ThisIsMe

Learning materials about Digital Identity

Produced by the This Is Me project Originating project funded by Eduserv.

Re-modified by Shirley Williams, Sarah Fleming and Pat Parslow for advice for retired people wishing to use the Internet, including the very elderly and vulnerable and their carers.

Acknowledgments

Online

- The original "This Is Me" worksheets are available online at
  http://thisisme.reading.ac.uk.
- The original "This Is Me" material is available in print, and online at
  http://stores.lulu.com/odinlab
- This version for those working in the non governmental organization (NGO)
  or non profit (NPO) sector can be found on the KS Toolkit at
  http://www.kstoolkit.org
- This version is available in print, and online at http://stores.lulu.com/odinlab

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Introduction

Digital Identity is a term we use to describe the persona an individual present across all the online communities in which he or she is represented. This can mean everything from social networking websites such as Facebook or Twitter, to online shopping accounts and the information you use to access services such as Internet banking.

IZ IN YUR IDENTITY SYSTEM, GETTIN CONFUZED

Diagram by Darren Barefoot – Photo by sp3ccylad (http://flickr.com/photos/sp3ccylad/476798140X)

Although such activity is perceived as the preserve of the young, creating and using a Digital Identity can have many benefits for the older user – particularly those with limited mobility, or who are perhaps disenfranchised from long standing friends or love ones.

For this group, the online world offers the possibility of staying in touch and staying in control of aspects of their lives they may otherwise feel slipping out of their grasp. However, concerns about identity theft, privacy and the challenge of simply using new technologies may be off-putting to the more mature user.

This workbook aims to raise awareness among older people, carers and user organizations about the potential uses of Digital Identity to enhance quality of life and foster a sense of connection and community.

We appreciate that the audience is diverse: that some readers will have contributed to the development of the Internet; some will be regular computer users, while others may be occasional users or complete novices; some will need help in using the computer; while others may be supporters (family, friends, carers or volunteers).

Throughout the workbook we will try to address this diverse set of interests. If some of the suggestions sound interesting but the technology sounds too challenging, try to recruit a tech-savvy trusted friend or relative to help with the interaction.

Finding Things

A number of years ago there was a television advert for Yellow Pages which featured an elderly gentlemen going from shop to shop seeking a book on Fly Fishing by J. R. Hartley. These days Mr Hartley would not be going from town to town seeking out second hand book shops, nor would his daughter be ringing round these shops, they would be sat at their computer, with a nice cup of tea searching the Internet.

One of the main uses people make of the Internet is to find things. Indeed 'Google' is now used as a verb in popular use for searching for information online. The generic term for products like Google is 'search engine', and using a search engine is a bit like having a vast library and a willing assistant to hand. The problem is that the willing assistant isn't very bright and interprets literally what you ask for.

There are a number of different search engines, and it is worth experimenting with a few to find out which one best suits you. It is also worth looking at the advanced features which enable you to make your search terms more specific.

Worksheet 1 - Searching

1. Choose an author you like, and search for all the books he/she has written.

2. Think of a place you have visited, search for information on that place and events that are happening there in the next month.

3. Search for someone you know, and see if you can find out something you don't know about them.

4. Experiment using different search engines for the above searches (list some to try)

5. Find out what Wolfram|Alpha is, and investigate how you can use it.

Making a name for yourself

When you put content on the Web, most systems want to know who you are. There are a couple of choices to make, and it is worth spending a moment thinking through how you want to be seen by other people.

Pseudonyms

Some people like to keep their real identity hidden. This is not necessarily because they are up to anything untoward. You can want to work under a pseudonym (false name) because you don't want any old Tom, Dick or Harriet deciding to track you down, for instance. Similarly, you might want to keep the comments you make on the BBC 'Have Your Say' site separate from your involvement with a local school as a Governor. You might want to share experiences you had when you were younger, to help others who are having similar experiences, without embarrassing anyone who was involved at the time, or their relatives.

