RunAs Radio

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RunAs Radio is a weekly Internet Audio Talk Show for IT Professionals working with Microsoft products. The full range of IT topics is covered from a Microsoft-centric viewpoint.

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Scott Kveton Shares His OpenID!
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[Music]

Carl Franklin: From runasradio.com, you're listening to RunAs Radio, the Internet audio talk show for IT professionals with Richard Campbell and Greg Hughes. This is Carl Franklin, introducing show #44, with guest Scott Kveton, recorded Friday, February 8, 2008. RunAs Radio is brought to you each week by PWOP Productions, offering professional media and podcasting services online at pwop.com.

Richard Campbell: Hi! This is Richard Campbell. You're listening to RunAs Radio and with me as always, my co-host, Greg Hughes.

Greg Hughes: That's me. Hey everybody. How are you today, Richard?

Richard Campbell: Things are really good and been pretty peaceful, knocking out a lot of shows these days, Windows 2008 Server RTM, exciting stuff.

Greg Hughes: Coming very, very soon to a shelf near you.

Richard Campbell: Yes.

Greg Hughes: Some people can download it.

Richard Campbell: And I'm mostly interested in their virtualization technology, but I've heard that Hyper-V is like pushed out for a few more months.

Greg Hughes: Yeah, not coming yet. I think we learned that during one of the interviews we did at TechEd USA or one of the similar interviews we did that it was going to be coming after the fact, but, boy, that's going to be cool when it does come.

Richard Campbell: Speaking of TechEd US, things are starting to come together now. You know, it's going to be over two weeks and I'm going to be at both because I'm going to be doing .NET Rocks! for the first week and then RunAs Radio for the second week.

Greg Hughes: Right, similar to the Europe style of having a dev forum and an IT forum week.

Richard Campbell: Absolutely, but the stage is going to be back, the Virtual TechEd Stage and the Fish Bowl, all that stuff is going to be at TechEd US both weeks and we'll be there.

Greg Hughes: Yeah, great.

Richard Campbell: And if there are some specific shows you want to see or topics we're not covering, send us an email, info@runasradio.com. All right, Greg, let's introduce our guest. Scott Kveton is a digital identity promoter and open source advocate. Scott has worked at Amazon, RuleSpace.com and JanRain as well as founded the Open Source Lab at Oregon State University. Working closely with projects like Mozilla, Linux, Drupal and Apache led Scott down the identity path and to JanRain in mid-2006. Scott was named to Red Herring's list of '25 Titans in Waiting' in early 2007. Scott speaks publicly about identity and open source, is an avid gardener and is also Internet-ordained performing weddings for family and friends.

Greg Hughes: Internet-ordained.

Richard Campbell: Internet-ordained!

Scott Kveton: Yeah, gotcha.

Richard Campbell: Decided you needed to be able to perform weddings.

Scott Kveton: No. It was actually the godfather of my son, my 3-year-old son, was getting married and we did some -- he actually was the one who came up with the name of my son Zivio and he just said, "Yeah, we're getting married." We're really excited and they were good friends of ours and I said, "Wouldn't it be cool if I can do it?" and he was sort of like ha-ha-ha and I went on the Internet and minutes later I was ordained. I was like, "Dude, we could actually do this." I'm five for five so far. We've got five weddings done and everybody is still together so I'm excited.

Richard Campbell: Ah, good news. An amiable track record. I'll check back in a couple of years see how you're doing.

Scott Kveton: Yes, yes.

Greg Hughes: We could do 30 minutes on just that. I'm sure there are some stories to tell.

Richard Campbell: I think we're very timely because OpenID is such a huge topic right now. I mean it's been going on for a while and I've certainly been keeping an eye on it, but we should dive in, a half-hour, I don't think we could even go close to doing it justice.

Scott Kveton: Oh, I think we can cover a lot in 30 minutes. I'm excited.

Richard Campbell: Let's start at the beginning. What's the deal with OpenID?

