

WHITE PAPER

How to Build an Options-Based Observability Strategy



THE CHALLENGE

The observability market is changing quickly. Rushing into a monolithic observability product limits your future options by locking you in to a single vendor.



THE SOLUTION

Design your observability strategy around options-based thinking to build a composable environment allowing you to stage your commitments and avoid vendor lock-in.



THE BENEFITS

- Lower the risk of failure by avoiding massive technology deployments.
- Increase your negotiating leverage over vendors.
- React faster to changing market conditions and business requirements.

WHITE PAPER

How to Build an Options-Based Observability Strategy

The observability market is changing rapidly, with new tools and vendors entering the space. An options-based approach to observability gives you control over investments and avoids vendor lock-in.

The global pandemic forced companies to accelerate their digital transformations, pushing them into new technologies and architectures as they struggled to adapt to a changing world. Companies wanted fast development and deployment and were happy to trade off efficiency, reliability, and, sometimes, security, to pursue their goals. Now that the pandemic is receding in many parts of the world, the priorities are rebalancing as companies grapple with choices made under fire.

Observability has emerged as a way for enterprises to better understand sprawling infrastructure and application environments. According to Gartner, “Observability enables organizations to reduce the time it takes to identify the root cause of performance-impacting problems. In particular, and in contrast to traditional monitoring, operators can freely interrogate data post-hoc without the need to pre-program dashboards.”

This sounds promising, and the market responded quickly, but predictably. Large and monolithic monitoring platforms embraced the term and added new features, making them even larger and more monolithic. These monolithic platforms represent a failed choice-based strategy. They assume that all observability data is collected, centralized, integrated, and only analyzed by a single tool. Enterprises following a choice-based observability strategy find themselves locked into multi-year investments without the flexibility to react to evolving technologies.

While this has been good for vendors in the incumbent monitoring space, end users haven't benefited from these enormous platform deployments because the choice-based strategy is built on the faulty assumption that a single pane of glass serves all of your monitoring and observability audiences, from SREs to DevOps and SecOps.

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A choice-based strategy also forces customers into limited options in the future as technology continues to evolve and requirements change. Defaulting to choice-based strategies also leaves little leverage for contract negotiations, data integrations, and data access.

Infrastructure and operations teams need to take a different approach to their observability strategy. Instead of focusing on buying products and making choices, teams need to shift their thinking to creating options. The choices you make today limit your options tomorrow. Tomorrow is unpredictable and uncertain, but taking an options-based approach allows you to be flexible and adaptable today and into the future.

An options-based observability strategy is built on three pillars:

- *Establishing your observability strategy principles*
- *Building composable environments*
- *Staging your commitments*

Let's look at each of these.

ESTABLISH THE PRINCIPLES OF YOUR OBSERVABILITY STRATEGY

When asked about their observability strategy, many often leap into detailed plans covering every imaginable use case. They talk about the current state of their infrastructure and how things will be at the end of three or five years, including the skills and functions they'll need in that time. If you've read the above, you'll recognize this as a choice-based strategy: All the choices they need to make over the next several years are already laid out. This leaves little room for adaptation and options as the world evolves around you.

Instead, think of your observability strategy as a single principle, or a collection of principles, guiding your observability strategy. Let's say your core principle is that observability is a key enabler of operational efficiency across SREs and DevOps. We can build on that operational efficiency principle and define what key elements our strategy must consider. In this case, those key elements might include:

- *Data sources having utility-like accessibility: always on and available across tools.*
- *Metrics primarily driven by total cost of ownership and optimization.*
- *Governance centralized to the team distributing data to downstream systems.*

These elements are different if your core principle is something like customer intimacy or risk management.

With principles and strategy in hand, we can focus on the next phase: composing the observability environment.

WITH AN OBSERVABILITY PIPELINE, YOU CAN SEND DATA FROM ONE SOURCE TO MULTIPLE DESTINATIONS, WHILE MANAGING DATA ANY WAY YOU SEE FIT.

COMPOSE YOUR OBSERVABILITY ENVIRONMENT

In an options-based strategy, the key success factor is avoiding large ecosystems that limit flexibility. Many vendors take a “give us everything” approach to observability. These approaches appear to start and end at the destination platform, but they begin even earlier – at data origination. It’s common to see agents only sending data to one destination, limiting the usefulness of the data by locking it into a silo.

Staying modular means selecting tooling that abstracts the data sources from destinations and puts the power back into your hands. By using an abstraction like an observability pipeline, you can send data from one source to multiple destinations, while managing that data any way you see fit. For example, this is where your centralized governance can occur.

When new tools are introduced, upgraded, or deprecated, an observability pipeline insulates the rest of your environment and users from those changes. A modular approach also gives you more power in contract negotiations with your other vendors because you’re less reliant on one vendor for all of your observability needs.

STAGE YOUR COMMITMENTS

A choice-based observability strategy is a large commitment, often taking years. Once you start, stopping becomes impossible. That’s simply unacceptable in today’s environment of uncertainty. Choice-based strategies limit your ability to test, experiment, and learn. At the same time, our infrastructure is critical and it must be reliable.

An options-preserving approach may be to experiment with freemium products, only paying once the product’s value has been proven. Cloud-based options are another consideration since they are commonly subscription-based and offer easy try-before-commit purchasing styles. Even better, cloud-based options don’t require using your own infrastructure to test new options.

Conclusion

Every IT team feels the need to react and respond to demands from the business. That urgency to make choices, to solve the immediate problem, can have long-term implications for future flexibility and agility. By structuring your observability strategy around a long-term vision based on preserving options, your team can remain adaptable as technologies and business requirements evolve.

ABOUT CRIBL

Cribl is a company built to solve customer data challenges and enable customer choice. Our solutions deliver innovative and customizable controls to route security and observability data where it has the most value. We call this an observability pipeline, and it helps slash costs, improve performance, and get the right data, to the right destinations, in the right formats, at the right time. Join the dozens of early adopters, including market leaders such as TransUnion and Autodesk, to take control and shape your data. Founded in 2017, Cribl is headquartered in San Francisco, CA. For more information, visit www.cribl.io or our [LinkedIn](#), [Twitter](#), or [Slack](#) community.