One Password Fits All
CIC Simplifies Inter-Institutional Access to Online Resources

Introduction

Aggregation and leveraging resources is one of the main priorities of the Committee on Institutional Cooperation, a dynamic consortium of 12 world-class research universities that includes the Big Ten members and the University of Chicago. After the 12 member institutions invested in building their own high-speed fiber optic network, one of its primary goals was the sharing of online resources. However, with a dozen disparate network systems serving more than half a million collective users, this objective faced considerable barriers.

The Problem

Issuing a new login and password for each collaborative application the CIC members developed was impractical and cumbersome, both for users and administrators. In 2006, the CIC Chief Information Officers (CIOs) gathered cross-campus identity stewards together to share institutional policies and identify collaborative opportunities that would require a method of verifying a user's identity across multiple campus systems.

This framework, known as federating identity, allows individuals to use their own campus credentials to access applications inter-institutionally, thus streamlining collaboration. But how do 12 institutions that operate highly complex information systems, with vastly different policies and standards, establish the infrastructure to accomplish such a monumental task?

The Solution

The first step toward implementing the framework was the agreement by the CIC CIOs to join the InCommon Federation, which facilitates and sets policies for identity exchanges in higher education. By July 2008, all 12 had met the technical and other requirements to achieve membership status in the organization. The CIOs set a goal to have one application federated by the following July.

The pilot project for federation was CICme, the consortium's online collaborative workspace based on Microsoft SharePoint. Federated access to CICme was unveiled on Feb. 17 to rave reviews.

"I am really impressed with the ease of using this system," said Ruth Reingold, the Assistant Dean for Computing Technology at the Weinberg College of Arts and Sciences at Northwestern University. "The new easy single-sign-on access is beautiful."

At Penn State, the administrative assistant to Chief Information Officer Kevin Morooney thanked him for the federation of CICme because she would never have to worry about forgetting her password again.

"Tracy is just one of what could literally be thousands of people who it's going to be that much easier for them to manage workflow and access to information that's important to them," said Morooney, a member of the InCommon Steering Committee. "[CICme] is just a start. Now that this first success is out of the way, maybe we can add some other high-value shared resources and we can then begin depending more mightily on this new infrastructure."

(More…)

The CIC believes that the ability for its faculty, staff and students to use their own campus identities to cross organizational boundaries will springboard its collaborations to a whole new level. It is further harmonizing CIC campus policies and standards that will accelerate greatly the process of federating future, higher stakes applications.

"The CIC as an organization saw the return on investment in the value proposition of doing federation immediately," Morooney said. "You can now get out of the business of managing identity but be in the business of enabling collaboration and information sharing, because that's what the CIC is all about."

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**With Identity Federation:
Use an established campus login!**

CICme Login Page → Security Check (with local campus login) → CICme

**Without Identity Federation:
A new login is issued for access**

CIC Creates Personalized Login → Change CIC-Issued Temporary Password → CICme Login Page → Security Check (using CIC-issued login) → CICme