Proof of ID Required? Getting Identity Management Right

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Identity management and privacy: playing for high stakes

Identity management is in. It is emerging as *the* topic in government and business information technology thinking.

Identity management is proposed as a solution to a loose collection of issues with powerful economic, political and social resonance. Greater confidence about the identity of individuals, particularly in electronic contexts, is aimed at preventing financial, welfare and benefit fraud, protecting national borders and increasing national security, as well as better profiling customers or clients to better target services and goods.

Individuals themselves see a need to consolidate or simplify the way they present their identities to the world. Many of us can imagine how much more convenient it would be to have fewer PINs, passwords and plastic cards, for example. Many of us find the evidence of identity demands when we first deal with a government department or financial businesses, for example, to be onerous and intrusive.

Implemented poorly, identity management is likely to be a cure much worse than the disease, posing risks to the fabric of our society. Indeed, it could amount to almost total surveillance of some, if not all, individuals. It would make it technically easy to combine vast amounts of electronic information held about a person, wherever it is stored, without that person's knowledge or permission.

On top of that, poorly implemented identity management 'solutions' have great potential to facilitate, not prevent, identity fraud.

One number per person solutions, like the Australia Card, fall into this category.

Implemented well, identity management can achieve its goals without endangering personal freedom and privacy.

What is Good identity management – what does it feel like when we get there?

The right identity management solutions will build trust between individuals, government and business, and increase each individual's control over his or her identity.

What is Good identity management – what are some of the essential characteristics?

This is the heart of the paper and will be developed in some detail. Specific proposals will be made.

The most essential ingredient of all – Public awareness and contribution to the discussion

Getting identity management right in today's world is in the end a very delicate social and political decision for society to make. It calls for clear, educated social and political debate. This lecture will contribute to that debate.