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GUARDING THE GATES

Your biggest security risk is already inside: Why Identity and Access Management needs to be at the heart of strengthening your security.

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A note from Cyber Services Director, Sean Tickle

Cyber security conversations often jump straight to tools, threats, and headlines. However, in practice, most incidents don't start with sophisticated attacks – they start with access. Either someone having more access than they should or still having access they should have lost months ago.

Identity and access management sits at the heart of that challenge. Done well, it quietly protects organisations every single day. Done badly – or, worse, not at all – it creates gaps that attackers are very happy to exploit.

This document is about getting back to basics. Understanding why IAM matters, where organisations typically struggle, and how to approach identity in a way that strengthens security without making life harder for users.

Remember, strong cyber resilience doesn't start with fear; it starts with control, clarity, and good decisions.

Please do get in touch with any questions you have about identity management at your organisation.

Best wishes,

Sean Tickle
Cyber Services Director

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Identity is where cyber security really begins

Identity and access management (IAM) has one core job: stopping the wrong people from doing the wrong things.

That might sound simple but, in reality, it's anything but.

IAM isn't just about passwords and logins. It's a framework of policies, technologies, and processes designed to ensure that the right individuals have the right level of access to your organisation's systems, data, and applications – no more, no less.

In doing so, IAM underpins almost everything organisations care about:

Protecting sensitive data

Meeting regulatory obligations

Maintaining operational continuity

Enabling end-user productivity and security

In short, IAM isn't an add-on to cyber security, but the foundation.

And with cyber threats continuing to rise, identity really can't be just a "nice to have" or something to revisit later. For organisations of all sizes, IAM has become a baseline requirement for operating safely.

> ***IAM isn't just about keeping attackers out – it's about making sure access inside your organisation still makes sense.***

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IAM explained *(without the jargon!)*

At its core, IAM acts like a digital gatekeeper. Think of it as the bouncer outside your organisation's digital doors, checking credentials and deciding who gets in, where they can go, and what they're allowed to do.

Most IAM solutions follow a similar structure, built around a few key capabilities:

Managing identities

IAM systems create and manage digital identities for employees, contractors, and sometimes customers. Each identity includes information about the individual and the access they're entitled to.

Controlling access

Access controls define who can reach which systems, applications, and data. Employees should only be able to access what they need to do their job – nothing more.

Authentication and authorisation

IAM verifies users are who they say they are and checks they're allowed to access specific resources. This can involve passwords, biometrics, or multifactor authentication (MFA).

Monitoring and auditing

Most IAM platforms continuously log access activity. This helps identify unusual behaviour, supports investigations, and provides a clear audit trail for compliance.

Least privilege and priviledged access

IAM often works alongside privileged access management (PAM), which tightly controls high-risk access to critical systems. Together, they enforce the principle of least privilege – giving users the minimum access required to perform their role.

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IAM plays a critical role in preventing cyber incidents

IAM doesn't just reduce risk, it actively shapes how resilient an organisation is to modern cyber threats.

One of its biggest advantages is automation. By streamlining how access is granted, changed, and removed, IAM reduces manual effort for IT teams while improving accuracy and consistency.

It also simplifies compliance. When access controls are aligned with regulatory requirements, organisations can demonstrate control rather than scramble to evidence it after the fact.

Several wider trends have made IAM more important than ever.

Rising cyber threats

IAM helps protect against data breaches, ransomware, and phishing by ensuring only authorised users can access critical systems. Simply put, fewer doors are left unlocked.

More complex IT environments

Modern organisations operate across on-premises systems, cloud platforms, SaaS applications, and mobile devices. IAM provides a unified way to manage access across that complexity.

Zero Trust adoption

IAM aligns closely with Zero Trust principles – explicitly verifying users, limiting access, and assuming breach rather than blind trust.

Remote and hybrid work

IAM secures access for remote users without sacrificing productivity, enabling people to work from anywhere without expanding the attack surface.

Insider threats

Often powered by behavioural monitoring, IAM can detect anomalies and revoke access when something doesn't look right – whether the risk is malicious or accidental.

