

What to Look for in a PKI Provider

Evaluating PKI providers can be a big undertaking, and some may think it's a bit overwhelming. But it doesn't have to be. Finding the right vendor has a lot to do with asking the right questions. Here's what to look for:

1. Flexibility

A flexible vendor can help you:

- Support your current environment - whether on-premises, cloud-hosted, or hybrid
- Integrate your systems and workflows
- Support the use cases that are unique to you

TIP: PKI is not a "one size fits all" scenario. Look for a vendor with multiple solutions, integrations, and deployment models, and one who is willing to work with you to discover what works best with your business needs.

2. Expertise

PKI isn't just a standard technology with a few options. It's a powerful infrastructure made effective by strategic rules, policies, and procedures. Architecting a secure, compliant PKI infrastructure that fits within your organization's needs - and isn't difficult to manage - requires a deep level of expertise and specialized skills.

TIP: Depending on your in-house skills and resources, a managed solution might be worth looking into.

3. Ownership

Being the policy owner of your PKI is essential. Without it, you can't prove to your organization, auditor, or others that you have complete control. You need the decision making power for the "how," "to whom," and "for what" of every certificate issued. Plus, you need to know that the keys to your Certificate Authorities (CAs) are protected - and that certificate holders are meeting their obligations.

TIP: With so much of your business reliant on PKI assurance, work with a vendor who doesn't try to fit you into a box, but will work with you to implement a policy specific to your business and aligns with best practices.

4. High Availability

High availability is a must. Even planned downtime involves scheduling and communicating a maintenance window to ensure there's as little disruption as possible. But any amount of downtime increases risk to the business. When a CA fails, it results in downtime as the "warm" or "cold" backup system must be brought online and be set as the operational "primary."

High availability infrastructure will seamlessly continue with no user interruption and no administrator involvement required. That's near zero downtime.

TIP: Consider your maintenance windows for updates or patches today. In the event of unplanned downtime, how long would it take to get back up and running? What would be the impact to your business? Look for a PKI provider that has a "hot/hot" or high availability option.

5. Scalability

Business are always changing, and they need to invest in solutions and technology that will scale with them as their requirements evolve. For example, the demand of modern use cases like DevOps and IoT require horizontal scalability and can mean a change from securing tens of thousands of identities to securing millions.

TIP: Imagine you're ready to scale up today and ask the questions you'd want to know.

6. High Assurance

A proper PKI architecture needs to be designed, operated, and maintained according to best practices to ensure compliance and satisfy audits. The issuance, management, and revocation of certificates should leverage a user and device registration model appropriate to the risk level for the PKI. Whenever appropriate, crypto keys should be securely stored (reducing the attack profile and protecting critical assets that would wreak havoc if compromised).

TIP: An expert partner should have policies and procedures to support both straightforward and highly complex scenarios so you know all your use cases are covered.

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