Scott Kveton: Sure. So, OpenID started about almost three years ago with Brad Fitzpatrick from LiveJournal and he was looking for a solution to

a problem that we've all encountered, which is I have too many usernames and passwords. He came up with actually a really simple idea and way of doing it. He implemented it and put it out there and it wasn't perfect. It has security implications. It didn't do everything that people wanted it to do. There were a lot of problems with it, but the difference was, he put something out there, he led with code and he enabled 10 million users. When he enabled Live Journal, there were 10 million users at the time and they all have OpenIDs. Well, that sort piqued the interest of a lot of people who have been playing around in this space for a while. Slowly but surely, more and more people got involved and more and more code got written, and a lot of folks who are sort of following the Identity community, people who have been working on digital identity for years, but also just in general because a lot of big vendors have been interested in a solution like this and they all came together around OpenID and it's taken us a good three years, close to three years, but we've covered a lot of ground and just this week, just yesterday actually we announced Google, Microsoft, IBM, Yahoo, and VeriSign joining the OpenID foundation as board members. So, it's been a real validation of the hard work that we've all put in over the last two-and-a-half to three years.

Richard Campbell: Wow.

Scott Kveton: So, that's sort of the base of OpenID. I mean sort of like the history of the thing, but from a why-do-I-care-about-this-technology standpoint, it solves the "I want one username and password for all the different sites that I go to," and it's a very, very simple technology. Your OpenID is actually a domain name, so in my case it's, you know, scott.kveton.com or I also use kveton.myvidoop.com and what's interesting about using DNS for this is that, you know, namespace is always a big issue on the Internet and Brad chose to use DNS because ICANN existed. There was a governing body that dealt with those things and we found other folks to try to create sort of new namespaces. We've run into that, you know, there's gold over there in those namespace kinds of issues and people, Land Rush, they try and grab all these names and it really just upsets. The other piece is that they're unique. Every domain name is unique. Hey, we solved another problem there. Finally, what's really interesting I think is going to be the driver for OpenID in 2008 is your OpenID is an endpoint. Now, as my mom or my grandma or my sister, whatever, they're not going to care about that, but from a developer's standpoint, a user can prove that there is some service endpoint on the Internet and then from there you can LAN service it. So, "Hey, I want their friends list. I want their contact information," all with their permission of course. "I want their preferences or their tastes," anything you can LAN there. We haven't had the ability to do that in a real decentralized fashion and I think OpenID is going to be the building block for making that happen.

Richard Campbell: It's an interesting thought that suddenly the whole Internet is your social networking space.

Scott Kveton: Yeah. So, let's be honest here. In my opinion, I've been saying this for a while, but social networking is not something you do, it's not a function of a site, it's a feature of a site. The problem is, every time you go to a new site, you have to recreate your social network.

Richard Campbell: Right.

Scott Kveton: So, if I have a unique identifier that's me, my OpenID, and then all my friends do and I've created a list of those, you know, my friends, my family, my co-workers, whatever, I should now be able to go into a site, log in and it should just be able to say, "Hey! We know that you have these friends and guess what? Here's all the people who are on this site right now." Great! That's how it should be. It shouldn't be you go to a site to do social networking. It's strange. I actually think in a couple of years, people will sort of laugh at the concept of social networking as a function of a site.

Richard Campbell: Yeah, it does seem strange now, doesn't it?

Scott Kveton: I think it's strange, but then again I do it all the time.

Greg Hughes: What does OpenID mean or maybe it doesn't mean anything, but give us maybe a vision or even some practical examples from, you know, we have a lot of IT people that listen to our show that work in businesses. How do you see OpenID impacting business in the future?

