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# Identity Synthesis: Creating An Identity From Scratch

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## Abstract

*A substantial quantity of research has previously been conducted into the identification and application of measures related to the detection and prevention of identity theft and identity fraud. In the current security conscious environment, the concept of creating an artificial identity is generally met with both caution and suspicion. Much of the attention placed on the concept of identity fabrication has been focused on the unlawful or the malicious use of created identities. Admittedly, the primary intention of a falsified identity is to usually gain a financial benefit however, instances such as long-term witness protection would provide a legitimate need for the use of an alias identity for the purposes of protection. Previous research associated with the development and potential uses of a manufactured identity is somewhat limited and any references to a developed identity are quickly associated with various aspects of computer and electronic crime and the appropriate preventative or protective procedures. In order to address the imbalance, this article has been developed in an attempt to determine the theoretical framework involved with the development of a secondary identity and the necessary process that are likely to be involved in the “construction” of an alternate identity.*

## Keywords

Identity / theft / fraud / fake / false / documents / computer crime / manufacture /

## INTRODUCTION

The concept of identity synthesis or identity manufacture has generally been seen to be within the realms of criminal or terrorist activities, with those developing the alias identities normally acquiring a financial gain (NCP, 2004a). Admittedly, the financial costs associated with crimes that involve false identities have experienced an increase and with the advancement of technology, there is unlikely to be any reduction in the near future (Bauknight, 2005).

There are however, legitimate applications for the development and usage of a secondary identity. Genuine applications for alias identities can include protective services such as witness protection or defector relocation. These application areas require the development and integration of false identities (and the supporting documents) into society in order to prevent the exposure of a person's original identity.

To best present the concepts involved with the creation and establishment of an identity within this paper, the definitions related to identity manufacture are also provided in the relevant sections. Additionally, the likely applications of secondary identities for legitimate purposes will also be presented.

The processes that are likely to be involved in the creation of a complete alias identity will then be established and it is intended that the methodology presented within this document will establish an outline for the construction of a generic false identity and will also provide an origin for further research into the generation and progressive development of artificial identities.

To conclude this paper, areas of identity construction that are likely to benefit from further investigations will also be provided to allow for continuing research to be conducted.

## THE CONCEPT OF IDENTITY: NOSCE TE IPSUM

To understand the processes involved with the production of a secondary identity it is first necessary to understand the concept of the identity, how it applies to an individual and how it is an integral part of both the physical and the virtual society. Without becoming heavily involved in areas of sociology and psychology, a person's general identity is some what difficult to define.

In the context of this paper, an identity is essentially comprised of a number of events that have occurred within an individual's life that has been “evidenced by documents” (Atkins, 2001). From this definition, the accumulation of various ‘evidence documents’ will eventually result in the establishment of a legitimate identity.

In the current, technologically dependent environment, the identity of a person can therefore be divided into two broad but essential categories. It is proposed by the author, that the two categories, into which an identity can be classified, are one of the following:

## 1. The Physical Identity:

Conceptually, the physical identity is a combination of self-identity and social identity which gives individuals their uniqueness (NCPP, 2004b, p3). The physical identity can essentially be described as: that which makes a person unique based on their personal knowledge and experiences.

It is this 'physical identity' that is utilised when an individual interacts with others and provides them with the perception of self. The physical identity also dictates the way in which an individual behaves and is dependant on the circumstances of place and time. Crompton, (2004, p4) elaborates in further detail regarding this type of identity.

## 2. The Documented Identity:

The documented identity, as previously stated by Atkins (2001), refers to the documentation that is used to provide supporting evidence of a physical identity. A documented identity does not evolve through knowledge or experience but instead, propagates other documents that are then capable of producing further documentation.

Essentially the acquisition of additional identity documents represents the development of the physical identity and according to the Financial Transaction Reports Act 1988 (FTR Act), these documents (as a collective) are recognised as evidence of an individual's existence (Atkins, 2001).

In the context of this paper, the term 'document' refers to any form of identification used to verify or support the existence of a physical identity. Forms of identification can include, but are not limited to items such as certificates or cards containing specific identifying information.

### **The Concept Of A Complete Identity**

Based on the above categorisations, a complete identity can therefore be defined as a physical identity that is 'evidenced' by a documented identity and therefore, without the relevant 'evidence documents' an identity would essentially cease to exist (Schwartau, 2005).

