

Title

Building the “Swiss edu-ID”: status and outlook

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Abstract

The Swiss University Conference recognised the importance of unlimited and widespread access to all sources of scientific information to the competitiveness of research and science in all disciplines in Switzerland. It initiated the 37MCHF project programme “Scientific information: access, processing and safeguarding”, which is running since the beginning of 2013 with a lifetime of 4 years [1]. Its aim is to ensure, that learners, teachers and researchers are able to access, store, exchange and make available to others all relevant scientific information in a secure, transparent and efficient manner.

A large number of scientific use cases were collected and grouped into these six fields of action: identity management, working environment, e-publishing, e-learning, data management and cloud computing. It became quite apparent, that identity management is a key field, on which all others depend.

With its strong background in identity management, SWITCH was chosen to lead a group of experts to develop a strategy for identity management in the context of this project programme, which was subsequently published in November 2013 [2].

While building on the very successful authentication and authorisation infrastructure SWITCHaai, the strategy document demands substantial changes to the current identity management processes. Currently, electronic identities get created and destroyed as individuals start or end affiliations with organisations or change roles. This is of little concern for services linked to a

particular role or function. But it does not offer adequate support for user-centric services, such as e-portfolios, which are designed to get enriched as individuals move from one university to another or change employer. Users need to export their data before their electronic identity expires, archive their data until they can reimport it upon establishment of the new identity; clearly a non-satisfying solution.

The identity management strategy proposes a user-centric approach by linking the electronic identity to the identity of the bearer instead of to his roles and affiliations. The implications of this change are quite substantial and need careful planning and a phased approach. The next two action items are the commissioning of studies to develop the high-level architecture of the “Swiss edu-ID” and the initial set of attributes to be used on the first version of the “Swiss edu-ID” service. Both action items will be concluded by the time the TNC2014 takes place and will be covered in this contribution.

Those are the steps planned to follow later:

- A new centralised identity management platform will be implemented by the end of 2014: the “Swiss edu-ID”
- In a first phase, the “Swiss edu-ID” will serve as a linked backup identity to host those individuals, that are about to lose their current electronic identity. It will only serve a very limited set of locally hosted attributes.
- Later, the “Swiss edu-ID” should become the authoritative identity management service for higher education and research in Switzerland. A richer set of attributes will be provided by aggregating attributes from multiple sources.

This process will take several years to conclude.

References

[1] Web site of funding programme ISCI (Scientific information: access, processing and safeguarding): <http://www.crus.ch/information-programme/projekte-programme/isci.html> (site is available in German and French, some documents in English)

[2] Sub-strategy “Identity Management” of funding programme ISCI: <http://www.crus.ch/dms.php?id=29016> (in English)

Vitae

Christoph Graf is Head of the “Supporting Operations” department of SWITCH. He completed his education with a Masters' degree “Dipl. Elektro-Ingenieur ETH” at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, Zürich, in 1986 and worked for four years as a designer of integrated circuits with Philips.

Christoph joined SWITCH in 1991 as an application engineer and later rejoined SWITCH in 1998 as head of security and system administration.