> *Janet is a retired shop-keeper, with three adult children and five grandchildren. She has been happily married to Geoff for 40 years, but before she met him she had been engaged to another man, and they had had a child out of wedlock. For various reasons, the baby was adopted and the relationship had to end. Janet wants to offer her experiences, and her support, to young women who have become pregnant in less than desirable circumstances who are looking for help on an Internet site. Janet knows that the baby's father also went on to have a family, and is conscious of the possible embarrassment that could be caused to both her own family, and his. She does not want to use her own name, in order to avoid anyone being able to make the connection.*

When choosing a name to use on a site, what sort of things should you think about?

> GlamourGranny45 – probably not good if Janet was born in 1945. Would the people Janet is hoping to help relate to 'GlamourGranny'?

> Janet_Cassidy – Janet knows she does not want to use her own surname, so picks the first one that comes in to her head. The problem is, how many real Janet Cassidys are there, and what sort of problems might arise through re-using the name? (NB this name was chosen entirely for illustrative purposes, and there is no connection intended with any real person either living or dead).

JohnHelper – in some cases there can be perfectly good, valid reasons for using or exploring a change of gender in an online setting. Would this be a good idea in this case?

GrumpyGran – Some names can give a bad first impression, and although they might be quite accurate and entertaining in some situations they may not be suitable for others. For instance, this sort of moniker is fairly common on forums provided by national newspapers and other news media, where one might see the phrase "*It would never have happened in my day…*", often in a mild form of self-parody.

Some people have a worry that using false names leads to a sense of detachment, and that normal social behaviour breaks down if you cannot identify who has written something online. If you are interacting with a community, you want to engage and build trust, and using the same 'handle' or name consistently is essentially just the same as being at school and being known by a nickname. You might find some people using made-up names who lack manners or are downright rude; either ignore them, or point out that it is unacceptable behaviour but don't get drawn in to an argument with them – 'walk away' knowing that you are on the moral high ground.

Real names

Other people prefer to connect socially online using a consistent name. The temptation is to use your own name, but it is worth thinking about whether this is the best choice for you.

Some things to think about:

Do you want there to be a clear connection between your online persona and your 'real life'?

> *You might want this if you are still working, perhaps in a consultancy role to help make ends meet, where having a 'personal brand' is useful. Similarly, you may want to make this connection easy for people if you are involved in local (or national) politics, charity work or the like.*

Do you want to have some degree of anonymity?

> *If you use the Internet as a tool to help you provide support for others, sometimes anonymity is just the ticket. Also, you may want to discuss matters with other people in an online forum which could embarrass other members of your family, or friends, and then a pseudonym can help prevent accidentally revealing more information than necessary – although you do also have to take care with the details of what you are discussing to make*

sure they are not identifying yourself or other people.

Do you want your online contributions to be available as a legacy to your family and friends?

You do not need to use your real name for this. It makes things easier for other people who don't know you so well to find your content, which can be a good thing, but your close friends and family can easily be told what pseudonym you use.

Will you always feel the same way about having your content available online?

You might be involved in some work online which benefits from using your real name now, but are you sure that you will always want to be associated with it? Although it is almost impossible to predict, it is also worth considering whether changes in society may influence your decisions now about what name(s) to choose.

Of course, sometimes you might not even be able to use your real name if you want to, because someone else has already registered with that name. In this case, try to find an available name which closely matches yours – perhaps using underscore characters where allowed, or other 'decorations'.

Are you human?

Unfortunately, there are a lot of people who are happy to abuse the services available on the web, mainly by posting unwanted adverts (known as "spam"). In order to try to prevent their services being used in this way, a lot of online providers implement a test to try to ensure that only real people get to post on their sites. The most common of these is a system which asks you to type in some letters or numbers from a distorted image.
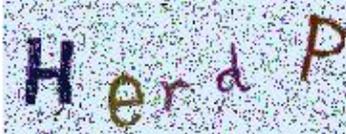
Some systems have an audio option, for those who have difficulties with their sight, which can read the letters out to you. If you have difficulty with these, don't feel inadequate – we all do! If you haven't managed to get it right a couple of times, ask someone for help. Most systems don't impose these extra hoops for you to jump through once you have registered an account, or only do so occasionally.

Email

If you are intending to have a presence on the Internet you need an email account. They are very easy to set up, and there are several services which are provided free of charge. There are several sites available which give reviews of free email services, which you can search for with a question like

> **list sites which offer "free email accounts"**

on all the major search engines.