This reliance upon identity documentation to prove evidence of existence also highlights two major concerns:

- the possibility of a documented identity without an equivalent physical identity (or vice versa) or
- the possibility of fabricating a documented identity to correspond with an existing physical identity (vice versa or possibly the fabrication of both).

The concept of a complete identity not only becomes an issue involving both physical and documented identities but also the degree of certainty of that identity (Atkins, 2001). It is this uncertainty of a complete identity that allows the creation of a secondary identity to be successfully integrated and used within society.

### **Identity Synthesis**

Based on the above definitions, an individual in possession of the necessary evidence documents and that is able to mimic the physical identity of the documented person, as far as legal requirements are concerned, is that person, regardless if they actually are that person.

The idea of presenting alias identities is not a new concept and the majority of crimes involving the use of fraudulent identities utilise 'documented identities' as opposed to physical identities because the "consequences of getting caught are less" (Crompton, 2004. p.7)

## **THE USES OF MANUFACTURED IDENTITIES**

When a false identity is manufactured, there are two general purposes for which that identity has been created. These areas can be classified to be: those for malicious purposes or those for protective purposes. Regardless of the motive for the manufacture of an identity, there are two main methods in which a false identity can be utilised. The methods of manufacture can be achieved through identity theft, identity fraud or a possible combination of both.

The terms: identity theft and identity fraud have commonly been used interchangeably in areas of law enforcement despite each referring to different aspects and behaviour. It is therefore necessary to distinguish between the two terms and the situations in which they apply.

The ACPR (2004) makes clear distinctions between identity theft and identity crime and the circumstance in which they apply.

Essentially:

- Identity theft refers to the theft of a “pre-existing identity” (ACPR, 2004, p.5) or the theft of relevant identity documents where
- Identity fraud is the gaining of a benefit or benefits “through the use of a false identity” (ACPR, 2004, p.4) that does not necessarily exist.

### **Malicious Purposes**

Both identity theft and identity fraud can be utilised for malicious purposes and is generally dependant on the sophistication of the criminals involved. If the intentions are for short-term financial gain such as illegal Internet purchases, then it is more likely that identity theft will occur (NCPP, 2004b, p4). Alternately, if long-term benefits are to be gained such as money laundering (Crompton, 2004, p7) then identity fraud is more likely to be utilised.

It is important to note that when a crime involving the theft of an identity occurs it is not the physical identity that is stolen but rather the documented identity.

### **Protective Purposes**

The protection and value of a life (or lives) should be considered to be far greater than the penalties associated with the creation of an alias identity and although the use of fraudulent identity documents are not condoned by the author of this paper, it can be stated that some of the protective areas of both state and federal governments are capable of providing the necessary documentation to support an assumed identity.

The ability to fabricate the necessary identity documents are fully supported by a variety of acts of legislation such as the Witness Protection Act 1994 (Cwlth) and similar acts of legislation available at a state level. Understandably, agencies involved in this type of industry are reluctant to divulge any details regarding this type of activity, however it is likely that some, if not all of the processes described in the following section are utilised by the relevant agencies.

## **THE PROCESS OF CREATING A FRAUDULENT IDENTITY**

By applying the above definitions to the manufacture of a completely fraudulent identity, it therefore becomes necessary for both the documented identity and the accompanying physical identity to not only be constructed but established into society. Establishment of an alias identity can be successfully achieved by providing a “trail of documents” (Atkins, 2001) that is able to demonstrate the associations that the individual has with others and other organisations (Crompton, 2004).

