Welcome to the Online Identity — An Overview Training Module.

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This tutorial forms part of the Internet Society’s work on Trust and Identity. For more information, please visit the following links:
The Internet Society and its mission

http://www.internetsociety.org/who-we-are/mission

Our work on Identity and Privacy
In the early 1990s, Internet users used to feel shielded behind an electronic veil of anonymity, able to take on any persona they pleased.
The internet has changed hugely in the last 20 years, in ways that directly affect our online identity and privacy. Online services of all kinds today have adopted technologies that build profiles of customers, offer product recommendations, and keep personal histories that can be long-lived and extremely detailed. Data sharing between these web-based businesses also affects our online identity and privacy. Through data sharing, a service provider can link subsets of personal data to a mass of data you may have thought was confined to another persona or context.
While some Internet users appreciate the convenience those digital identities afford, others worry about how much of their personal information is being stored and how this information is being shared.
This training module will help explain the various different identities and profiles that represent you online.
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 and
• Understand the relationship between online identity and personal privacy
Your identity is the sum of your characteristics, including your birthplace and birthday, the schools you attended, your shoe size, and so on.

Some of those characteristics never change, such as your birthday, and some change over time, such as your age, or hair color. Simply put, your identity is you are who you are and what you do.
Your online identity is not the same as your real-world identity because the characteristics you represent online differ from the characteristics you represent in the physical world, and because your online identity reflects kinds of interaction that often differ from your real-world interactions. When you are using the Internet, your online identity is the sum of your characteristics and interactions.

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

For example, Amazon has established an identity for you based on the products you buy, whether it’s you at the keyboard or someone else using your account. Yahoo! Finance has established another identity for you based on the stocks you are following, whether you actually own those stocks or not. Neither one has your full 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.

When you provide personal information, such as your **name**, **age**, and **hometown**, to a website operator, you are creating your own partial identity, which is called a **persona**. A persona is a partial identity created by you to represent yourself in a specific situation.

You may have many personas. Some of the information associated with a persona is under your control; other information may be out of your control or even completely invisible to you. For example, other "Internet users" (e.g. friends, colleagues, etc) may provide (e.g. posting, commenting) information about you, and add to “your” online identity (e.g. on facebook, blogs etc). Regardless of what you can and cannot control, they all contribute to “who you are and what you do.”

[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.]
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.
For example, if you use Microsoft’s Bing to search for something on the Internet, Bing will assign you an identifier and store it in your Web browser as a cookie.

Every time you use Bing, the cookie that Bing stored in your Web browser acts as an identifier that links together all of your characteristics into Bing’s idea of your identity.

If you use Bing from both your laptop and your smartphone, you may even have more than one identifier, each representing you to Bing, even though they may be completely disconnected from each other.

The identifier that a service like Bing has assigned to you does not actually refer to you as a person; it is simply a way of pointing to, or indexing, a set of characteristics that have been collected to form a profile of you. Some of those characteristics may match your real identity and some might not.
Let's take a look at some of the terminology used in describing **identity and identifiers**.

Click each **Example** button to learn more.
Identity and Identifiers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Definition</th>
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<tr>
<td>Persona</td>
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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: 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.
Let’s take a look at some of the terminology used in describing identity and identifiers.
You may be wondering why websites assign identifiers to you and build profiles about you.

They do it mainly for three reasons.

Click each sticky note to learn more.

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The websites you visit ask you to create an account with a unique identifier.

This is partly because they need a way to maintain information about you, for example so that they can provide you with a personalized experience.
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.
Another reason why websites build your profiles is behavioural or targeted advertising. This means a company can make money by selling advertisements aimed specifically at you, or by selling the data that determines which advertisements you see. The more a service provider knows about you, the more accurately such advertising can be targeted.

Many online services are offered “free” to users because they are funded by advertising revenue and the sale of data about the user. This part of the “bargain” is often invisible to the user.

However, it is a mistake to think that, just because a service is paid-for, it does not also collect, track and monetise user data.
Select the correct terms from the dropdown list to match the definitions.

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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.
Resources

Primelife Project
This is the foundation document for the Primelife proof of concept. Chapter 2 of this document includes an excellent overview on identity concepts, including the concept of personas or partial identities.

Roger Clarke's ID
This segment of the site provides access to Roger Clarke’s published papers that deal with "Identity Matters". It includes his conceptual model and a glossary.


Roger Clarke's ID: http://www.rogerclarke.com/ID/