The user name you choose for your email account says something about you, so think carefully before selecting, and if you are concerned about what an existing one portrays consider changing it.

Styles of writing

You might want to write in a different style, depending on who you are sending an email to. When writing to the family, for instance, it may be that a formal letter style is inappropriate, whereas an email to a local politician, or local authority should generally follow more traditional guidelines.

Email, because it is essentially free and fast, can allow for a discussion to take place, rather than the more traditional idea of letters having to be well structured and well formed because of the cost of sending them and the time delays. Amazingly, though, some young people now consider email itself to be 'for old people', and tend to prefer to communicate with each other using the "instant messenger" types of program which are commonly available.

Worksheet 2 – What's in a name?

1. Imagine you are a trustee for a small charity with hundreds of enquiries about a single opportunity for funding and had mail from the following email accounts:

> greent66
> thirstyferret
> fluffypinkbunnyknickers
> dduck237
> desperateforcash

Which would you open and why?

2. Now look through your inbox at the names that your friends and acquaintances

use, which of these do you consider great and which ones are (in your opinion) inappropriate.

Making a name for someone else

Choosing how to identify yourself online can be tricky enough, but being responsible for creating a digital presence on behalf of someone else – another vulnerable adult if you are a carer, or perhaps for a grandchild if you are a grandparent – can raise further issues.

Roy is a retired businessman, who in addition to spending his days pottering around the garden and the golf course spends quite a bit of his time interacting with friends and former colleagues from around the world on social networking websites and via email.

Now that he and his wife have plenty of spare time on their hands, Roy's daughter-in-law asks them to look after their nine year old grandson Sam for a couple of hours after school, two or three days a week so she can extend her working hours. Though fond of the lad, Roy finds himself at a bit of a loss to know how to entertain him for any length of time – as he shows little or no interest in either gardening or golf - and is relieved when Sam turns to him one evening and asks 'Can we play something on your computer Grandad?'.

Mindful of the fact that a lot of the stuff he does online is not particularly child-friendly, Roy does a quick search for something more appropriate – coming up trumps with Disney's Club Penguin. The pair sit down to register on the site, which requires the user to register not only a user name, but create a name for the penguin avatar through which Sam will be playing. 'This is cool,' says Sam, 'Mum doesn't let me play stuff on the Internet.'

Not really wanting an earful from his daughter-in-law for encouraging Sam to do things he's not allowed to at home, but also not really knowing what else to do with him, Roy decides they'll go ahead and register anyway – particularly as the site seems well moderated with all the right sort of security measures in place.

'So,' he says to Sam, 'what are we going to call this penguin?'

This scenario describes the dilemma of creating a Digital Identity on behalf of

someone else – in this case a minor, who may not be able to make informed choices about that identity.

In this situation, Roy chooses to take on the responsibility for creating a Web presence for his grandson, whose parent has already expressed misgivings about their child interacting on the Internet. How he approaches the registration process for this site, and helps Sam choose a name for his persona on it – in this case a cuddly cartoon penguin – could have consequences not only for Sam as an individual, but for his family relationships as well.

Worksheet 3 – Name that penguin

1.What issues are there you should think about when helping someone else to create a facet of their Digital Identity?

2. Does the creation of an avatar form a link to the user? If so, who can 'join the dots' to see who the person behind the avatar is?

3. Recent research has shown that the pattern of people you connect to, and the ways you connect, are as unique as a fingerprint. If looking at the connections Sam's penguin makes can identify him when related to, say the friends he has on Facebook later in life, does that change any of your previous answers?

Shopping

It is possible to buy almost anything online, from a curtain hook to a world cruise.

> *Bobby lives in Yorkshire in a small hamlet without any shops, the local bus service is very irregular and he always relied on his car to get his weekly grocery shop. Recently his vision has deteriorated and he can no longer drive. His son Rob who lives in London was very worried about how his father would manage now he can't fetch his own groceries, the neighbours are friendly but Bobby does not want to impose. So Rob and Bobby have set up an account with a major supermarket that offers online shopping. One weekend Rob and Bobby went shopping together, and when they returned together they made a shopping list for the following week, set up and online order and fixed delivery for a week's time.*
>
> *Now either Rob or Bobby can order the shopping online and know what time it will be delivered.*

Worksheet 4 - A bag of potatoes, washing powder and a loaf of bread

1. Investigate the online shopping facilities for your favourite supermarket: set up an account and order your next week's groceries. If you have any concerns about shopping online get a trusted friend or family to help you, for example you can set up the order and then a family member can double check, and maybe organise payment.