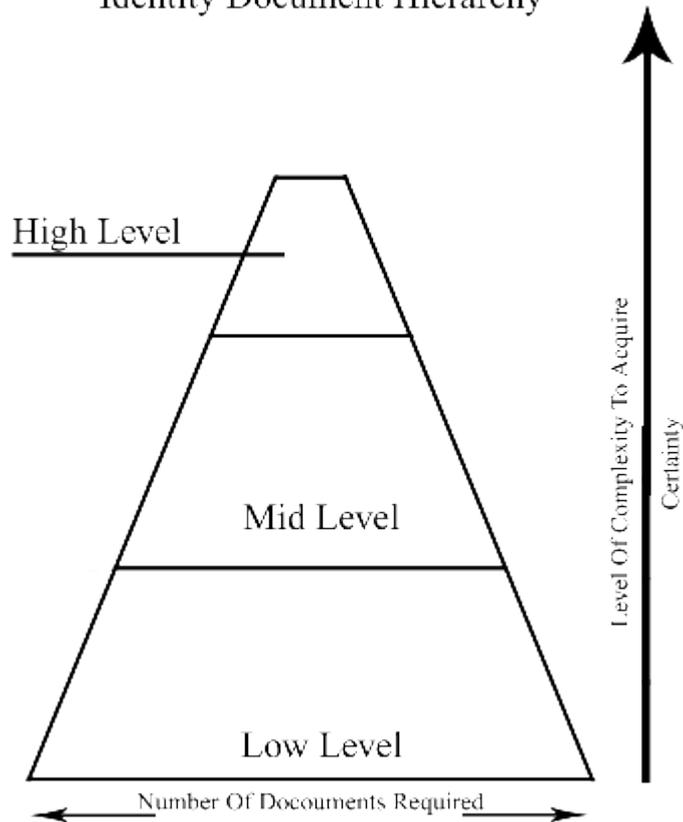
The creation and establishment of a documented identity, as stated by Atkins (2001), requires an individual to have experienced and gained the knowledge of a number of events. With the passing of each of these events, the individual is then provided with evidence documentation capable of providing further support for the existing identity and essentially becomes another step in the document trail.

Therefore, to create a fraudulent identity i.e. an identity that is completely fictitious (ACPR, 2004, p.3-4) it is necessary to start the document trail at the very beginning (or as close to the beginning as possible). Admittedly, the construction and integration of an alias identity can be substantially time consuming although the longer a counterfeit identity exists for the more established, and subsequently credible, it becomes.

The scope of this paper has been confined to the development of the documented identity and as such the following section will hypothetically attempt to create and establish a documented identity by utilising three levels of evidence documents. Documents contained within each level are determined by its ability to produce other documents, commonly referred to as: “breeder documents” (Collins, n.d).

As demonstrated in the following diagrammatic representation Figure 1, evidence documents form part of a hierarchy in which the level of sophistication required to obtain them increases according to its value. The value associated with an identity document can essentially be described as the degree of certainty that the information contained within it is accurate. The certainty of these identity documents themselves present further difficulties and are investigated further by Atkins (2001).

## Identity Document Hierarchy



**Figure 1 - Identity Document Hierarchy**

The Identity Document Hierarchy represented in Figure 1, consists of three levels, each containing documents that support the existence of a physical identity to a differing degree of certainty. To obtain a mid-level document it is first necessary to acquire a certain number of low-level documents. Similarly, to gain a high-level document a combination of mid-level and low-level documents would then be required. The requirements of the type and number of evidence documents to acquire other documents are detailed in the FTR Act 1988 (FTR Act 1998) (Cwlth).

### **Low Level Documents**

Low-level identification documents are essentially a type of evidence document that can be acquired with little or no verification process. Documents that can also be classified as low-level allow individuals to specify some of the details that will appear on the document and commonly require some payment before it is produced.

Examples of this type of document can include (but is not limited to): self-addressed postage mail, personalised junk mail, membership or affiliation cards such as fly-buys or mail-ordered credit cards. The information contained within this type of document verifies the existence of a physical identity (to a limited extent) despite not being put through any form of verification process.

### **Mid Level Documents**

Mid-level documents can be described as identification documents that have undergone a basic level of verification or substantiation. In this context, the basic level of authentication refers to the use of multiple low-level documents to provide supporting evidence of the physical identity. The low-level documentation that can be provided to obtain a mid-level document may not necessarily be accurate however, by simply providing several variations of low-level documentation an individual is able to increase the credibility of the artificial identity.

Mid-level documents are commonly types of identification required by small/medium sized organisations or various charities in which an ongoing service are offered to the holder of the card. This type of documentation can include (but is not limited to): video library or library cards and sporting/social club identification.

## High Level Documents

High-level documents are generally identification documents that are utilised by government agencies or large organisations such as financial or educational institutions. Documents at this level of the hierarchy commonly contain photographic information in conjunction with a number of ‘tamper-proof’ security features. To obtain a high-level document it is necessary for an individual to provide a combination of low and mid level documentation as defined in the Financial Transaction Reports Act 1988 (FTR Act 1998) (Cwlth).

