

Identity management best practice #1: Analyze your objectives and risk tolerances

This post is first in a series on best practices that will help you develop the right identity management solutions for your business. Looking at the title, you're probably thinking, "That's obvious." You might be thinking, "We already know we want to replace a manual validation process with an automated one" or "The goal is to improve identity assurance in online authentication and access management by adding age verification."

But hold on... figuring out what you're trying to accomplish and which identity management capabilities are the best way to achieve that objective may not be obvious at all. Let me give you a couple of examples.

In an initial meeting with a large utility company, I was told "All we want is verification that customers applying for a Senior Discount meet our age requirements." OK, that's fine. But as we discussed the client's business process further it became clear that what they need to accomplish isn't just verification of the customer's age, but assurance they're providing discounted services only to qualified customers.

To do that they also need to verify that the customer actually lives at the address where the service is to be provided. Without that essential piece of information, seniors who own properties could pass along discounted rates to tenants occupying those premises or even to family members and friends living at other locations.

Or let's say you're identity proofing a customer applying for a new high-value account service. When prompted to provide Name, Address, and Social Security Number, the customer mistypes a digit. What do you want to happen? Maybe the data mismatch triggers a dynamic knowledge-based challenge/response quiz. Or maybe, given that this is a potentially high-value customer, it would be better to let your identity management system do some additional checks in the background. If the results meet the level of assurance required by your risk tolerance, you may be able to skip the challenge/response and allow your customer to move on through the process with ease.

The objective in the above scenario is not identity establishment — it's booking lots of customers for this profitable new service while controlling risk. Making the identity management process not only accurate, but as frictionless as possible, contributes to this goal.

These kinds of subtleties can make or break the successful entry of a new product into an intensely competitive market. And, when it comes to regulatory hurdles, such details can be the difference between being compliant and being compliant and profitable. Many organizations, however, aren't aware of the full range of possibilities in digital identity management today — all the ways we can help them accomplish their objectives. It's worth taking the time to explore beyond the obvious with an IDM professional.