2. Next time you have to send a birthday present to a distant friend consider buying online from a provider who will deliver directly to your friend. Some, for example Amazon, will gift wrap your chosen purchase and add a greeting.
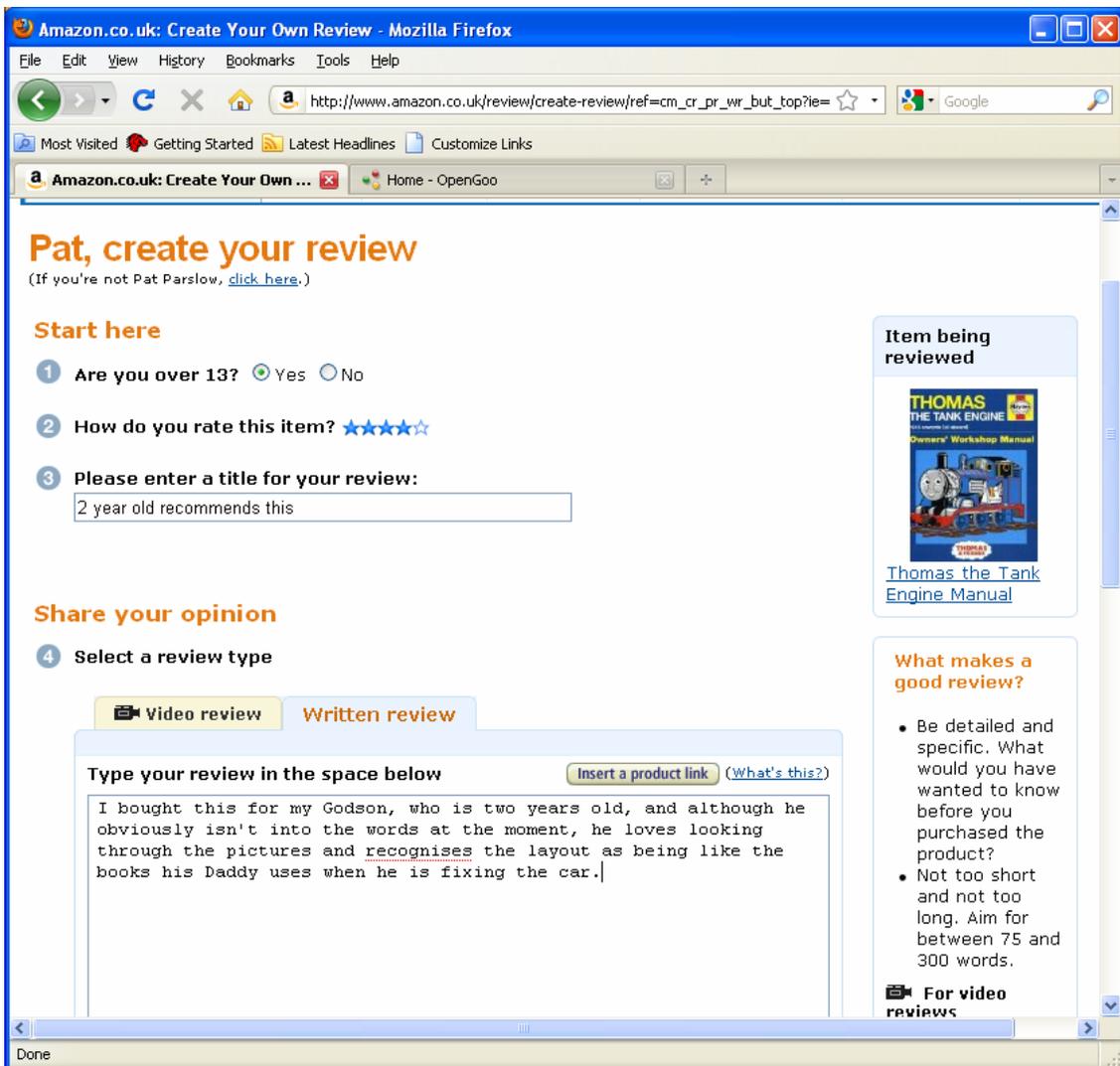
3. You may have seen advertisements for companies which send cards on your behalf. This saves on a trip to the shops and the post-office, and you can actually design your own card this way too. The cost is comparable with the old-fashioned way of sending a card, and they can even send you reminders next year so you do not forget the grandchildren's birthdays.

