Iconix Truemark Authentication Service
Add More Trust into E-Business

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Management Summary

The problem with Trojan horses is not just that armies climb out of them and ravage cities. Rather, over time, such ruses cause you to lose faith in gifts (horses and other things), and to spend more time worrying about the downside than using them well. The Internet gives a case in point. Few tools have been as potent for addressing new markets, and for satisfying customers, as the Internet. The external persona of a business presented on the net can enhance its reputation, inform potential customers, and satisfy routine queries. But, if customers are duped by phishing attacks where imitations of your enterprise's e-mail harvest personal information from people who think they are talking to your company, the fervent business dance of courting markets becomes a furtive hopping about of risk avoidance, and your brand becomes a pale shadow of what it might have been.

As well as benefits, the Internet brings risks. Many are risks of connectivity – the ability of people to snoop, and of viruses and spy-ware. These are generally known, inherent risks. The insidiousness of phishing is that it rebounds on the reputation of the hijacked enterprise as well as harming customers through identity theft.

Since phishing is not a threat to the enterprise network *per se*, IT administrators may think that it is not their problem. **As a threat to business productivity, and a problem best addressed by technology, not just the hand wringing of customer education, phishing becomes an IT issue.** If customers fear that your site is often spoofed, they may go to a competitor's site that seems to be more obviously proven. Moreover, if IT is not part of the solution, it may be assumed, as Dick Gregory put it, to be a part of the problem.

Iconix, a company based in Mountain View, CA, has an e-mail visual authentication service that can provide proof that email from you is really from you – something that customers need. Iconix *Truemark* is not a matter of encryption, nor is it something that is deployed in the data center as part of security. It is more a matter of identity – of brand security, built on the use of emerging industry standard *DomainKeys* or *Sender ID* protocols. It works as a service through plug-ins on e-mail servers or agents on end user environments of all who do not want to be taken in by phishing attempts. Because it is not data-center based, it may not fall onto traditional data center wish lists. But, for any enterprise doing business over the Net with end users or partners, solutions like Iconix Truemark may be just what you need to keep your on-line businesses trusted and productive. For more details, read on.

The Problem of Trust

Trust is a large component of business. Trust is built up over time, and can be reinforced by personal relationships and face-to-face time. Many of us need to be able to trust those with whom we have done business over time, but the nature of Internet-based business often makes a personal relationship unfeasible. On the other hand, doing business over the Internet allows the price of many goods and services to be kept low. Doing business over the Internet lets customers shop, pay bills, and communicate at their convenience. **The challenge is to build enough trust into online processes so that customers have confidence that their identity is not going to be stolen and misused.**

Trust is not a great problem when customers go to an enterprise Website, and enter their account and password. However, it remains a problem for push marketing, something that, when well targeted, is extremely effective. Phishing looks like push marketing. Phishing should be obvious, because they ask for information for which a reputable company would not ask, but people still forget and click on URLs that are not what they seem. Enterprises spend many thousands on campaigns to educate customers on what not to do, but the problem persists. Moreover, **as the false paths of phishing become more subtle and alluring, the admonishment to *just don't click* will become even less effective.**

The Iconix Solution

Iconix takes another tack. Customers download a free plug-in to their e-mail server (or, in the case of consumers, to their e-mail client). This agent authenticates all incoming email with the high-security Iconix authentication service. For senders with an Iconix account, the appearance of a padlock with a checkmark superimposed (a *Truemark)* indicates that the Iconix server has declared the sender valid. Mousing over the Truemark will produce a *Truemark Profile*. This gives more information about the sender, somewhat like a security certificate.

This approach is different from filtering and other security-based approaches, such as encryption. It protects against unknown as well as known threats, and works with new as well as existing correspondents. It is somewhat similar to e-mail marketing products, in that it makes push marketing more effective and yields a higher rate of response, but it differs from them in focusing on the question of trusted identity. It represents a way to tell your customers, with each e-mail, that you have their best interests at heart.

The Iconix visual identity for e-mail is available for *Hotmail*, *MSN*, *SBC Yahoo Mail*, and *Yahoo Mail*. It will support *Gmail* and *Comcast* by the end of 2005, *Outlook,* and *AOL* in the first quarter of 2006, and most other popular e-mail clients by the end of that year. Iconix runs initially on Windows but will work on Macs for Apple Mail and other browsers by mid 2006, and will work on Linux by the end of 2006. The service is provided by a highly secure environment dedicated to this single task. As a single-focus service, it can do that one thing very efficiently.

Iconix authenticates via an enterprise's outward-facing Domain Keys or Sender ID. Use of Iconix does not require any changes to enterprise's IT infra-structure. It is one less breach in the firewall, and one less spiky demand for the data center to have to manage.

To promote recognition of the Iconix service and its business value, Iconix is launching a *Checking It Twice* Program that will preemptively identify authentic e-mail from major retailers during this pre-holiday season. This will give businesses and consumers a taste of what a Truemark can do for them. The Iconix service obviously is most valuable for email between businesses and consumers, where most phishing is now focused. However, it will also be valuable in business-to-business relationships, where attempts to suborn email to extract competitive intelligence can be expected to become very sophisticated.

Iconix also offers end users a free but unauthenticated Buddy List option. In this service, buddy lists become enhanced with buddy icons and buddy profiles that give a comprehensive view of friends' online identity, which can include blogs, RSS feeds, and other services. End-user use of Truemarks is free. For Truemark, enterprises will pay a flat fee.

Conclusion

Iconix addresses a pressing problem that can cost your customers a lot of money and your brand their loyalty. Internet-based business and communities are here to stay. It is time to start to think about what is needed to make them work better. With the trust that Iconix helps support, Internet relationships can become more like face-to-face relationships. With more trust, there is more benefit. Relationships and communities can flourish with less constraint. Think about how Iconix' visible authentication icon could enhance your business.

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