Scott Kveton: Oh, great! Yeah, that's an excellent question. A lot of companies are trying to figure out how they can save money, obviously, right? We see a lot of open source tools being deployed even behind the firewall and although OpenID is, you know, in its truest sense an open -- a DNS is external and anybody can create DNS. You just open up an OpenID provider behind your corporate firewall. Well, why would you want to do that? Why would you care? Well, there are a lot of open source packages out there now, content management systems, CRM, bug tracking, lots of different tools that actually already support OpenID and a lot of enterprises already have directories. So, if I have my directory in Active Directory or LDAP or whatever, I could very easily expose those as OpenID and then automatically be able to log in to Drupal or Bugzilla or whatever that I'm using behind my corporate firewall.

You're really able to extend your directory into new ways and be able to deploy new pieces of software without having to sort of reinvent the wheel and figure out how you're going to do accounting or helping your directory, which can be pretty painful. So, I think from an IT perspective, I'd be really excited about OpenID because it's going to allow ease of new tools.

Greg Hughes: So, what does it look like? I mean from a practical standpoint. Obviously, this is an audio show. Maybe you can describe from a usability standpoint, how does this actually work?

Scott Kveton: Sure. That actually has something to do via voice. Actually, it's really handy with them. There's actually a great, you know, how does OpenID work on YouTube that the Vidoop folks did. I work for Vidoop so it's a shameless plug, but it's actually quite good. It's a whiteboard. So, if you want to see the visualization of what I'm going to describe, that's the place to go check it out. As a user, I go to a site to log in and there's an OpenID login form there and I enter in my OpenID, which in my case is kveton.myvidoop.com. Now, I click Go and what happens is the site then redirects me over to my identity provider, which is myvidoop.com to authenticate. Once I have authenticated there, the site that has requested my login credential can ask for some really basic information like, "Hey, we'd like your full name, your last name, maybe your preferred nickname or an email address," and the user is prompted with a nice dialogue that says "I will allow this" or "I won't." They click OK, let's say they want to allow it, and then they're redirected back to the site. They're logged in and all their information have come across that they've allowed to come across. So, this is a really, really handy thing. What's really interesting is if I'm already logged in to my identity provider, in other words, if I set up my browser in the morning and logged in to myvidoop.com, I'm logged in sort of for the day and now as I go to other sites to log in with my OpenID, I don't have to re-authenticate because I've already entered my password once on my identity provider. There are all kinds of really interesting things about being able to also manage your data from that identity provider. Let's say I go back to a site I haven't been at in six months and maybe I moved and my zip code has changed, well, it will prompt me and say, "Hey, it looks like you have an old zip code over here. Would you like us to update that? Because we noticed that it's different," and you can say, "Yes, that sounds great." This solves the problem that we see with sort of, you know, information ageing on all the different sites that sign up. I think on Yahoo, I'm still listed as living in Seattle and I haven't lived in Seattle since 1999, but there hasn't been an easy mechanism for me to go and change that and I always forget that. I always mention it during interviews like this and then I never go back and change it. So, it's a really simple tool, it's a really basic building block, but I think it's a very important one. Does that make sense? I really recommend the video. I can't recommend that more because it's just such a nice; really explains it, especially if you're developer or an IT person who wants to understand the flow of things. It's good to see in front of a whiteboard.

Richard Campbell: I get the idea that myopenid.com and openid.org and so forth can host my OpenID entity there. What does it take for me to run one myself?

Scott Kveton: You know, it takes the domain name and it takes some software, plenty of which is out there. Drupal, which is an open source content management system, actually has an OpenID provider and consumer module, so you can not only provide OpenIDs from your Drupal installation, you can also consume them. Somebody from Yahoo or AOL or MyVidoop or whatever can come over and log in and use their OpenID on your site. So, it's very basic and this is one of the really powerful things about it and I think one of the reasons why it's deployed so quickly and has grown sort of this viral adoption. The real tech heads have been able to spin up their own domain and run their own servers behind their DSL line at their own house. The reality is the majority of users won't want to do that. They're just like the majority of users don't run their own email. They go to Yahoo or Google or their providers to get that done.