Reviewing and Rating

When I have read a good book, I like to share my enjoyment with my friends. When I have had lousy service I do have a tendency to grumble. Lots of online shopping services allow customers to post reviews and/or rate products.

Amazon allows customers to write reviews. So if you have just read a really good book you can write a review to help others decide whether or not to buy this book.

You can also indicate whether you find other people's reviews useful.

Worksheet 5 - Rating and reviewing with Amazon

1. Create yourself an Amazon account (if you don't have one already)

2. Go to 'My Profile' and set up a 'Pen Name', you can use your real name, but at this we recommend that you don't, you can always change your mind later. Spend

a little time considering what to use as your pen name, as this will be part of your Digital Identity.

3. Find a book you are interested in, read some of the reviews of that book, and for each one answer the question at the end that says:

"Was this review helpful to you?"

You are now contributing to the order in which reviews are presented.

4. Now find a book you have already read and write a short review of it (Amazon provide helpful guidance on what to write).

5. Your review will not appear instantly as Amazon check your response to ensure that you are adhering to their guidelines.

6. Lots of sites encourage their users to participate by rating and reviewing. Start a list of sites you use and the ones that you would like to contribute to; find out how to set up an account and what the guidelines are.

Wikipedia

Einar Kvaran is an American in his 60s who has an interest in a particular area of the arts, he has contributed to many of the pages of Wikipedia on his specialist topic and he maintains a curator's view, watching pages (via technical alerts) for changes and then reacting to these.

Wikipedia is an online encylopedia that is written collaboratively by volunteers. It is an enormous project that has millions of articles (in hundreds of languages), written and edited by thousands of contributors, such as Einar.

You can find out more about Einar at http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/digitalrevolution/2009/10/rushes-sequences-einar-kvaran.shtml

or search on **Einar Kvaran BBC**

Worksheet 6 - Contributing to Wikipedia

Currently you do not need to be logged in to edit many pages, but details of your IP address (essentially the address of your computer) will be recorded, but it is good practice to be recognisable.

1. Create an account on Wikipedia (http://www.wikipedia.org/), think about what you will choose as a user name

2. Head over to the sandpit to work out how to edit (a sandpit is an area which does not impact the main site), experiment until you are certain you know what you are doing.

3. Now look for a page where you can contribute, at the top of some articles there are invitations to take some actions. Start with making a small change.

Getting Published

Bo is a keen amateur cook and photographer, he likes to experiment with recipes and take photographs of the results. He recently discovered he is developing dementia and wanted to ensure his family and friends remembered the current Bo, so he has produced a book of recipes and photographs. He uses a self publishing service to produce the books and when anyone wants to buy his book it is printed and mailed to the purchaser. Bo will never have the sales figures that Jamie Oliver has, but he is happy to sell a small number of copies and his real joy is in the ones he bought himself and gave to his friends and family.

Worksheet 7 - Publishing with Lulu

1. Browse the Lulu site (http://www.lulu.com/)

2. If you want to do more than browse you will need to create an account, which is a relatively painless process.

3. As with Amazon you can browse the content and review it.

4. You can also upload your own material and produce your own book. You do not have to go public with it. Consider what you would like to publish and then set aside time for doing this.

You might want to create a calendar using pictures you have, perhaps of how your town looked in the past, or create a book of stories you remember from childhood. Perhaps you have fond memories of your children or someone else while they were growing up, and they would make a nice present in book form. The options are only really limited by your imagination, and there is something nice about having a book in your hands and knowing you created it.

