



Accelerating the ATO Process with cATO

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ACCELERATING THE ATO PROCESS WITH cATO





By focusing on continuous compliance and leveraging advanced technologies, federal agencies can navigate the complexities of the ATO process more effectively.

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MARK BAGLEY
Chief Product Officer, Cav

Many in the federal sector are familiar with the challenges of the Authority to Operate (ATO) process. When asked how many had endured ATO processes longer than six months, the audience at **The ATO and Cloud Security Summit** responded overwhelmingly. For some, the process stretched beyond 24 months, often relying on outdated methods such as spreadsheets and manual personnel efforts.

During a breakout session with Mark Bagley, Cav's chief product officer and Brian Mongeau, Cav's director of go-to-market operations, they explored the common issues federal agencies face. These include the manual gathering of evidence and aligning it with relevant controls, which is a labor-intensive process causing significant delays and inefficiencies.

Bagley emphasized that while no “magic button” exists to streamline this process overnight, adopting the right technologies can pave the way toward achieving Continuous Authority to Operate (cATO), ultimately saving time and money.

Leveraging technology for continuous compliance

For federal agencies, cATO represents a transformative approach to cybersecurity and compliance. Building



on the principles of DevSecOps, which integrates security practices into the DevOps process, cATO emphasizes the need for ongoing assessment and real-time risk management. Shifting from traditional, static authorization processes to a dynamic, continuous model allows agencies to maintain a strong security posture in an ever-changing threat landscape. This approach not only streamlines compliance but also significantly reduces the time and cost associated with achieving and maintaining authorization.

A critical step toward cATO is moving away from manual evidence gathering, which, according to Bagley, is a precursor to many other manual steps that slow down the process. The solution lies in using Application Programming Interfaces (APIs) to automate the collection and interpretation of evidence, thus reducing the manual effort required.

"We're sitting on top of a very not-so-secret weapon, which is APIs," said Bagley. "So many of the control technologies that exist, which form a significant portion of the evidence but also a big drag on the operational personnel's time to gather evidence, can all be exposed through APIs."

Essentially, the path to cATO involves adopting technology that can automate evidence production and management, reduce manual workloads and enable a more dynamic and continuous approach to maintaining security and compliance.

For example, a cabinet-level agency initially spent eight figures maintaining ATOs, relying heavily on manual processes and contractor support. By implementing a technology-driven approach to manage its Risk Management Framework and automate evidence collection, the agency reduced its compliance costs to six figures and achieved continuous compliance. This approach not only streamlined processes but also provided the agency with real-time insights into its security posture, enabling proactive improvements.

Another case study involved a forward-thinking federal organization that leveraged their systems management infrastructure to expose intelligence to their programs, significantly improving their compliance processes.

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By adopting an API-centric approach and integrating various intelligence sources, they automated the documentation process, delivering it to their mission-critical governance, risk, and compliance technologies. This comprehensive view enhanced their ability to maintain compliance across the agency.

"This is a maturation experience," said Bagley. "This is not something that you wake up one morning and say, 'We've got the way!' But by making the right moves, in terms of technology adoption, you have the ability to take the steps to a point where you're saving time and saving money. Those are real outcomes that can be realized today."

Cav is helping agencies streamline ATO.

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