ThisIsMe

Learning materials about Digital Identity

Produced by the This Is Me project Originating project funded by Eduserv. Modified by Nancy White for use in the NGO Sector and the CGIAR Social Media Workshop/KS Toolkit

Re-Modified by Shirley Williams, Sarah Fleming and Pat Parslow for use by health professionals and trainees October 2009

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NGO/NPO Revision: This revision was created as part of a workshop on social media sponsored by the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research. It is quite a bit shorter than the original This Is Me so you might want to check out both versions.

Health Professional Revisions: This revision was created with healthcare professionals and trainees in mind, whether working in private practice, or for a public or private health services organisation.

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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Contents:

Digital Identity

'Digital Identity' (DI) is a term to describe the persona an individual presents across all the digital communities in which he or she is represented.

As we use more and more online services which allow user content and discussion, such as Facebook (http://www.facebook.com) , LinkedIn (http://www.linkedin.com), Delicious (http://www.delicious.com), Twitter (http://www.twitter.com), Google, blogs and so on, we leave a 'digital footprint'. This 'footprint' is what makes up our Digital Identity (DI) – all those things which can be found out about us from the content you posts, the profiles we make, the conversations we have with others and the things other people post about us.

Much of this material remains accessible for an indefinite period. Unlike a conversation in a coffee shop, what is put on the Web tends to stay on the Web. With the increasing processing power of computers, it will become easier over time to aggregate this information to build a profile of someone. Various Web sites are already starting to do this, with varying degrees of accuracy.

What would someone who searches the Web for you find? Does it reflect the image of yourself you want to portray? If there is something about you on the Web, how would you find out about it? What does it say about somebody if they have no Web presence in today's world? If you are responsible for others, e.g. a parent, mentee, associate or partner in your practice, are there any extra precautions you should take? As a health professional you may find patients and potential patients searching for you online, and too much public information may not be appropriate. On the other hand, as a 21st century individual, you are likely to want to use social networking sites to keep in touch with friends and to keep you up to date with your profession.

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

Learning materials

This workbook is designed to help you explore the ideas and issues surrounding the concept of Digital Identity. Experience shows that a person's view of Digital Identity changes as they become familiar with different online services, and when issues are reported in the media. It can be useful to go back and revisit how you answered the worksheets every now and then, to see how events change your view.

Where possible, people seem to gain more from the worksheets when they have the opportunity to discuss the issues they raise in pairs or small groups. Some people may need to be told not to share any issues which they feel sensitive about, unless with a trusted friend. For example, the worksheet on DI and Death may need to be handled with particular sensitivity.

Exploring your Digital Identity

Clare is a chiropractor with active research interests. She was educated in the UK in the 'pre-Internet' era but over the past five years has come to accept that working online is a valuable part of her work. She has published in print academic journals and presented at national and international conferences. She has three grown up children and two young grandchildren. She loves it when her daughter sends a link to pictures of the grandchildren and had a chuckle to see her picture as well. Then one of her patients said "hey, cute grandchildren on Flickr," and Clare said "what?". Her patient said she was searching for a picture of Clare to describe her to a friend with foot problems and found her on Flickr, the photo sharing website. Clare was aghast. She had no idea she was 'online'!

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?

The first thing is to explore your own Digital Identity.

Worksheet 1 - *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 current client
- A distant family member
- Someone referred to you
- A colleague you are currently working with
- Someone who is about to rent you a house
- Your daughter/mother

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.

Locking down your Digital Identity?

From School to Work

Abi just finished training and has begun her career as a sports physiotherapist linked to a national athletics team. While at college, she built up a Facebook account with literally hundreds of photographs of her tagged at parties, holidays with friends – the usual! Abi studied hard too and received a good upper second degree (2.1). As a teenager, she used chat rooms, and found out a lot about the university she goes to from people who were happy to talk about it online. She has always been careful to avoid heated arguments online, but is aware that her cultural views have shifted since going to university. She does not necessarily see everything she said in the past as being entirely representative of her today.

When she applied for her job with the sports team, she was well received. The interviewers were impressed with her ability to express herself and communicate with the interview panel without any nervousness, probably because of her dynamic and lively approach, which is reflected in her online persona. They, however, were not users of online media, so they did not ask her about her online experiences.