Exploring your Digital Identity

What do people see when they search for your name on the Web? Will they find you easily, or is your Digital Identity buried beneath many other search results. Is information about you online? Is it accurate? Are you comfortable with what is there?

Bill and Moira have recently taken the plunge to fulfil their dream of a rural retirement by selling up the family home and buying two cottages; one in Devon, the other in a picturesque part of Normandy. They have two grown up children and four young grandchildren, none of whom live nearby to their new homes, so they have begun to use the Internet to try to stay in touch – both having used email for a number of years. They love it when one of their daughters sends a link to pictures of the grandchildren, and had a chuckle to see their picture as well taken at a recent family get together. Then one of their new UK neighbours commented "hey, cute grandchildren on Flickr," and Bill said "what?". The neighbour said she was searching for a picture of Bill and Moira to describe them to a friend who was thinking of moving France and found her on Flickr, the photo sharing website. Bill was aghast. He had no idea they were 'online'!

Worksheet 8 - Search Exercise

This can be a bit of a strange activity and it may be easier to do it with a trusted friend taking on the roles and sharing the results in a spirit of friendship. Imagine you are someone else who is looking to know a bit more about you. Given the role of the other person, write down the types of internet searches that you imagine that they would do, and then try doing them on yourself and making a note of the results.

- A distant family member
- A new neighbour
- Someone who is about to rent or sell you a house
- A carer
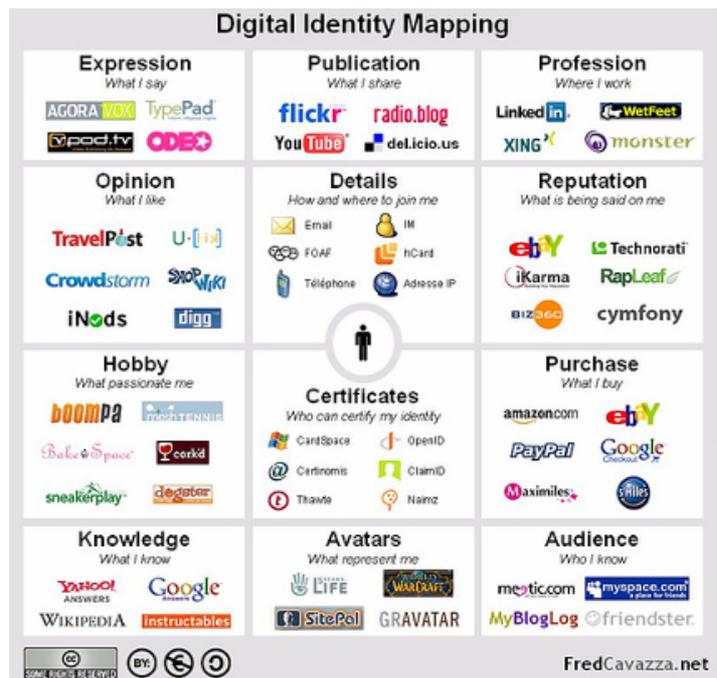
If you have a common name or a name shared with a celebrity, you may not find much with a search just on your name, but you will find more by adding other information such as your location or a key word relating to you. This is also a good exercise to test your search skills.

After you complete your search, consider creating a profile on Google Profiles (http://www.google.com/profiles/me/editprofile?edit=ab) to consolidate the things you do want people to easily find about you. This will improve their ability to find you when searching on Google.

eSafety: how to safeguard your information on the Internet, advice from Fred McCrindle

The growth of the Internet and easy online access to goods and services has provided an ideal environment for the cyber criminal. The combination of UK online consumer spends of over £500m per day allied with the exponential growth of online access from home and work has resulted in an explosion in Cyber crime.

The Internet operates across cyberspace and users can if they wish remain anonymous, this creates an ideal environment for criminals to exploit the inexperienced or unaware online user. Despite the growing awareness of online fraudulent activity, the chances of the criminals being caught are very small due to the growing sophistication of the cyber crime and the difficulty of law enforcement across worldwide jurisdictions.

