Welcome to the
Online Identity — An Overview
Training Module
In the early 1990s, internet users used to feel shielded behind an electronic veil of anonymity, able to take on any persona they pleased.
Introduction

Today web-based businesses:

- Build profiles of customers
- Offer product recommendations
- Keep personal histories
Introduction
This training module will help explain the various different identities and profiles that represent you online.
Objective

By the end of this module, you will:

• Understand some of the key differences between online and 'real life' identity
• Recognise the nature and purpose of digital identifiers
• Understand the relationship between online identity and personal privacy
What is Your Identity

Your identity is the sum of your characteristics:

- Birthplace
- Birthday
- Schools
- Shoe size

Some of those characteristics never change.
What is Your Online Identity

Real-world identity

Online identity

Every website you interact with has its own idea of your identity because each one you visit sees you and your characteristics differently.
What is Partial Identity

These different representations of you are referred to as **partial identities**.

**Partial identity** is a subset of the characteristics that make up your identity.

A **persona** is a partial identity created by you to represent yourself in a specific situation.

**Disclaimer:** You may find other definitions of ‘persona’ and ‘partial identity’ elsewhere, but to explain the concepts, these are the ones we’re going to use in this module.
What is Identifier

An identifier is one or more pieces of data that uniquely identify a person or thing, within a given population. For example, your name or phone number, the IP address of your computer, or the MAC address of your computer’s network adapter.

Service providers use identifiers to point to the other information they hold about you - what we have described as a ‘partial identity’. This allows them to build up a profile, over time, of you and the interactions you have with them.
An identifier is a way of pointing to, or indexing, a set of characteristics that are associated with you.
Identity and Identifiers

**Identity:** The complete set of characteristics that define you
**Identifier:** A way of referring to a set of characteristics
**Partial Identity:** A subset of the characteristics that make up your identity
**Profile:** Information collected by others about your actions and characteristics
**Persona:** A partial identity created by you to represent yourself in a specific situation

Let's take a look at some of the terminology used in describing **identity** and **identifiers**.

Click each Example button to learn more.

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**Example: Identity**

Name, nicknames, birth date and any other unique characteristics that combined make you who you are
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**Example: Identifier**

Your email address (myID@me.com) or user name (RaulB) or an account number (7633)
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**Example: Partial Identity**

Demographic information about you or any purchase history is stored in your account at a website.
### Identity and Identifiers

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**Example: Profile**

A search you conducted for “discount shoes” or a list of websites visited.

Your profile may also be based on inference data. For instance, a service provider has a certain number of data points, they will use those as the basis to infer other things about you.
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**Example:** Persona

A social network account or your online blog
You must be wondering why do websites assign identifiers to you and build profiles about you.

They do it mainly for three reasons.

Click each sticky note to learn more.

- Provide you with a personalized experience
- Prevent online frauds
- Aiming advertisements at you
You must be wondering why do websites assign identifiers to you and build profiles about you. They do it mainly for three reasons. Click each post it to learn more.

The websites you visit ask you to create an account with a unique identifier. This is because they need a way to maintain information about you so they can provide you with a personalized experience.

Provide you with a personalized experience

Prevent online frauds

Aiming advertisements at you
You must be wondering why websites assign identifiers to you and build profiles about you. They do it mainly for three reasons. Beyond the information you explicitly provide, these websites also build profiles based on what you search for, the links you click on, your location, and so on.

One of the reasons that online companies and organizations want to build a more extensive profile about you is security. Websites that are engaging in commerce, such as your bank, have serious concerns about online fraud. By profiling your interactions with them, and then noticing changes in your behaviour, they can act more intelligently to protect your interests, and theirs.
You must be wondering why websites assign identifiers to you and build profiles about you. They do it mainly for three reasons:

1. **Click each post it to learn more.**

   Another reason why websites build your profiles is behavioural targeting. This means a company can make money by selling ads aimed specifically at you.

   This type of advertising surrounds a significant amount of information that is available on the Internet. The more relevant an advertisement is to a target audience, the more value it has to the advertiser.

   The more a website operator knows about you, where you’ve been, and what you’re doing, they will have more control over the types of advertisements you see, which is what earns them the highest revenue.
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Conclusion

You have reached the end of the Online Identity — An Overview training module.

You can click on any of the links on the left to review any section that you might like.

To learn more about this topic, click here.