



A global framework for authentication in e-commerce

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A high level group of experts, including representatives from the European Commission, met at the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) Headquarters on 9 and 10 December to discuss the regulatory, technical and legal obstacles to the use of authentication technologies across borders.

The group agreed on a set of recommendations for areas where the ITU would have a useful role to play in overcoming these obstacles. These recommendations will be put to the ITU's governing body at their next meeting in July 2000.

"We believe that the ITU, with its unique expertise and experience working closely with industry is well placed to help facilitate electronic authentication and foster a global dialogue about authentication measures and issues", said Fred Cate, Professor of Law and Director of the Information Law and Commerce Institute at the Indiana University School of Law, who chaired the meeting.

The ITU aims to find and develop a model to serve as the basis for authentications across borders. The group agreed that the ITU should encourage voluntary, rather than mandatory approaches, and should focus on areas where international dialogue is needed.

Market-based initiatives and standards of private arrangements for authentication should be encouraged, while the needs of developing countries, and social and cultural concerns should be addressed.

Building trust will be crucial to the future development of e-commerce. This implies a confidence that on-line purchases, funds transfers, and business deals will be as

valid as traditional activities, and for this, transactions will need to ensure a recognised system of authentication across borders.

Several countries have already adopted legislation on electronic signatures, and it is being actively considered in many others including the EU. However the global nature of the Internet makes it vital that government and industry collaborate to harmonise national approaches to authentication.

'E-commerce has reached a stage where it is critically important to agree on international approaches in the areas of electronic signatures and authentication if we don't want to see the emergence of fundamentally discordant standards as to what constitutes a 'signature' or what constitutes valid certificates in different jurisdictions', said Cate.

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