Examples of Cyber crime can include identity theft, phishing, system hacking, credit card fraud, virus dissemination, cyber stalking and infiltration of Bots and spyware. There cannot be many online users that have not encountered emails and web products which aim to mislead victims into believing they are at a trusted website such as their bank, when in fact they have been enticed to a bogus website that intends to steal their identity and drain their financial resources.

The end user must always be aware and vigilant when online and a number of useful security tips are outlined below.

- Keep your web browsers and operating system up to date.
- Install online firewall, anti-virus and anti-spyware protection on your computer
- When using social networking sites ensure your profile pages are only accessible to people you trust and not to the general public by customising your security settings
- Never publish personal or sensitive information such as your birthday, drivers license number, or bank account details
- Never publish contact details such as your home address or phone number
- Always shred or destroy papers containing your personal information
- Check your credit card statements and bank statements on a regular basis
- If bills don't arrive on time make enquiries at the earliest opportunity
- Shield the entry of your personal identification numbers (PIN) at ATMs and retail payment points
- For online transaction use credit card in preference to a debit card
- Never let your credit card out of your sight
- Keep a check of your credit status by regularly viewing your credit report
- Banks, building societies and credit card companies will never contact you by email to ask you to enter your password or any other sensitive information

- Never carry out an online financial transaction on a website unless it can demonstrate that your transaction will be encrypted and is secure
- The displayed web page addresses for a secure transaction should begin with the letters **https.**

Security - Banking on honesty

We struggle to remember all the different passwords we have, so sometimes reuse them or use easy to remember, but easy to 'hack' passwords. There are tools to help manage passwords we can consider. Some organisations require a reset of passwords on a regular basis to avoid these 'easy password' problems. It is worth thinking about your password practices as you begin to use more online tools

Widow Barbara has a keen interest in family history, and was delighted when a distant cousin based in Canada got in touch out of the blue to say they were in the process of drawing up a family tree, and would she mind filling in a few names and dates from her branch? Of course, Barbara replied that she'd be glad to help, and after a few weeks received an email from the cousin which contained a link that she could click to look at the completed family tree online. Whilst fascinated by what she learned about her family by clicking on this link, Barbara became a bit concerned that all of her banking security question answers were either directly visible on it, or easily found by following links. This was because many banks ask for a person's mother's maiden name as a security question. It was only somewhat later when talking to her son – on who's advice she'd set up Internet banking in the first place - that he asked why she had given honest answers to the bank in the first place. As her son pointed out - it isn't as though the bank checks the answers are true, you just have to remember what you told them. .

Worksheet 9 - What are your password practices?

Think of any Internet accounts you have – perhaps on a forum, the BBC Have Your Say site, your email account, perhaps your online bank account:

1. Are the passwords all the same, or different? If the same, what would be the consequences of someone guessing/hacking into any of those accounts?

2. Are your passwords real words, or do you use a combination of letters, words and characters. The latter are harder to crack. If you have a very valuable account, are you giving it a valuable password?

3. Consider using punctuation in your passwords, to make them harder to guess.

Some people find it useful to make up a little story in their head based on the site they are using, and to define their password using that. For example, I might decide to have an account with Google (perhaps my email), and I sit down for a moment to think of a 'story' about which the word Google will remind me.

"Oo it's the GGs thought young Jenny, who loved her 3rd dashing Little Pony"

I might then use a password made up from the initials of some key words, substituting a dash for the word dashing

yJ3-LP

The thing about this is, although it might need you to practice it a few times, by making the relevant story (or *mnemonic*) up, nobody else is going to be able to guess it. What's more, you can probably get away with writing the little story down somewhere, because it still won't be at all obvious to people what its significance is – unless they see you referring to it while trying to remember your password!

Death and the Internet

Earlier this year a friend of mine died, it was very sad. Some weeks later, I realised that she was still in my Skype contacts and that really I should remove her. When you remove Skype contacts, they are shown as going into a rubbish bin and I felt, in the circumstances, that it was tasteless.

There are a number of services becoming available that allow people to lodge details of their digital presences so they can be dealt with after their demise, for example allowing access to a blog. The other side of this is there are a number of memorial sites where obituary notices can be set up. There are a number of Facebook groups that are set up in memory of people who have died.

