place, organizations gain the foundation to:

- ✓ Consolidate overlapping tools
- ✓ Negotiate renewals from a position of strength
- ✓ Implement governance policies teams can actually follow
- ✓ Improve cross-department transparency
- ✓ Reduce the “SaaS debt” that weighs down operations

This is where SaaS Management transforms from administrative overhead into a business-critical driver of savings and agility.



# Visibility Is the Starting Point, Not the Goal

Perfect visibility is unrealistic and unnecessary. Organizations that break out of the Visibility Loop do so by focusing on data to support action, not data to fill a spreadsheet.

When visibility becomes continuous, outcome-driven, and integrated into everyday operations, teams finally gain the leverage they need to control cost, reduce risk, and modernize how the business consumes SaaS.

This is the new model of SaaS Management:  
Lightweight, adaptive, aligned to outcomes, and fast to value.

## **The best part? You can start for FREE.**

Ready to break the Visibility Loop? Get started for FREE.

Calero can help you implement SaaS Visibility in under 30 days with no cost and no commitment, using your already trusted discovery sources.

[Get Started for Free →](#)

