**Reimagining Growth for Enterprise Regulatory Compliance Products**

***Applying Product Thinking to Cost-Center Systems***

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**Executive Summary**

Enterprises build a whole category of internal products that exist for one reason: regulatory or governance obligations. GDPR/CCPA privacy tooling, audit readiness systems, risk registers, accessibility compliance platforms, ESG reporting workflows—you name it. These products are essential, but they are cost centres and don't generate revenue.
Inevitably, the product is often lower in priority and may not offer a fully functional experience. User experience is usually an afterthought. It is observed in many cases that these systems are buried beneath layers of links and portals. While they do serve a purpose, they rarely receive the same attention, investment, design, or product love that revenue generating customer facing products enjoy.

Yet the strategic question remains:

**If retention, virality, and monetization are not the 'North Star', how do we create "growth" in compliance products? And what does PLG-style thinking look like in this context?**

This article reframes growth for compliance products and outlines how product teams can drive adoption, efficiency, and enterprise-wide value without relying on typical SaaS metrics which do not apply.

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**1. Why Compliance Products Behave Differently**

Compliance products do not exist because users want them. They exist because they are mandated by regulatory requirements.

Common categories include:

- Data privacy compliance (GDPR/CCPA)
- Internal audit preparation
- Records retention & data deletion
- Risk & control tracking
- Accessibility compliance (WCAG/ADA)
- ESG disclosures and reporting

- Vendor-risk assessments
- Policy attestations
- Consents management (collecting, tracking, and proving lawful user consent for processing data)

These products share difficult truths and significant challenges:

- Function as cost centers, rather than revenue engines
- Underfunded relative to customer-facing systems
- Low UX quality because of the assumption "users **have** to use them", and sometimes because the users are internal rather than external
- Buried deep in enterprise portals or websites
- Minimal product ownership, often treated as IT projects
- Adoption is mandatory, not meaningful

Although these might seem to suggest that traditional PLG is not feasible — it ironically makes product thinking even more important.

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**2. The Misconception: "Compliance = No Product Strategy"**

Compliance tools are frequently built under pressure: a new regulation arrives, a deadline is looming, and the organization cobbles together a functional solution. Over time, this leads to:

- UX debt
- Duplicate tools across business units
- Siloed data and workflows
- Manual processes hidden inside spreadsheets
- High operational cost during audits

Yet compliance products often serve more internal personas than anything else: Legal, HR, Security, IT, Privacy, Risk, Audit, Operations, and Finance. In addition, they may also serve direct and indirect external consumers such as in the case of privacy laws or consent-law-related workflows.

This makes them ideal candidates for structured product management. This is especially important since they have a broader and multi-layered stakeholder footprint.

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**3. Redefining “Growth” for Compliance Products**

Traditional PLG metrics like retention, activation, daily/weekly/monthly active users and revenue expansion don’t apply. Compliance tools must instead measure value-expansion, not user-expansion.

Growth = Increasing the product’s value footprint across the enterprise

**A. Internal Adoption Growth**

How many business units, departments, or regions use the product?

**B. Workflow Penetration**

How many compliance tasks, workflows or processes now run through the system vis-à-vis spreadsheets or email workflows.

**C. Efficiency Gains**

How much manual effort has been automated or eliminated?

**D. Reduction in Risk**

Fewer policy violations,
Fewer audit findings,
Faster remediation.

**E. Standardization**

A single compliance workflow reduces training, errors, and shadow-IT risk.

These are the “growth metrics” that matter.

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**4. Translating PLG Principles into Compliance Context**

PLG Principle → Compliance Equivalent

| **PLG Concept** | **Compliance Equivalent** |
|---|---|
| Time-to-Value (TTV) | Time-to-Compliance (TTC) – the time it takes a user to produce a compliant outcome |
| Activation event | First completed audit workflow, first policy attestation, first compliant report |
| Retention loops | Recurring audit cycles, regulatory reporting cycles |
| Expansion | More BUs, geographies, frameworks, or workflows onboarded |

| PLG Concept | Compliance Equivalent |
|---|---|
| Virality | Internal invitations, cross-department adoption |
| Product certifies itself | Product becomes the "enterprise standard" |

Compliance isn't designed for consumer-like retention. It needs to be frictionless, predictable, trustworthy, and adopted across the organization.

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### 5. Hypothetical Example: Internal Compliance Tool Finding Its Growth Loop

A global enterprise built an internal privacy-compliance system to manage data-retention obligations.

**Initial state:**

- Built hurriedly due to regulatory pressure
- Hidden deep inside internal portals and process documentation
- Manual evidence uploads
- Poor UX
- Used by only one business unit

**Product-led reframing:**

The team redesigned the product guided by PLG principles:

- Self-service wizard for onboarding
- Automated data ingestion
- Prebuilt templates for common workflows
- Dashboard showing compliance readiness
- Cross-BU onboarding using invitation links

**Outcome (illustrative):**

- Adoption expanded from 1 BU to 7 BUs
- 45% drop in manual compliance tasks
- Significant shrinkage in audit preparation time
- Standardization of the tool enterprise-wide by leadership (Yay!)

This isn't "growth" in the SaaS sense—but it is meaningful growth in compliance value and in certain cases it directly prevents costly fines.

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**6. Monetization Potential**

Can these kinds of products evolve into revenue generating assets? What potential do these have?

Surprisingly, yes, they can! Sometimes internally and occasionally externally.

**i. Internal Monetization: Turning a Cost Center Into an Internal Product**

Many organisations use internal chargeback or showback models already for cloud and shared services. Compliance products can operate on the same model.

**A. Chargeback Model**

Business units "pay" internally based on:

- Users/seats
- Modules (e.g., privacy, vendor risk, audit)
- Evidence storage volume
- Workflow automation usage

This creates sustainable investment and accountability.

**B. Compliance-as-a-Service (CaaS)**

A centralized team provides compliance workflows to other departments or regional stakeholders.

**C. Enterprise Standardization**

Once scale is achieved, creating predictable funding and roadmap clarity, the product becomes the *mandated standard*.

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**ii. External Monetization for Smaller Companies**

Smaller or mid-sized organizations may consider externalizing internal compliance tools by:

**A. White-Labelling:** Position the product to partners or suppliers.

**B. Industry-Shared Platforms:** Compliance consortium tools are common in highly regulated industries.

**C. SaaS/PaaS Conversion**

If the workflows are generalizable, the internal product can evolve into:

- SaaS
- PaaS (Product-as-a-Service)
- Managed offering

Only feasible when architecture, security, and compliance controls are generic enough to serve external customers. Certainly possible in rare cases, even if not feasible in most.

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**7. Strategic Recommendations for Product Leaders**

✔ **1. Map the compliance value loop**

Value = reduced effort + reduced risk + increased visibility.

✔ **2. Instrument Time-to-Compliance (TTC)**

Equivalent to TTV for compliance products.

✔ **3. Treat BUs as customer segments**

Each has different workflows, personas, and obligations.

✔ **4. Reduce friction in compliance workflows**

Users don't want to spend time here—speed is value.

✔ **5. Build integrations first**

Automation drives adoption more than UI polish.

✔ **6. Use internal expansion as your "growth loop"**

BU → region → division → enterprise standard.

✔ **7. Advocate with quantified outcomes**

Hours saved, risks reduced, audit findings prevented— significantly outweigh the relevance of metrics such as DAU, WAU, or MAU.

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