

# A System for Personal Identity Management

## Overview

Often times, our online identity is thought of as footprints in the digital sand. What we say, where we go, and how we interact leave our traces online, like trails we leave on a beach. The comparison, while evocative, is flawed. As sand is washed clean each night by the tide, there is no way to remove our digital traces. These bits we leave behind may stay with us - spidered by search engines, stored in archives, republished again and again. As we change, and our identity shifts, we may wish an ocean could come and wipe our footprints clean. Since that option is unavailable, how will be deal with this unique problem of the information age?

The internet is fundamentally changing the way we interact with each other. It has compressed our communication channels both in time and space. Our messages to one another can be instant, they can be copied and pasted, and they can be persistent for much longer than we ever expected. Since our identity is a social construction, these messages help to signal to others about who we are. Over time, we have conditioned ourselves and know how to manage our relationships with the people around us. We smile at the right times, we say the right things to the right people, and we always call our mothers on Mother's Day. We've worked it out in the physical world. The digital world is new and different.

## Problem Space

Our digital footprints are only one part of the problem in the *search identity* space. Since we share names, disambiguation in identity search is an enormous problem. What's more, we have no control over the presentation of search results, the contextual information displayed with search results, or the validity of search results. Indeed, the internet has changed the equation of "identity". We are not in control. The search engines get to determine a lot of what is found about us and how it's represented (sort order). They get to prioritize what is most important (by ranking) and what is buried (on page 7). They get to construct a picture of our identity - even if that picture isn't remotely accurate.

## Solution

Seizing on this very large problem space, we developed claimID (<http://claimid.com>). ClaimID's goal is to help individuals be proactive about managing their online identity. Instead of letting the search engines have the final say, we want people to empower themselves by claiming their identity.

ClaimID is a simple web application that allows people to claim their links. In doing so, they create a link resume they can share with the world. They can put context around links that mention them, disambiguate links that mention someone sharing their name, and disavow links that falsely report information about them. With claimID, an individual can present their best identity in search - and they feel empowered in doing so. Although claimID is designed as a loosely coupled service, individuals can verify their links with MicroID (<http://microid.org>), and create a multifactor verified identity profile with OpenID (<http://openid.net>).

Indeed, claimID doesn't have all the answers, but it is the beginning of a conversation - one that stands to be one of the most important conversations information scientists will be having in the future. How do we enable and empower people to deal with this very fundamental concept - how they are represented online. In an era where Social Network Websites and Blogs dominate, forward thought about how we manage our online identity is both necessary and vital.

Join us in this conversation.

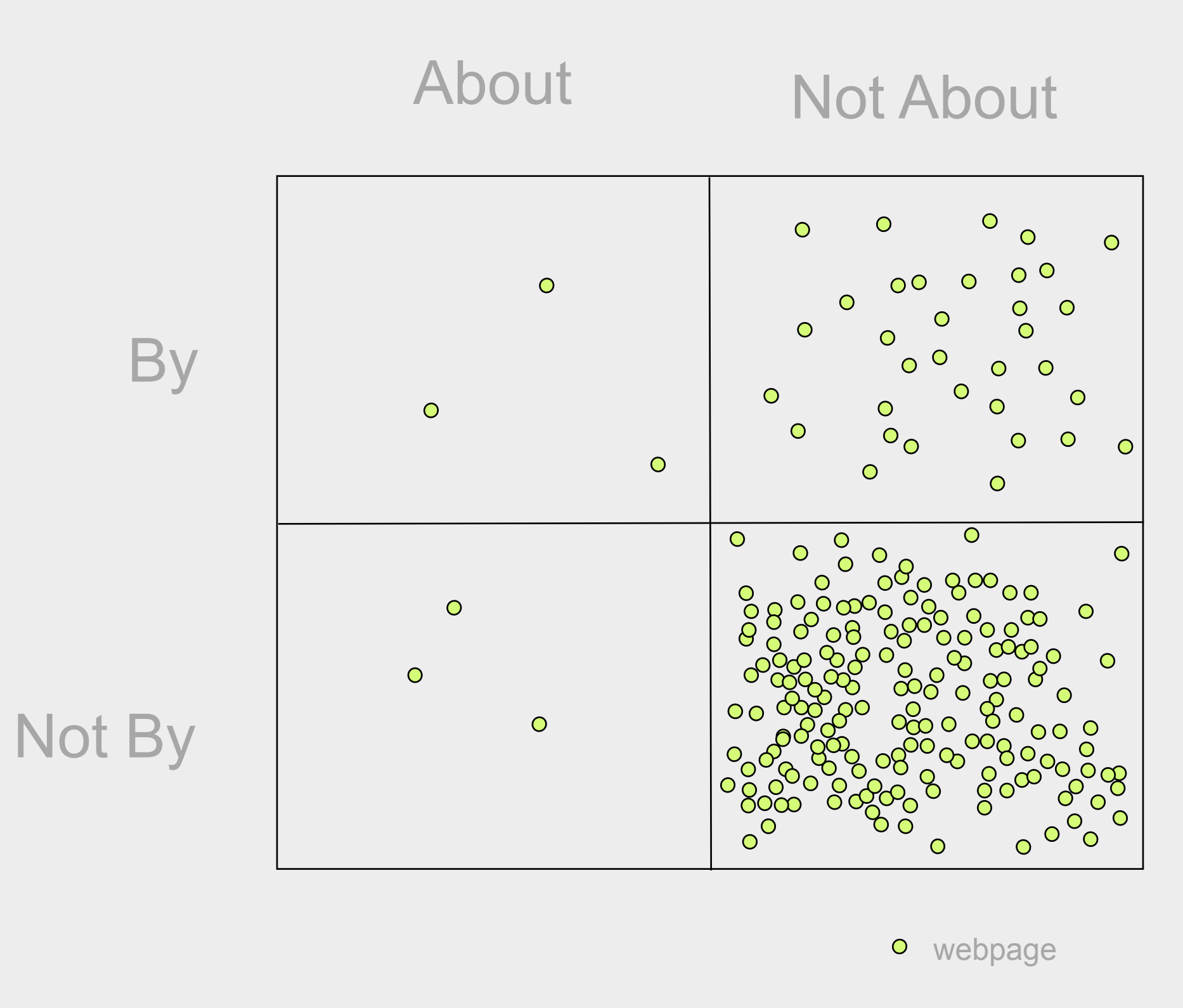
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claimID allows an individual to collect, annotate, classify, prioritize, and verify the links that are about them online.

## claimID : Internet Identity Model



## Job Search Scenario

Craig is looking for a new job. He has been working at a branch office on the sales team for the last couple years and is ready to try something different. He graduated from college the spring before he landed his first job and still keeps in touch with his friends through email, instant messaging, and social networking sites. He wrote for his college paper and still runs road races when he's not out of town on business.

There is information available online about Craig related to all of the above activities. Work related pages, pictures from parties in school, race results and more. Someone searching for Craig would find these things within the first page or so of results.

However, there is another Craig from his hometown that, if confused with Craig, might affect his chances at getting a job offer. Craig needs a way to clarify his position and help those who are searching for him to find the right information.

After Craig has collected the different sites around the internet that pertain to him, he can mark them as By or About him as well as marking things that are Not By and Not About him. Craig places his claimID on his resume, allowing his future employers a simple pathfinder to his online identity - not replacing identity search, but giving his employers a disambiguated and trusted place to start their search.

Craig has taken some control over how he's represented in search. He's shown he's savvy and has possibly helped educate his new employer about how we'll deal with online identity in the future.

And he got the job.