Greg Hughes: What do you see is the story in terms of trust? I mean I've spent the last couple of years of my career, a few years, trying to keep bad guys out of all my banking sites through fancy authentication methods and whatnot. OpenID is interesting from a Single Sign On perspective even if an institution has multiple 30 or 40 different systems that maybe they don't have a Single Sign On provider. Is this something that from a technology and security standpoint might be viable now or in the future for maybe a financial institution to use to identify their users?

Scott Kveton: Yeah, absolutely. I think the key is, you know, we have to realize that we're putting more and more important data out on the Internet and when you look at corporate grade security, you know, you have RSA tokens, you have Smart Cards, you name it, and now we have Microsoft, Yahoo, Google wanting all of our data and "hey, let's put our health records out there," "hey, let's put all these different things out there," and yet we're still required to use just username and password.

Greg Hughes: Sure.

Scott Kveton: The paradigm is shifting that we need to find better ways to protect ourselves, so whether it's second backup authentication with a phone, we see a lot of that in Europe with banking sites, we're going to have to see something change here and even some of the bigger players are starting to realize it as well. When you look at like Yahoo's sign-in seal, or site key from VeriSign, those kinds of things.

Richard Campbell: I find it interesting the idea that now I'm separating my identity from the site I'm trying to use.

Scott Kveton: Exactly, exactly. Yeah. That's interesting is, you know, security is best done in layers and the more layers you can add in there, the better. The key is I don't want to have to jump through a bunch of different hoops for every single site that I go through, right?

Greg Hughes: Right.

Scott Kveton: I don't want to do an SMS verification or carry a Smart Card because I'm going to Yahoo and a different one for AOL. What's interesting about OpenID is I can lock down one of my identities, my one account that I use everywhere that I go. I can put some extra hoops in that and I don't mind doing that because maybe it's the beginning of the day and I only have to do it once or maybe I've registered my computer in some special way so that it knows who I am and when I log in from that computer I'm good to go, but if I use a different computer, I have to jump through those hoops again. Well, I can still log in to all those other sites and not have to worry about jumping through those same hoops again. So, having all that sort of your identity in one place and being able to really lock that up well is a good thing. One of the things that we hear a lot from folks who are sort of critics of the technology are "Wait a minute. Now, I have all my eggs in one basket. If somebody gets to my one account, you've got everything. You're into everything that I do."

Greg Hughes: Right.

Scott Kveton: And I would argue that we're already in that space today. If I got access to your email account, the odds are I could go to all the different sites and request your password and have it sent over to your Gmail account and guess what? I'd log in as you on all those accounts.

Greg Hughes: Sure.

Scott Kveton: Or allow users to just have the same username that they use because they found some unique nicknames that they can use all over the Internet and they use that and then they use one password on all those sites to make it easy for themselves. So, I actually think that we're better off because we get the Single Sign On functionality and no different from the security.

Greg Hughes: Well, I know I've seen Kim Cameron for example over at Microsoft has certainly talked a lot about OpenID and also about their CardSpace initiative. How do those things fit together? Are they the same thing competing? Are they really complimentary to each other? What's your view?

Scott Kveton: We started talking with Kim probably it would have been almost a year ago now. It was January that we first started chatting in 2007. We looked at the difference between OpenID and CardSpace and CardSpace and Microsoft, they really have a requirement to make sure they look out for the end user security without a doubt, without any consideration whatsoever and they have baked the CardSpace into Windows Vista. It's actually a really solid piece of technology. The problem is, for them, they're realizing that the Internet is becoming this very public place. So, you have a private persona, which is all the things that you really want to keep secure and private to yourself, but then you have this public persona. CardSpace wasn't really good for the public persona. Then enter OpenID. OpenID is really, really good for the public pieces that you want to do, but then to have some better security from the private side of things. This is why we see folks adding multi backdrop in occasion and really wanting to lock this down.

Greg Hughes: Right.

