Words Matter: A Rethink of Current SSI Terminology

By Ana Goessens from Animo Solutions.

At Rebooting the Web of Trust #?, the term self-sovereign identity (SSI) was created. Now, years later, the world of self-sovereign identity has changed. Implementations have become production ready, governments have started to agree on it's usefulness and non-experts are constantly being introduced into the ecosystem. More and more the need for accessible and intuitive terminology is becoming clear. This paper aims to create an overview of the ways we've talked about self-sovereign identity, credentials and all that comes with it up until now, and take a step forward in finding new/adapted terms.

There seems to be some consensus on the need for new terminology, a lot of which Riley Hughes (CTO of Trinsic) summarizes very well in his article 'SSI has an Identity Problem'[1]. The discussion has been ongoing, so the goal for this paper is not to start over, but to make sure the conversation is continued. The focus is not on gathering opinions on whether to keep or to discard specific terms, but to use different perspectives and techniques to learn more about terminology and it's role in the overall goals of adoption, accessibility and practical use. Basically: how do we move forward.

> *'Self-sovereign identity' is an imperfect name for an imperfect, but rapidly growing and promising new category of technology and business solutions. I think it's the best term on the table; but ultimately, the way to refer to the category will be defined over time as the dust settles through real-world deployments. The name that will emerge will likely not be the first one, but the one with the least negative baggage that balances being specific to the technology but broad enough to encompass all its variations.*
>
> Riley Hughes

Method

While we as a community are having this discussion on the level of verifiable claims vs. verifiable credentials (see below quote). My grandmother will not understand either.

During RWOT11 I would like to gather people with different perspectives to continue the conversation on this topic. Preferably by using theories and techniques all the way from from commercial branding to semantic philosophy to the practicals of accessibility checklists.

> *"NOTE:"Verifiable Claims" are now known as "Verifiable Credentials". The W3C Verifiable Claims Working Group's experience with using the term "Verifiable Claims" demonstrated that it led to con-*

fusion in the marketplace. The group has since found consensus in shifting to use the term "Verifiable Credentials", which contain "Claims"."

RWOT's verifiable credentials primer

References

[1] SSI Has an Identity Problem - Riley Hughes

Starting points

- Self-sovereign identity: Unraveling the terminology - IBM
- The Path to Self-Sovereign Identity - Christopher Allen
- How to Name Things - V. Rao