

Name that penguin

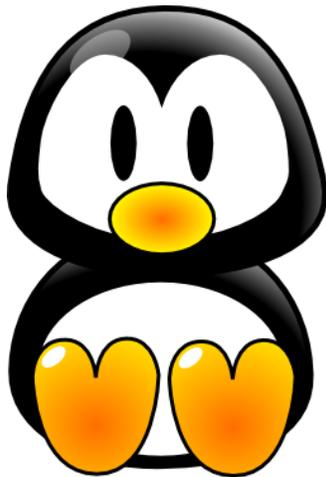
Greg is a recent graduate, now enjoying the London lifestyle since securing a job with a large City-based company thanks to a good degree and dazzling Web profile, painstakingly crafted to sell his talents to a decent employer. In addition to the usual bright lights big city stuff of touring bars and clubs, Greg spends quite a bit of his down time gaming on the Internet, playing a wide range of browser games and Second Life.

Now that he's a respectable working man with a (rented) flat all of his own, Greg's older sister decides he's responsible enough to take charge of his 10-year-old nephew Sam for a couple of days during the school holidays. Though fond of the lad, Greg finds himself at a bit of a loss to know how to entertain him for any length of time, and is relieved when Sam turns to him one evening and asks "Do you know any cool computer games Uncle Greg?".

Mindful of the fact that a lot of the stuff he plays online is not, well, child-friendly, Greg does a quick search for something more appropriate – coming up trumps with Disney's Club Penguin. The pair sit down to register on the site, which requires the user to register not only a user name, but create a name for the penguin avatar through which Sam will be playing. "This is cool," says Sam, "Mum doesn't let me play stuff on the Internet".

Not really wanting an earful from his sister for encouraging Sam to do things he's not allowed to at home, but also not really knowing what else to do with him, Greg decides they'll go ahead and register anyway – particularly as the site seems well moderated with all the right sort of security measures in place.

"So," he says to Sam, "what are we going to call this penguin?"



1

¹ Image by chovynz in public domain available at <http://openclipart.org/media/files/chovynz/11921>



Worksheet 4

Context:

This scenario describes the dilemma of creating a Digital Identity on behalf of someone else – in this case a minor, who may not be able to make informed choices about that identity.

Greg is clearly a technologically literate individual. He not only spends a lot of time playing online games, but has also used the Web to manage his own reputation both as a student and as a potential employee. This shows he understands the implications of having a Web presence, and the fact that Web presence is viewed and interpreted by others.

In this situation, he chooses to take on the responsibility for creating a Web presence for his young nephew, whose parent has already expressed misgivings about their child interacting on the Internet. How he approaches the registration process for this site, and helps Sam choose a name for his persona on it – in this case a cuddly cartoon penguin – could have consequences not only for Sam as an individual, but for his family relationships as well.

Thinking about this scenario:

1) What issues are there you should think about when helping someone else to create a facet of their Digital Identity?

2) Does the creation of an avatar form a link to the user? If so, who can ‘join the dots’ to see who the person behind the avatar is?

3) Thinking back to any accounts you may have had when you were a child, does anyone still know you in terms of the identity you projected then?

4) 4. Recent research has shown that the pattern of people you connect to, and the ways you connect, are as unique as a fingerprint. If looking at the connections Sam’s penguin makes can identify him when related to, say the friends he has on Facebook later in life, does that change any of your previous answers?