Abi had not thought much about her online persona in her professional life, especially since many of her peers aren't using online tools. But last week a colleague made a remark about a party picture and now Abi is not sure whether to 'clean up' her Facebook profile, to make it look more professional, or whether to acknowledge that she enjoys a party as much as the next person, and that this shows she has a character as well as those all important skills she has learned at university.
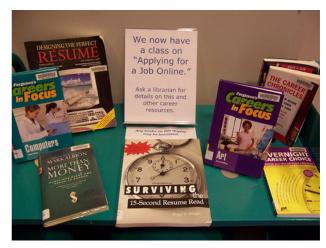
Worksheet 2 – What will they find?

Imagine you are just starting your career as a health professional in a private practice with celebrity clients. You have been using the Internet socially since you were a teenager. You have secured your first job – an associateship in a practice where *who* you are is almost as important as what you do. Appearances matter. You hear your Practice Principal is going to begin looking up everyone online to see if there are any image problems that may be found by the media.

1. What might your existing Facebook or LinkedIn profile say about you if your employer looks at it?

2. Are there any things or in notes you have posted which help your employer see you in a positive light from their perspective? Conversely, is there anything on your profile that might put your employer off?

3. If you were in the position of shortlisting people for interview and your organisation had a policy of checking candidates' Digital Identities, how would you interpret it if it was obvious someone had just 'cleaned up' their profile?

4. How would you feel if the organisation you worked for banned use of social networking sites such as Facebook during work hours? How, on the other hand, would you feel if the organisation you worked for decided its staff had to use a social network?

Quick Digital Identity?

Mike is a nurse working in a research institute, and is involved in local volunteering initiatives such as mentoring local school children. He also volunteers at a local homeless shelter. Mike has never had time to get involved with social networks on the Internet, preferring the immediacy and dynamic nature of face-to-face conversations. He uses email and, occasionally, gets distracted by his instant messenger program with queries from colleagues, but apart from that, the Internet is chiefly a resource for researching things.

Times are changing. Mike's research institute is being reorganised. Everyone will have to reapply for jobs and it is expected that some people will have to look elsewhere for positions. So it is time to get some other options ready. One of the organisations Mike would like to work for, though, has a strong presence online, and does a lot of outreach and advocacy using online social networks. They have been contacting people though this medium about their plans for a major new research initiative. Mike is not sure whether he wants to get involved in this – on the one hand, he could sit down and write a profile to provide an online presence, but on the other hand, he has plenty to do, with the current work and volunteering.

What is worse is that he cannot work out whether a plain and straightforward profile would actually help him in this case. It may be that it would look just a bit too 'engineered' and put a potential employer off. Some people expect to see a 'back story' behind an online persona, and it may just be too late to create one now.

Worksheet 3 – Job Hunting for the Experienced

You are looking for the opportunity to work abroad for a year. You have avoided being drawn in to social networking sites, preferring to spend time with your friends. You have three organisations that offer interesting opportunities for a year out, and you discover from one of your friends that two of them have been getting in touch with potential applicants through LinkedIn, a business social networking site. While you were chatting with friends over coffee, you heard that there are 20 people applying for each position within the organisations, so it is going to be quite competitive.

1. What basic research would you do to try to determine whether you are more likely to be successful in your application if you have a LinkedIn profile?

2. If you choose to create a profile, for the purposes of enabling the organisations to find you, what sort of information would you make available?

3. What do you think it says about you, if you just create the profile with your academic achievements and areas of professional interests?

4. If you were interacting with potential employees via a social networking site, how would you see someone who had created a profile just to interact with you, or to get your attention?

Tweeting

In the 'old days' people used email lists, forums and bulletin boards to have conversations among communities. Social networking sites offered ways of having many-to-many communication via people's 'walls' (in Facebook) and through use of groups. Then came microblogging, (like Twitter), which popularised the idea of sharing out to the world, via the Internet, what you are doing or thinking. People who use it ('Tweeple') were quick to come up with ways of holding semi-private conversations (addressing a remark @someone) which anyone can see. It also has a means of sending 'Direct' (or private) messages to others.

Jill works in respite care for the terminally ill and started using Twitter to communicate with some of her friends while she was staying long-term with a patient. It helped her feel connected with her friends and family while working hard in difficult situations. It was great because she could use her mobile phone when there was no Internet access.

Because she liked to Tweet about books, she gained a few other 'followers' – people who were interested in her status updates. Although Jill still feels that it is a little odd that people from around the world are interested in what she has to say, she continues to update the 'Twitterverse' with comments on books she has read, interspersed with occasional conversations with friends, total strangers, and the odd Tweet about her day-to-day life and the place she is staying in.

