

In brief: Keeping Company in a Digitized World

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John Henry Clippinger was there when the Internet existed only on the desks of a few members of the U.S. Defense Department. And he's still involved today, as social networking becomes engrained in almost every aspect of people's lives.

"One is known by the company one keeps. To some extent, we've always been linked to those with whom we chose to associate," said Michael Duca, Head of Wealth Management at Cambridge Trust Company in his introduction of Mr. Clippinger at Cambridge Trust's Thought Series™ event on October 12. Mr. Clippinger addressed this point and the impact these connections can have on one's personal identity in the age of social networking in his talk entitled, "Our Digitized World: The Impact of Social Media on Defining You."

Mr. Clippinger began the evening by guiding the audience through the history of the Internet – from its early origins as a small village of individuals sharing a hacker mentality to the mainstream social network it is today, while always touching on his central theme of personal identity and the role of authentication.

As the Internet evolved, there was a gradual shift from the small village with no centralized control to a publishing platform where portals, blogs and ecommerce began to develop. The mentality during the earliest stages was that the Internet was there to share new software with other users. The emergence of the worldwide web and browsers moved us beyond this, making the Internet a destination for a broader audience, although it was not yet social. The information was there for people to consume, but they weren't having conversations or making personal connections with other users.

It was during the next phase that social media and networking began to truly develop with the emergence of reputation websites such as eBay, and the use of search via Google's page rank algorithm. The use of page rank was groundbreaking in the sense that never before did one person's web browsing habits have an impact on another's search results. It was during this time that people began relying on one another for information and the issue of trust and authentication emerged.

As the talk shifted to the current stage of the Internet and social networks, there was an increased emphasis on trust. In an age of 500 Facebook friends, are these people really your friends? Can you really trust them? "What is the nature of the relationship?" Mr. Clippinger posed. While there is no easy answer to that question, people are continually looking for



In brief: Keeping Company in a Digitized World Continued

reliable and tangible signals of trust. In an online world, these signals are even less tangible than in the past. People are reliant on an online ratings system which raises the bigger question of who rates the raters and who guards the guards in this era of constructed reality.

As Mr. Clippinger touched on the direction he sees policy headed, he spoke of the pivotal role of mobile phones being used as a person's digital wallet. The shift towards mobile will evolve into a global platform that won't be governed across countries, but rather at a global level. He sees the pioneers with a hacker mentality from the Internet's beginnings involved in building this policy. Policy that is new and completely different from anything that has been used in the past, and absolutely necessary.

The talk culminated with a lively round of questions from the audience, most of which focused on the future of personal identity protection and Mr. Clippinger's predictions for what's next. The future he sees will be populated by cloud content where users can float from site to site without losing their identity. If you are interested in listening to John Clippinger's talk in its entirety, a podcast of the event will be available soon.

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To learn more about John Henry Clippinger's background and what he's working on now, visit: lawlab.org/law-lab/who-we-are/john-henry-clippinger/

Stay updated on Dr. Clippinger's work at the Berkman Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University: cyber.law.harvard.edu/

Read more about Dr. Clippinger's perspective on Facebook's privacy practices in his recent article: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/john-henry-clippinger/facebook-is-betting-again b 599231.html

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