Examples of high-level identification documents can include (but is not limited to): passports, birth certificates and drivers licence. Alternately, these high level documents can also be used to obtain additional mid-level or low-level documents.

## Transition Between Levels

The type and quantity of identity documents required to progress up (or through) the hierarchy varies greatly and is defined in great detail in the FTR Act 1998 (Cwlth). This Act however, provides a broad categorisation of acceptable forms of identity documentation and it is the responsibility of those providing the higher-level documents to verify the documents that have been provided are authentic. It is during this human ‘authentication’ of identity documents that the level of certainty needs to be established and in some circumstances adequate authentication does not take place.

Essentially, if the necessary criteria for a higher-level document are met, then the appropriate identification is provided regardless of the authenticity. This newly acquired identification document can subsequently be utilised to attain additional documents further propagating the existence of the alternate identity.

In some circumstances it is also possible to progress downward through the hierarchy. In this situation, fewer higher-level documents are required to produce a greater number of lower-level documents. As previously defined, higher level documents that are capable of producing a larger number of lower level documents are referred to as “breeder documents” (Collins, n.d).

## THE THEORHETICAL FRAMEWORK OF IDENTIITY SYNTHESIS

To successfully create an alternate identity based purely on falsified documents, it would therefore be necessary to commence its creation in the lower section of the hierarchy. As depicted by the above Identity Document Hierarchy, the easiest way in which an identity can be fabricated is to begin with a number of low level documents.

As previously stated; the degree of certainty that is associated with these types of documents is limited and the documents can easily be manufactured with basic desktop publishing tools and a high quality printer. The easiest type of low level documentation to fabricate is likely to be documents such as personalised junk mail, sports affiliation documents and credit card payment receipts from fabricated organizations.

From these low-level identity documents, it is then possible to collectively use these to acquire a number of mid-level documents. Preliminary research into the acquisition of mid-level documents has indicated that with an adequate number of low-level documents, fundamental social engineering skills and a convincing physical identity, it is possible to acquire mid-level identity documents such as video library cards and club association documents.

It is during the attempted acquisition of the high-level documents in which some problems are likely to begin to emerge. As described in the Financial Transaction Reports Act 1988 (FTR Act 1998) (Cwlth), to obtain a high-level document another high-level document, in conjunction with a combination of low and medium level documents, must be provided. This type of recursive identity verification presents two major issues to this theoretical framework that would benefit from further research.

The two issues that have been identified with the use of high-level documents to obtain other high-level documents are listed as follows:

- The self-propagation of identity documents that utilise themselves to determine the degree of certainty. It is possible that a single, high-level, fabricated identity document is created that is then able to perpetuate other high-level documents without any degree of certainty.
- In the event that an individual has a legitimate need to acquire high-level identity documents identifying a possible starting point for the recursive document verification process may possibly provide individual with a point from which to acquire other high-level identity documents.

## CONCLUSION:

Based on the fundamental investigation conducted in this report it can be established that all that is required to 'exist' is a documented identity. Essentially, in the technological society of today if this documented identity does not exist "you are just gone" (Schwartau, 2005). Inversely, an identity can be 'created' by simply manufacturing the necessary identification documents without the existence of the physical identity.

To fabricate a credible alias identity it is necessary to acquire the necessary supporting documentation. This adequate identity documentation can be obtained by progressing from low-levels of the document hierarchy through the mid-level and then up to the high-level documents. Progression through the document hierarchy can be a complicated task due to the reliance of one type of identification document on another.

The inter-connectivity between various identity documents, particularly those referred to in the FTR Act (1998) would most likely require further analysis and mapping in order to determine their inter-relationships. It is therefore recommended that further research be conducted into the reliance and interdependence of identification documents at varying levels of the document hierarchy.

The fabrication and integration of an alternate identity requires a substantial level of sophistication however attempting to establish an identity, regardless of intent, becomes increasingly difficult to achieve when a recursive verification process is applied to acquire other evidence documents. In circumstances where an individual does not have any identity documentation (e.g. destroyed by fire) but has a legitimate need to obtain identity documents, the processes described in this paper essentially denies them of those documents. It is this denial of identity documents which suggests that without supporting identity documents, the individual ceases to exist.

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