Jill was a little surprised when one of the agency owners signed up to Twitter. This person was very sensitive about how their work is communicated out to the world. Jill spent a little time wondering whether she should protect her updates. Protecting them means that people can't read what she writes unless she gives them permission. She would never accidentally connect with others. However, in the end, she decided that although she had made some comments about the local conditions that she would have phrased differently if she had intended the owner to read them, she decided it would be OK. But she resolved to keep her Tweets to things she is totally sure are OK to say publicly, which means she sometimes doesn't say what she'd like to say!

Worksheet 4 - Tweeting from the field

You are an undergraduate student and you start using Twitter over a summer holiday as it was used by staff at the clinic where you were gaining work experience. When you are back at college, you find that a number of others are also using it.

Thinking about these people

Ali - who takes the same modules as you
Bob - who takes one module with you
Cat - doing the same degree course as you but in a different name
Doug - a postgrad who helps with one of your tutorials
Ed - a lecturer on one of your modules
Fi - your personal tutor
Greg - your student union representative
Hiya - your student radio's twitter ID
Mum - your mother
ST - your college's senior tutor

X - your ex-lover

1. What would be your reaction if any of the above started following you? How do you feel when Doug, a stranger from the other side of the world follows you. If they seem to have similar interests? If they also Tweet about completely different things?

2. Would you expect the above to follow you if you followed them?

3. Now would you Tweet about your work life? Social life? Everything?

Security - Banking on honesty

Lynn decided to delete her Facebook profile after realising 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 telling the tale of how hard she had found it to delete the information, that a friend asked why she had given honest answers to the bank in the first place. As the friend pointed out - it isn't as though the bank checks the answers are true, you just have to remember what you told them.

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 critical intranet 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 social media tools.

Worksheet 5 - What are your password practices?

Think of four Internet accounts you have.

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?

What's in a Name?

Greg is a recent medical science graduate, enjoying the Rome lifestyle since securing a job with a large research institute thanks to a good degree and dazzling Web profile, painstakingly crafted to sell his talents. In addition to the usual bright lights big city stuff of touring bars and cafes, Greg spends quite a bit of his down time gaming on the Internet, playing a wide range of browser games and hanging out in Second Life.

In the office, Greg met Sam from Sudan. Sam has been working with refugees around Darfur, particularly those who are at risk for political persecution. Sam's job has been to help these people reconnect with their families and relocate to safer locations. Sam is intrigued by Greg's online life as he has had neither the time nor internet access to experiment with these new tools. His employer, a small, conservative NGO in Sudan, does not allow its employees to do any of their work online for fear of compromising the privacy and identity of the people they serve as well as to protect staff safety.

Greg offers to set Sam up with a Second Life avatar and some other online accounts. Sam has some misgivings, but allows Greg to "go ahead and do it as long as we don't use my real name".

Worksheet 6 – Do unto others

What happens when we create a Digital Identity on behalf of someone else – in this case a person with no experience, limited Internet access, and some prohibitions about Internet use at work.

Greg is a technologically literate individual. He spends time playing online games, and has used the Web to manage his own reputation both as a student and as an employee. He understands the implications of having a Web presence, and how presence is viewed and interpreted by others.

Greg has taken on the responsibility for creating a Web presence for Sam, whose organisation has already expressed misgivings about their staff interacting on the Internet. How he helps Sam register and choose an online name could have consequences not only for Sam as an individual, but for his organisational relationships as well. Thinking about this scenario:

1. What issues should you 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' and do enough web-based research to see who the person behind the avatar is?

3. Thinking back to any accounts you may have had when you were younger, does anyone still know you in terms of the identity you projected then?

4. 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 Second Life avatar 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?

Clearance or Convenience?

When John was a child, he had a Brownie camera and he could take eight photos on each film; he now has a digital camera and can take thousands of pictures. As a child he stuck his photos in an album and showed them to family and friends, now he can post his pictures on the Internet and share them with the whole world. The photographs in which he appear that are posted somewhere on the Internet certainly contribute to his Digital Identity.

On holiday with family and friends, large numbers of photos are taken throughout the trip, from the drowsy morning shots of pyjamaed individuals grasping a cup of tea, through sightseeing and lounging by the pool, to boozy evenings. He can control which of these he posts, but he has less control over the ones others select to post.

At recent conferences he attended he was asked to fill in a form that giving his permission for pictures to be taken and used. There were professional photographers who, it seemed, were almost everywhere capturing not only the presentations but also the coffee breaks and lunch.
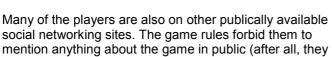
Worksheet 7 – Time to review policies?