Worksheet 10 – Life after death

Only try this worksheet when you are feeling good about yourself, as it explores the Digital Identity that will be left after you have died.

One of your friends has a terminal illness; they ask you to describe what you would do in the following circumstances:

1. Consider one social networking site you are represented on. If you were never able to update it after today, what changes would you now make?

2. Thinking of all the digital places you are on, which ones would really need to know if you have died? Consider the impact on your loved ones if a service was not told.

3. It is possible to arrange for someone to update your personal sites after you have died. Do you know anyone you would trust to 'properly' update your personal sites after you have died?

4. If your friend asked you to look after their online presence after their death, what would be your response?

Work of Fiction

Maria has always enjoyed reading, as a child she read to her dolls. Much of what she chooses to read is recommended by friends, and so it is quite varied in style and settings. But recently she has found her eye sight has deteriorated and she is unable to read the small text in some books, a magnifying glass helped but was cumbersome. She was grumbling about this at her lunch club, and one of the volunteers said there was a local charity that may be able to help. The charity has lent Maria an e-book reader, and Maria thinks it is fantastic she is able to change the settings so that the font is as large as she needs it. The charity has pre-loaded a number of books and will help when she needs new titles. They also offer an audio book service, so if her sight does deteriorate further she still will be able to keep up with her reading.

In the thriller category, Maria is enjoying seeing how technology is creeping into the genre. She finds it interesting to consider the mechanism of how the protagonist seeks information on another character. Those written before the turn of the millennium tend to have the protagonist travelling to distant destinations and interviewing a wide variety of people. More recent books describe how computers have come in to play and reduced the travelling times for protagonists.

Worksheet 11 - Twist in the Plot

How do you imagine where all this living online stuff is going? Look to fiction! Assume that you are a novelist (or advising one) and you want to have an interesting twist in a plot, how might you introduce these areas of online reputation (Digital Identity):

- a character has an extremely common name;
- a character appears to have no mention on the Internet;
- a character appears to have no digital presence for the past five years;
- a character is following all the other characters on Twitter;
- there is a Flickr picture of a character at a location he denies visiting;
- there are messages written in code on the character's Facebook wall.

Mike Roch on managing your Digital Identity

With 25 years in technology behind him Mike Roch, Director of IT Services at Reading University, has a great deal of insight into Digital Identity – both in terms of what it means to him, and the way it is approached by others.

With social networking, particularly Facebook, being very much the topic du jour, Mike observes that his own experience shows you can never be too careful about how you present yourself online, because that information will be around for a long time! "So much of the discussion focuses on the here and now," he says, "but, sorry to be the old fart, to me it's not that new."

"It's a new medium, but we were doing this sort of thing 25 years ago – and the evidence still exists that we were doing it 25 years ago. The persistence of this activity is something we are only coming to recognise now – there are Web sites out there whose mission it is to record all of the Internet for posterity, and actually, it's much more accessible than just some juddering archive!"

With this in mind, he says, people should perhaps take lessons from real life when considering how to form their digital one. "A lot of people don't think about what the audience for their postings is going to be. Yet our actual experience of life is not speak as you would be spoken to, but to speak as the audience expects or requires you to. Very few people have the luxury in life of being themselves, and having the world like it or lump it."

Mike adds that people's belief in the anonymity of the Internet is part of their innocence about how it really works, and can make them throw caution to the wind by telling the world and his dog about their life and exploits from the comfort of a laptop. "I do think there's a lot of, not naivety – because that's a loaded term – but trust and innocence about the way people use social networking, young people in particular," he says.

"Their openness in social networking is not reflected in openness in their real lives. For example, it's not usual when walking down the street to see what someone's name is – even their name is private, never mind what's going on in their relationships, or their political views."

In fact, says Mike, the analogy of a

street applies rather well to the Internet. "There are all sorts out there," he comments, "and if you're going to use a street safely and securely, then you tend not to make a lot of eye contact, you tend to avoid dark corners, and cross over when there are no street lights. The Internet's got dark corners as well – and there is a level of risk, especially when there is a link between the virtual and the real."

Setting boundaries and making yourself fully aware of these risks, concludes Mike, are key to staying in control of your Digital Identity, enabling it to work for you and hopefully not against you.

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