Shibboleth: A Project of the Internet2 Middleware Initiative

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http://shibboleth.internet2.edu/

Shibboleth, a Hebrew watchword once used to distinguish tribal affiliation, has re-emerged as a brand name for a unique middleware authentication product. Developed by Internet2, a U.S. networking consortium, Shibboleth is a federated, open source authentication suite serving research federations and higher education. Shibboleth is a freely-available product, providing seamless access across multiple institutional platforms including: databases, data, internal documents, indexes, etc. Offering a single password sign-on, Shibboleth provides a secure gateway between users and proprietary resources.

Ken Klingenstein, senior director of Internet2 likened his role in developing Shibboleth to plumbing: "connecting the pieces that will eventually bring water out of the taps," (Weil, 2004). The release of Shibboleth 2.0 in 2008 offered enhancements that provide a "more robust and interoperable platform." (Rotman, 2008) Although not specifically built for library research applications, the Shibboleth architecture has the potential to support e-research which is cross-disciplinary, collaborative, and distributive. Kevin Morooney, the CIO of Penn State University, underscored the collaborative value of Shibboleth saying that it provides an "unprecedented ability to deliver both improved security and privacy for users while at the same time greatly enhancing collaboration opportunities," (Rotman, 2008).

John Culshaw, Associate Director of Administrative Services at the University of Colorado at Boulder, University Libraries, agreed that Shibboleth may resolve many of the security and privacy problems related to library resources and e-research. However, Culshaw also said that institutions need to clearly understand how Shibboleth fits into the overall identity management plan. Specifically, Culshaw emphasized the need to determine how broadly Shibboleth has been adopted by library e-resource vendors. Ensuring access across all library research platforms is essential for facilitating e-research and collaboration. Shibboleth 2.0, with increased interoperability has the potential to provide seamless, secure access to all library e-resources. Actualizing the promise of this collaborative software for research requires the widespread adoption of Shibboleth by institutions in tandem with the e-resource vendors.

References

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Rotman, Lauren. 2008. Internet2 community releases shibboleth version 2.0. https://mail.internet2.edu/wws/arc/i2-news/2008-04/msg00004.html (Accessed 9 January 2009).