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Why do organisations struggle with IAM?

Despite its importance, IAM is still one of the most challenging areas of cyber security to implement well. That's not because organisations don't care – it's because IAM touches everything.

Common challenges include:

Managing roles and permissions

Defining roles sounds simple until people start changing jobs, joining projects, or taking on temporary responsibilities.

User adoption

If IAM feels clunky or inconvenient, users will resist it – or work around it.

Change management and training are critical.

Integrating with existing systems

IAM needs to work across legacy platforms, cloud services, and modern applications. Inconsistent integration leads to fragmented access controls and poor user experience.

IAM must work when scaling over time

As organisations grow, IAM systems must keep pace – handling more users, devices, and applications without losing accuracy.

Limited resources

IAM is often tackled alongside multiple competing priorities. Without sufficient time and expertise, implementations can stall or fall short.

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The joiner, mover, leaver problem

One of the most persistent IAM challenges is managing change. People join. People move roles. People leave. And every one of those moments creates risk if access isn't updated promptly. Failure to manage joiner, mover, and leaver (JML) processes effectively can result in:

- Excessive access
- Outdated permissions
- Orphaned accounts belonging to former employees

These gaps are particularly dangerous because they're often invisible until something goes wrong.

Effective IAM requires continuous attention – not a one-off project. Access must evolve alongside the organisation itself.

> ***Identity isn't static and your IAM strategy shouldn't be either.***

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Security and user experience – not one or the other

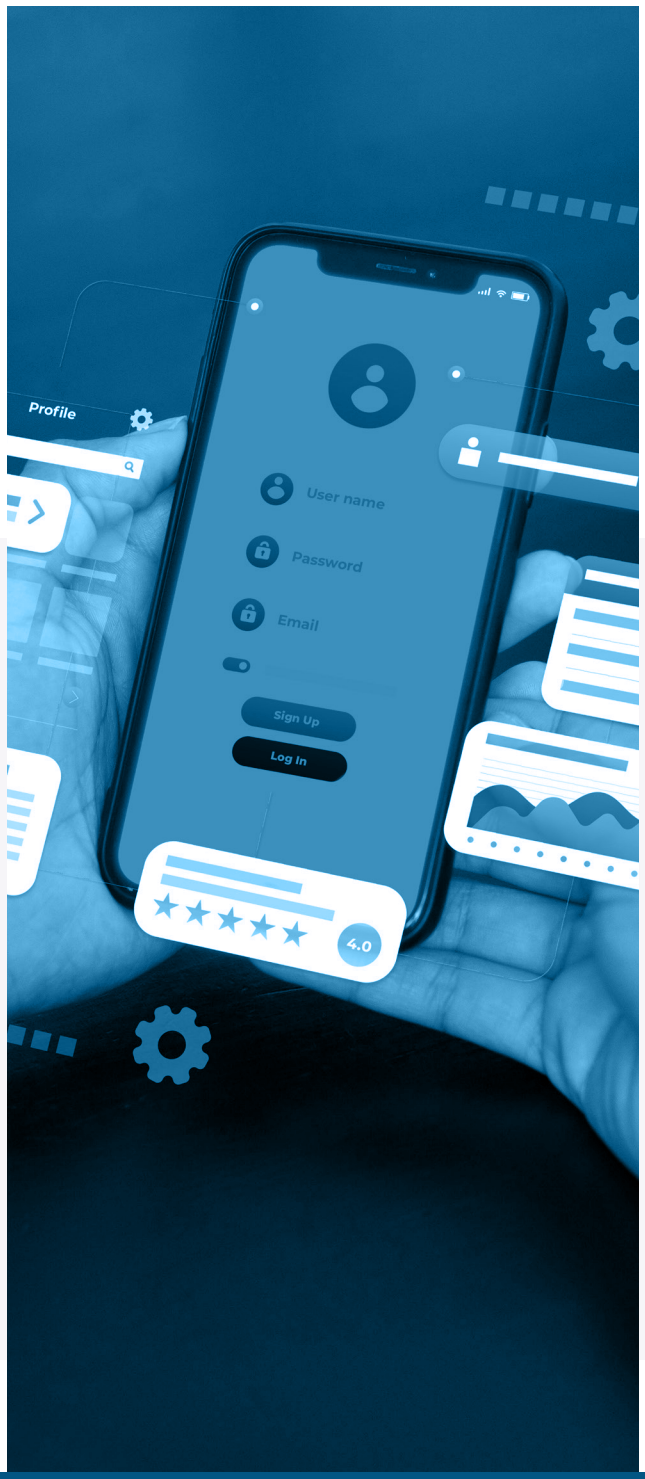
A common concern among leaders is whether stronger IAM will frustrate users or slow productivity.

