

# Personal Digital Identity Association

## Statement of Intent

### The trend

One by-product of the digital revolution is that increasingly, individuals leave a 'digital footprint' or 'audit trail' of everything they do. We are rapidly moving towards a situation where what we buy, where we go, the thoughts we express, what we are interested in, even who we spend time with creates a digital information stream where we can be recognised and monitored and data about us collected.

What we buy is already the subject of vast enterprises including the banking, customer relationship management, credit referencing and loyalty card industries. But that will soon be supplemented by radio frequency identity (RFID) tagging technologies, tagged to all the physical items we purchase, and open to be read by anybody with a reader. Our many interactions with our governments are not far behind in the data gathering stakes - and when they catch up they will have the potential to be as much again and more in terms of their ability to digitise the lives of individuals.

GPS satellite positioning systems in mobile phones can keep a track of where we were every time we used the phone, while CCTV tracks the movements of our cars, and credit card (and pre-pay card systems such as Oyster on the London Underground) track where we were when a transaction was conducted.

What we think can be mined easily, because what we write in emails is never fully lost or deleted. And organisations like Google are creating vast data warehouses to hold this information, sweeping it for words to which ads can be attached. Words will soon be followed by phrases, by increasing 'semantic' understanding.

On top of that, ISPs and other organisations like Google can monitor and record every web site we visit, and every Internet search we conduct, to create a database of our intentions and interests.

And thanks to digital photography linked to face recognition technologies and GPS pulses we can even be recognised or identified when strolling in the street with friends.

## The problem

There are three things to note about this development.

First, the potential (and actual) uses and applications of these technologies is unfolding much faster, further and deeper than most individuals realise: there is a gap between what individuals *think* is going on, and what *is* going on. And that gap is widening rapidly. A recent headline in The Times 'Byte by byte, our identity is being stolen' captures the trend. This gap is creating a space for all manner of misunderstandings, suspect practices and abuses to flourish.

Second, the technologies are also developing much faster than the law. And without a strong, well informed public opinion to influence the law, the law is unlikely to keep up. Even worse, the technologies are making it much harder to uphold existing data protection laws and much easier to flout or work your way around them.

Third, there are many commercial, political and other interests only too happy keep it this way. Whether it is the criminal end of abuse (such as identity theft) or the commercial end of mis-use (intrusions of privacy for the purposes of 'more effective marketing' for example, or even 'you must buy a shredder' or identify theft insurance pitches), many people hope to profit or otherwise benefit from the relative ignorance and inertia of individuals and regulators in the face of rapid technological change. More subtly, many organisations risk compounding the problem simply by using new opportunities to continue long-established policies: since when have big organisations not wanted to collect and use more data, more efficiently?

This is creating a very dangerous situation. New digital technologies represent a huge opportunity to develop rich new services which enrich peoples' lives in countless ways, cut transaction, interaction and other costs, thereby unleashing sustainable economic growth that could, and should, benefit all.

Instead, it threatens to become an epicentre of mistrust and conflict. Without individuals' trust and voluntary cooperation most of the potential benefits of these technologies can never be realised: only those technologies that operate without individuals' knowledge or permission will flourish - thereby engendering even more mistrust and conflict.

## **The opportunity**

The ramifications of these trends reach into every area of commercial and political life; into every industry and every human activity that uses information (try thinking of one that doesn't).

It means we need an ongoing, open public debate about where we are headed, and why. It means we need a rethink of legislation and regulation, including the enforcement and application of these laws and rules. But crucially, it also means we need to think hard about how we use the potential of new digital technologies, via what sorts of commercial frameworks and business models.

Because what we must not lose sight of, is that there is a huge commercial and technological opportunity here too: to *apply and use technologies to empower and enrich individuals*.

Should this happen in a sustained, consistent way the information potential of digital technologies would become the individual's (that is, the consumer's, the citizen's and the employee's) friend - something to encouraged, supported and invested in. Instead of engendering mistrust and conflict, we would be building trust and mutually beneficial cooperation.

## **The central principle**

There is a principle at stake here. A debate to be had. It boils down to this. Who should be the pivotal beneficiary of new technologies?

- Those who (for whatever reason) have the ability to use these technologies to harvest, store, trade and otherwise apply information collected from and about individuals?

- Or, the source of the information - the actual information generator - individuals themselves?

Depending on how you answer this question, you set yourself on a completely different trajectory. And yes, there are middle ground variants where information is jointly 'owned' or shared, but the underlying question remains the same.

### **The PDIDA's mission**

It is the view of the Personal Digital Identity Association that the only possible sustainable, successful win-win answer to this question is to put the information generator and source at the heart of all future development: to make the individual the pivotal beneficiary, to place the potential of technology at the disposal of the individual and to use it to empower and enrich individuals.

If and when this happens, individuals will only be too happy to cooperate with, invest in, do business with and otherwise support and help those organisations that deliver these benefits. If it doesn't happen, we have a recipe for ongoing conflict and mistrust which will ultimately place a brake on the technologies' application, development and potential.

The Purpose of the PDIDA, then, is to do everything in its power to place individuals and their interests at the heart of technology development. This is a massive agenda. It means

- an ongoing campaign of public education and debate, including what The Central Principle implies and means, where its boundaries lie (e.g. national security, law enforcement, etc) and how best to apply it
- ongoing research into technology potential and applications, current commercial and organisational practices, consumer, citizen and employee behaviours in response to these developments, and individuals' attitudes towards them
- constant review and updating of legislation and regulation, including their application and enforcement
- constant review and open debate of organisations' policies, practices and priorities
- *crucially and pivotally*, ongoing business model, service and technology innovation designed to use the potential of new technologies to empower and enrich individuals.

The PDIDA is calling on all those individuals and organisations who subscribe to this central principle to join us in this quest: to make sure that the true potential of the digital technology revolution is indeed realised.