Scott Kveton: Or, better yet, why not just use CardSpace to lock down the OpenID and then have the OpenID do the public side of things? So, really, really complimentary in the way that we work together. This speaks to the fact that OpenID is this endpoint, is this URL that you might want to approve that you own and then get services from based on the authentication that the user did. You can't do that with CardSpace. It's not a destination on the Internet and that's not how it was architected. So, the two pulls together so, so nicely. Basically, what they have done -- we've been working with Microsoft on how you would basically embed an OpenID inside the card that you insert. So, now, you can go to a site, prove who you are via CardSpace and along with it you'll pass an OpenID that it's a public endpoint that users approve they own and they can now get and manage services through that.

Greg Hughes: So, in a way having a machine with that card on there is almost presenting a second factor of authentication on your OpenID.

Scott Kveton: Yeah, absolutely, for sure.

Richard Campbell: Obviously, there's been some very big news recently. I'm trying to figure out exactly what it means. It almost seems like everybody just sort of stormed on and said, "Okay, we're going to do this," but I'm still not getting a sense of what, you know, the Googles and the IBMs and the Microsofts are actually going to do as far as using OpenID.

Scott Kveton: Sure. This has been a long time coming. We have been having these conversations for mostly a year now with these organizations and they have all agreed that the ideas behind OpenID and the technology itself is nothing that they all need to have. Microsoft learned the hard way with Passport that no one company can own it. They learned a lot of hard lessons with that and actually those are the things that we took away to help create OpenID. So, I'm actually really excited to have Microsoft participating because they've actually been just fantastic in this thing. Over the last year, we've been working on sorting out the IPs who have contributed less, how the IP and the contributions will work in the future, really kind of working through the mechanics and quite honestly it's pretty boring stuff. It's a lot of all caps could and should and would and those types of things, but it's very important. It's the framework that helps this community really move forward. In terms of what would it mean for these companies to join, well, speaking as a member of the OpenID Foundation Board, I think it really enables us and will help this community move forward and really validate the work that we've done and say, "Hey, OpenID is a technology that you can trust and OpenID is a technology that is going to be powering the Internet over the coming years." That's symbolic in and of itself, but the work that we're going to be engaging in among the committees and work groups to help build new extensions to OpenID and extend the technology, that's going to be the really exciting stuff because your OpenID is this endpoint and it's going to be a choking point I think for users to control and manage their data and their digital identity. So, we've built this great forum. We've got an awesome group of people involved and I'm really excited about the work that's going to be happening over the next couple of years.

Richard Campbell: On one hand, I think this is such a grassroots movement. It can carry itself forward and I got to wonder if bringing the big companies in actually complicates matters.

Scott Kveton: We've reached a certain point honestly where we have to manage our trademark. We have to deal with IP and what it means to have copyright in Asia and Europe and other places. Those are things that a community traditionally has a difficult time dealing with, especially if you're talking about on a volunteer basis. A lot of those are lawyer time.

Richard Campbell: Yeah.

Scott Kveton: And when we had these board members join, they joined not only with themselves, but also with their pocketbooks to help drive a sustainable organization that will continue through time to be able to manage and help this community thrive. So, it's more than just symbolic. It's not like some of the other things we've been seeing in the last couple of weeks around like the dataportability.org stuff. This is real people who have been working towards a goal and putting their money where their mouth is. I think that's really important to mention.

Richard Campbell: Well, there is an interesting angle on this that you hit a certain point in that sort of open source model where now we must spend some money to formalize things and stabilize things and mature things and these guys have got the money.

Scott Kveton: Yeah, for sure and we struck a really good balance I think. The foundation isn't in charge of the technology. In other words, the board doesn't dictate how the technology is created. The board simply dictates the mechanics of how the community operates and the community is the one who develops and defines how the technology is going to go, so there's a whole bunch of technically minded, really smart community members who are driving the technology forward. Now, these companies will also have individuals that will participate as well, but they will have a boat just like everybody else could participate. It's a really interesting model and I've seen it succeed time and again and we're really, really excited about what it's going to mean for the open web really.

