

4. Who Owns You?

Identity is not about who you are. Identity management does not determine if you are a good person, or bad. It is rather the processes that allow actions and decisions, and determine the set of opportunities that people have given how identity is constructed. “Identity management” is actually a set of products to address a set of problems.

Identity in the digital realm is far less about who you are and more about what will be offered or done to you. Identity is not about you as subject, but you as object: to whom, from whom, by whom and for whom. Understanding your role as idealized by the construction of the identity means being able to navigate the various identity constructions.

Identity in the digital realm determines essential choices, even more freedoms. Identity among individuals is personal, with identity depending on the relationship with the individual: professional, paternal, casual, hostile and every combination of these that exists. If you have more resources and are more able pay then you will be charged more. Identity construction in a digital age is not relationship or personalization, it is pricing and determination of options.

Identity management is focused on fraud prevention and detection, in the sense of “identity theft”. Identity theft is also an issue of payment, determining if a payment is valid. These are what individuals think of when it comes to identity threat.

Identity management is much more than that for vendors. Digital rights management is about control of users, more than payment. Vendors want not only payment for use; vendors also want to sell specific business plans. Certainly music providers can make money with paid music downloads. Yet there is much music that simply cannot be purchased. There are historical movies that cannot be rented, but must be obtained in a traditional (unusable) format because the copyright owner is not known. There are copyright owners who have an antipathy towards the Internet and thus never want the material on the net. So this is not simply an issue of payment, but of access. The argument over DRM is an argument over ownership, access, and creativity of culture.

Identity management is an issue of resource allocation. What privileges do you have? Do you have the deluxe cable configuration?

Identity management enables personalization and price discrimination.

Finally identity management is about filtering. Did Hillary Clinton shoot Vince Foster and drag his body to the park? Obviously not. Were there weapons of mass destruction in Iraq? The answer is a documented negative. However, there are people who believe this. There is a strong market in

providing them with only the news with which they will agree. In order to provide information services, including news, as consumer-defined rather than fact-based requires knowing a tremendous amount about the consumer. But even in this case you need not know “who” the user is. What you need to know is a credential that indicates a particular life view.

There are two basic identifiers: the set of public information including name and date of birth, and the ability to respond to an email.

Me@WhereIAm

Email is the network identifier, the new “family name”. Last names on the net are domain names. A person is not longer a member of a good family, but an AOL working stiff or a Gmail high school student.

There are authenticated emails, such as my own `jean_camp@harvard.edu`. That email provides a name, and attaches the name to an institution that has a well-known name and a reputation to protect. Hopefully, the organization does not give out emails at random but only grants emails to people somehow affiliated with the organization. In this context, affiliated means being paid by, giving money to, graduating from, or providing services to Harvard University. However, anecdotal evidence indicates that this authentication is limited as one project director allegedly managed to keep an email address for four years after being fired from the University. My email address is still valid, in my third year at Indiana University because I am officially on leave. In fact, I am simply affiliated as a courtesy until my doctoral students graduate. If you went to Harvard for enforcement against an action taken by me, there would be little response. (Of course the institution could cancel the email address.)

There then are weakly authenticated emails. I have one of these as well, `me@ljean.org`. This domain is authenticated based on the information provided in the database of information of those who own domain names.

The degree to which domain names are linked to identity has been a subject of passionate debate for several years. The body developed to be a technically coordinating committee for domain names has been deeply immersed in this very political issue. The Internet Corporation for the Assignment of Names and Numbers (ICANN) is a self-selected group of the technical elite that is optimal for a technical standards-setting body but quite ill-suited to discuss issues of identity, anonymity, and privacy. Therefore there is no way to predict the final association of domain names and identity. Some advocate passionately for the right to speak anonymously on the Internet. Others, so alarmed by the explosion of spam and the widespread illegal sharing of information subject to copyright, passionately oppose anonymity. Those in the first group want to be certain that individuals can broadcast information without threat from oppressive governments, violent