

Digital Identity Management: Technological, Business and Social Implications by David Birch
Foreword by Peter Cochrane

Foreword

The lady in front of me just purchased soup, salad and coffee on her credit card. This resulted in the cashier entering 43 keystrokes. I just bought a large café latte using cash, which required 26 keystrokes. My wife just called into a beauty parlour to purchase some nail varnish and, despite it being a cash purchase and our being out-of-towners, the sales assistant insisted on capturing her date of birth, address and phone number. A few days ago I purchased a pair of pants on my credit card and the sales assistant never looked at my signature, but did ask me for my zip code and a phone number. The fact that I am not a US citizen, and therefore had neither, caused no end of confusion and an awful lot of manual typing. Six days ago I went through check-in, passport control and security for the tenth time in nine months at London Heathrow and I was treated with the same degree of suspicion as someone travelling by air for the first time. I'm in New York this morning, and if I get hit by a yellow cab what use are my inaccessible medical records back in Suffolk UK?

Security, identity theft, incorrect computer records, credit rating destruction, privacy, online purchasing and banking, loss of identity, misuse of personal information, phishing, identity cards, behavioural monitoring and tracking ... the list of concerns goes on and on. No wonder people feel concerned and worried about the digital world, security and a loss of control. In my most caustic moments I am given to this one-liner: 'Security and privacy – you never had any anyway – so get over it!'

In my generally more considered mode, however, I think about all the data that have been, and continue to be, collected about me, my family and my friends. Who's got it, how do they gather it, do they share it, why do they want it in the first place, what are they doing with it, how will it advantage or hurt us? I'm not a fan of Big Brother but on the other hand I would like to be recognized at all airports as a safe traveller of zero terrorist or behavioural risk. I would like to walk in with an e-ticket, not have to take off my shoes and trouser belt, empty my pockets and get my laptop out of its bag. At the same time I like the 'sucking up' at the stores and restaurants I visit regularly. Could all this be extended worldwide please? And I really would like my bank, insurers, phone/mobile company, ISP, retail outlets, business and domestic support companies and accountants to be far more proactive in helping me manage my life and

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my company affairs. After all, these folks have most of the data on my life and business and what I do. So why can't they get their act together and use my data – sharing them while subject to my control in some way – to advise me on opportunities and risk ahead of time?

But then there are my medical records, and the potential for my insurers and bankers to know just a little too much about me. I don't mind you knowing that I am diabetic and that I have been so for 15 years, but would I like these folks to know? Would they use it to adjust my charges or refuse me as a risk? I reckon! In the past decade it has become clear that we all face a growing conundrum of personal and company data collection, and use. This is all topped off nicely by the rate of change of technology: cards to smart cards to mobile phones, barcodes to RFID tags, photographs and signatures to biometrics ... all in no time at all!

So at the heart of the debate about digital identity are conflicting needs and requirements compounded by a technological capability that is moving far too fast for society and companies to adapt to. By and large any significant change in society takes at least a decade to implement. Human momentum just slugs everything – we simply cannot move fast enough. So right now, we are quite frankly in a bit of a mess! And what has engendered the mess? Digital everything!

The story so far is as follows:

- Everything goes digital.
- Everybody and everything gets connected by digital networks.
- Everything gets smarter – more storage and processing power.

And to come shortly:

- Embedded sensors in everything we own, wear and use.
- Tracking, location and activity recording of things and people.

How and why:

- Cheaper, smaller, faster, more complex electronic devices.
- A desire to make a safer world.
- A desire to cut out waste, save money, reduce ecological damage.
- A desire to build sustainable futures.

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- *Because we can!*

Sometimes I think we should pause to ask the question: should we? But in reality we are being bowled along by progress, and by and large the outcome sees us gaining significantly year on year. Hopefully, that will be the case as we all migrate to a global system of digital identities for people (and some animals) and things.

I am pleased to say that between the covers of this timely book you will find most of the above issues (and many more) addressed in detail. The book comes with my strongest recommendation as I believe that everyone at all levels in governmental, commercial and societal activities should have at least a grasp of what has happened, what is likely to happen, and what are the likely consequences of the transition to world of digital identity. If you need to get a picture of where we have come from, where we are now, the pros and cons of digital identity technologies and solutions in the near and not so near term, then I am sure you will find this book very useful.

The editor has done an excellent job in smoothing the differing styles and ensuring that the text is well supported by case studies, which really help when grappling with many of the complexities inherent in this topic. I also happen to like the overall style of tackling the tricky and complex head on. This is not a political book that shies away from the difficult, or hides uncertainty in weasel words, but it goes to the meat of the problem. We really do need the clarity it provides.

From smart cards, to biometrics and RFID, company and personal information, people and machine ID, online banking and computer games, I found this an edifying and interesting read. I hope you do too.

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