

3SKey – A common key to the online banking world



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SWIFT's key strength has always been the provision of a resilient, reliable and secure network. With FileAct, SWIFT has created a channel that facilitates the transfer of any message between clients and banks in a secure environment. From a corporate's perspective, FileAct is a truly global multi-banking network that can be used with many banks worldwide.

Transaction security for FileAct has been secured by means of a corporate seal PKI¹, which enables the authentication of the message interchange between corporate and banks. In addition, the corporate needs to ensure the eligibility of an individual to sign a transaction for the agreed mandate via its own application. The corporate seal does not permit a bank to know which individual has

signed a transaction and verifies this against the bank's records.

With 3SKey, SWIFT's digital signature capability, SWIFT went a step further by offering a global solution for bank-agnostic personal digital signatures. Tokens are personalised and assigned by the corporate to its employees, and are administered via the SWIFT 3SKey web portal after which they are registered with every bank which associates the 3SKey token with the identity and name of the individual.

Over the past few years, 3SKey has been rolled out for FileAct by almost all the major transaction banks, including Deutsche Bank. However, since FileAct is a multi-banking channel and the corporate seal is the required authentication method shared across all banks, the additional use of bank-agnostic individual authentication was limited to certain use cases.

We have received positive feedback from our clients in France, where 3SKey has become a best practice solution for digital signatures since the local French EBICS² standard adopted 3SKey as a multi-banking signature. The coupling of 3SKey with a local multi-banking standard proved to be successful in France. The question is, can this success be replicated globally in corporate online banking?

Contrary to SWIFT FileAct, corporate online banking users require individual identification and feel the pain of using proprietary signature tools for each different bank. The access control can differ greatly among banks each using their own tools with varying levels of authentication and workflows. As treasurers often work with a large number of banks, they need to deal with many different login methods and passwords to login and authorise orders for online banking transactions.

¹ Public Key Infrastructure

² Electronic Banking Internet Communication Standard

We also see a clear trend towards the use of 2-factor-authentication (2FA)³. 2FA is taking the security level for online interaction to an acceptable level and is the preferred way for regulators to manage security concerns. In Asia this is already a long-standing regulatory requirement in countries such as Singapore and Malaysia and it is set to be further expanded. In Europe the SecuRePay initiative – although predominantly aimed at retail clients – will pave the way for 2FA on a much larger scale than other regional initiatives. This will either increase the number of tokens an average treasurer has to deal with or act as the catalyst for one token to be used across multiple banks.

Deutsche Bank performs regular user experience reviews and our findings confirm that users of online banking do see the use of multiple devices from different banks as inefficient. 3SKey is an attractive proposition – one personalised token to authenticate payment instructions and authorise bank account mandate changes across banks and channels, SWIFT and online electronic banking channels alike.

This is why Deutsche Bank extends 3SKey for online banking via the Autobahn App Market. David Watson, Global Head of Global Transaction Banking Cross-Product Components outlines that, “Banks are currently working with proprietary signature technology. By providing the 3SKey solution to our online clients, we can unlock tremendous value from a single token serving all banks. Complementing this ‘one token strategy’, we are delighted that 3SKey will be supported by Deutsche Bank’s Autobahn App Market – the online access channel to a wide range of the Bank’s electronic services. Client-centricity is key to our product strategy and close cooperation with providers like SWIFT allows us to keep abreast of current industry trends, including the growing demand for multi-channel personal digital signature tokens and ensuring further enhancement of our 3SKey offering.”

Besides the “one token serves all banks” approach, there are a number of additional advantages with 3SKey for corporates. It is the high standard of security that SWIFT offers and with SWIFT being a bank-owned cooperative, it has the buy-in from banks to support and sustain this concept. This commitment ensures that the SWIFT 3SKey service keeps pace with the ever-changing regulatory standards experienced across the globe. This is an important asset for banks and corporates to manage the complexity of complying with the global regulatory landscape.

Since banks have a decisive voice in meeting the requirements of future development, evolving issues can be taken-up by them and brought to conclusion. A recent example is the support of mobile devices with 3SKey, which was raised by the community. Given its track record, SWIFT is poised to provide a solution where a 3SKey token can be used with mobile devices in the near future.

Ultimately, the one-stop assignment of the user token by a corporate allows the client to remove or instantly deactivate a token for all banks to protect the corporate against malicious use of a digital signature, for example, in cases where an employee leaves the organisation.

For all these reasons 3SKey for Online unlocks the full value of the bank-agnostic individual digital signature. Complemented by SWIFT’s ongoing commitment to security and Deutsche Bank’s intention to continue enhancing its offering based on client needs, the time appears to be right to use 3SKey for online transaction banking.

³ Abbreviated 2FA, i.e. something you know (e.g. your password) and something you have (e.g. a token)