Richard Campbell: So, now, I've got to imagine going forward here. As an IT guy, my time is precious. I'm busy, busy, busy. If I look at, see, IBM and Microsoft and so forth are now involved, I'm wondering if I can stop worrying so much about OpenID because it's just going to be incorporated to the products that I'm going to be deploying.

Scott Kveton: That could be. And that's fantastic; I know for a fact there are quite a few companies who sell technologies that enable you to deploy OpenID in the enterprise or otherwise. Microsoft has enabled that along with their server technologies. Hey, that's fantastic, right? The more, the merrier. For us, we're just excited to see all these folks jump in and it's going to be really good for OpenID. It would be great for the marketplace and I think we're going to see some really exciting things happen around social networking and what it means

to manage and deploy your data over the next couple of years.

Richard Campbell: So, is the key work going forward here really about the developers incorporating OpenID authentication into their apps now? That all websites will use this identifier in various applications?

Scott Kveton: Yeah. I think we'll see some of that. I think there will be some general marketing and evangelism that we'll see come out of the foundation. I think we'll continue to do the grassroots stuff that we do. David Recordon and I, David is one of the other board members of the OpenID foundation and has been around, you know, playing with this stuff almost as long as Brad, he and I put together an OpenID development camp that we host down at the Bay Area. We had about 40 to 45 people show up for it and just folks hacking on code, you know, no politics, no talk of wars or any of that stuff. It's just about the developers get together and solve real problems and also have real discussions about the implications of this technology, really good stuff. So, we'll continue to see a lot more of those things happening. I'm super bullish about 2008.

Richard Campbell: I've really got a sense of -- I'm looking forward to a battle of the best practices that as a corporate entity, I really ought to be running my own OpenID server and we want to be authenticating this way and here's how this thing should relate together. It sounds like everybody is doing it their way so far. I don't get a sense of a one right way yet.

Scott Kveton: No, and you know, I don't know if there will be one right way because some people want to have public, crazy put-everything-out-there-they-can and other people don't want anything out there. We'll have sort of boutique providers that do a little bit of everything or both. Again, it's all great for the marketplace. The reality is, when we look out on MySpace and Facebook, privacy is definitely a huge consideration, but a lot of users, especially for folks who are from a different generation, have a hard time understanding how much data these kids will disclose.

Richard Campbell: Right.

Scott Kveton: So, I think sort of the "winner" in the game is going to be whoever provides the easiest tools to give you the most control whether it's turn it all up to 11 and see the world with everything you got or crank it all the way down to zero and not -- it's got to be this little knob that allows you to do that and whoever can build that really good knob I think is going to succeed.

Richard Campbell: Excellent! Well, gentlemen, any last thoughts as we race into the end of a half-hour? Scott, places that folks should be going to find out more about OpenID.

Scott Kveton: Openid.net, of course. It just recently went through a revamp in terms of the site, some really great resources there for developers. End users can learn how to get an OpenID, those kinds of things. Great videos up on YouTube that describe OpenID. Let's see here, what else? Oh, and also the foundation itself, if you want to join as a member, you can do that as well. Again, just go to openid.net and join as a member. What that means is you can participate in the conversations that are happening and also vote on board members and things that work groups and committees should be doing and you log in with an OpenID, you vote with your OpenID, so very good stuff.

Richard Campbell: Brilliant.

Greg Hughes: For that OpenID video, I think if you search on the web for OpenID according to Dave, then you'll find that YouTube video.

Scott Kveton: Yes, that's the one.

Richard Campbell: Excellent! Scott Kveton, thank you so much for your time. I really appreciate your insights into where OpenID is going.

Scott Kveton: Great! Thanks for having me, guys. I appreciate it.

Greg Hughes: Thanks Scott.

Richard Campbell: And we'll talk to you next week on RunAs Radio.