Select someone who is your Facebook friend and look at photos in which they are tagged, then imagine what comments the following may add to these photos:

- Their father
- A prospective employer
- Their cousin
- A co-worker
- Their partner
- A former classmate

Having tried this with someone else, now try it on photos posted featuring yourself.

Closed communities – private community/public impact

David, a medical student, belongs to a secret society. Well, he plays a game in which he is a 'spy' and the game organisers have forums and social networks set up which can only be accessed by paying players. David enjoys the game, even if some of his friends think he is a bit geeky. Around 30 of his friends in the local area also play it on a regular basis.

Many of the players are also on other publically available social networking sites. The game rules forbid them to mention anything about the game in public (after all, they are spies!), and generally people abide by the rules. After one of his friends was treated a bit harshly by one of the referees, there was an incident on the game's forums. The friend was angry and let the referees know about their shortcomings using some colourful language.

Whilst David sympathised with his friend because the judgement had been unjust, the outburst made (game-related) life tricky for a while. Some people decided they couldn't trust David anymore because of his friendship, and because he had defended the guy in the forum. David remained calm and polite throughout, but was now in a position where his friend's reaction had had a negative impact on his own reputation. In a 'real life' situation, this would probably have blown over, as memories started to fade, and people gradually left the game and were replaced with new blood. However, the persistent nature of the incident, recorded in the archives, meant that it never quite seemed to go away.

Worksheet 8 – What changes?

Imagine you are a member of a national society, which has an online presence for its members in the form of email lists. Only members of the society are allowed to join the lists, read emails coming from the list, and send emails to it. You know the following people who received the email:

- Andrew - via the email list only
- Bill - via the email list at first but he lives close by, and you've met up in the pub
- Cassandra - a friend who encouraged you to join the society
- Frederick - a colleague who you know through the society
- Gerald - holds a position of authority in the society, although he isn't in charge

You read your mail one afternoon, and one of the emails is an angry diatribe, targeting those currently in charge of the society. For each of the above people in turn, assume they were the person who sent the email.

1. How does sending the email change the Digital Identity (DI) of the sender? How does it change the DI of the target?

2. How does it change the DI of the society internally?

3. What impact does it have on relationships outside of the society?

4. How do you respond to it? What can be done to mitigate the effects?

DI and Death

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 youngsters who have died. William Henry Bonser Lamin, born August 1887 in Awsworth Notts, to Henry and Sarah Lamin, did not have a Digital Identity when he was alive, but now he does, and he has his own blog at http://wwar1.blogspot.com/.

Worksheet 9 – 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 clients has a terminal illness; they ask you to describe what you would do in the following circumstances:
- 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?
- 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.
- 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?

If your client asked you to look after their Digital Identity after their death, what would be your response?

Mike Roch on managing your DI

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.

Erica and the aggregator

Erica maintains a simple but effective online profile, which shows her professional achievements. She updates as often as is appropriate, and makes sure it links properly to other information about her on the Web.

When checking recently to see if there were any new mentions of her work which she should create links to, she was surprised to find a site which claimed to be about her. It had her email address, employer, and most of the content from her profile, but it also had links that related to somebody quite different. Moreover, as Erica had never worked as a masseuse, she was rather surprised to see a Web page that appeared to claim she had!

The problem was that the site in question trawled through countless pages, trying to find everything it could about a person, and the rules it used for deciding whether information was about her were not quite right. The company that ran the site said the easiest option was to sign up with them and edit her profile. Although this would get rid of the errors, Erica could not see any reason why she should effectively be blackmailed into joining someone's online service (even though there was no cost).

Nowadays we are often offered the opportunity to tag resources. In Facebook we can tag the people in a photo, on our blogs we can tag a post, and on del.icio.us we can tag pages we have bookmarked.

There are a number of reasons why we choose to tag:

- For ourselves, so that we can find resources later. For example Andy may tag an article 'toread' to remind himself that he intends to read the article later;

- For others, so that others know what the resource is about. For example Bo may tag a picture 'pig' so that others know that it is a picture of a pig;

- For automation, so that other systems know that this resource is meant to be aggregated by them.

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- Identity LOLCat http://www.flickr.com/photos/dbarefoot/514759657/ by Darren Barefoot
- Mirror http://www.flickr.com/photos/g_originals/403658486/ by g.originals
- Digital Identity Map http://www.flickr.com/photos/fredcavazza/278973402/ by Fred Cavazza
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