It doesn't have to.

In fact, poor user experience is often a sign of poorly designed IAM.

When security controls are overly complex, users find workarounds – and that creates more risk, not less.

Well-implemented IAM focuses on making secure behaviour the easy option.



That often includes:

Single sign-on (SSO)
Reducing password fatigue by allowing users to access multiple systems with one secure login.

Multi-factor authentication (MFA)
Adding protection without unnecessary friction, using contextaware prompts rather than blanket challenges.

Adaptive authentication
Applying additional verification only when risk is higher – such as unfamiliar locations or devices.

Clear communication and training
Helping users understand why IAM exists and how it protects them, not just the organisation.

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What good IAM really looks like

Successful IAM isn't about perfection. It's about consistency, clarity, and ownership. Based on real-world experience, a strong IAM approach typically includes:

Executive buy-in

IAM needs senior support to succeed. Without it, priorities drift and compromises creep in.

A clear strategy

Organisations should define what success looks like, how it will be measured, and how IAM supports wider business goals.

Good data hygiene

Accurate identity data underpins everything. Poor data leads to poor access decisions.

Role-based access control

Assigning access based on roles reduces risk and simplifies management as people move around the business.

Continuous monitoring

IAM isn't "set and forget". Regular review keeps access aligned with reality.

> ***IAM works best when it's treated as a living part of the organisation, not a compliance checkbox.***

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Identity is a leadership issue

Identity and access management is not just an IT concern. Remember, when leaders take ownership of IAM, organisations are better placed to:

Prevent avoidable incidents

Maintain trust with customers and partners

Enable secure growth and flexibility

Build genuine cyber resilience

The strongest IAM strategies also aren't driven by fear; they're driven by confidence – confidence that access is controlled, risks are understood, and the organisation is prepared.

What the future holds

Identity is moving beyond traditional IAM, and newer browser-led tools are beginning to close gaps that older models simply can't see. These approaches focus on what really happens at the point of access. They do not rely on perfect visibility of every client environment. Instead, they help teams understand real behaviour exactly where it happens: in the browser.

Instead of relying on whatever a client environment does or doesn't tell you, this flips the model. When a service desk engineer navigates to a client system, they authenticate through the browser first. If something looks off, such as skipping MFA or using a breached password, the tool alerts the user instantly and notifies the SOC or relevant stakeholders.

These tools also give organisations a clearer picture of day-to-day hygiene. They can flag weak or reused passwords, apply block lists, and guide safer behaviour without slowing people down. Because they live in the browser, they stay lightweight, consistent, and easy to tailor.

This isn't about replacing IAM, it's about adding real-time visibility and smarter guardrails that help catch risky access patterns early. Browser-led IAM will increasingly become part of how organisations bring identity and Zero Trust principles to life in practical ways.

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Let's talk about identity

If you're reviewing your IAM approach – or suspect access has grown messier than you'd like – a conversation can go a long way.

We help organisations design, implement, and mature IAM as part of a wider cyber security strategy. That includes identity governance, privileged access, and Zero Trust alignment, making security work with your people, not against them.

If you'd like to explore what good IAM could look like in your organisation, we'd love to talk.

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Get in touch to learn more about our IAM and cyber security services and start putting identity back where it belongs: **at the centre of your security strategy.**

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